**Debriefing**

Overview

When people visit or live overseas in a cross-cultural context they are often changed irrevocably in a variety of ways. The idea of re-entry can be exciting, but often leads to fatigue and confusion. Re-entry can make you feel out of place where home no longer seems like home.

Some may be returning home for a short time or a long-time time. Either way, each individual’s reaction to cross-cultural ministry and re-entry may vary greatly.

Debriefing is simply a way for an individual to have an environment in which they can reflect on the impact of their past experiences and gain perspective on the future. Debriefing brings a variety of emotions that are not always easily identified. Workers may miss their adopted world or home one day and the next have no desire to be there at all.

Workers may also feel guilty for having negative feelings about their assignment or return. There is encouragement from Scripture that we can bring both our joys and our laments before the Lord.

Debriefing is beneficial because it helps you:

Verbalize: Expressing your thoughts and feelings clarifies both.

Normalize: When you verbalize your situation, it helps to recognize you are not alone in what you think and feel.

Contextualize: Debriefing helps you put your experiences into the context of your life. You can relate those experiences to earlier events in your life and see how God is using them to prepare you for the future.

Looking Back

What are some of the most satisfying things that happened on your trip? Why were they satisfying?

What were some of the most enjoyable things that happened on your trip?

How have you grown? What has God done in your life?

What were the most painful/stressful things that happened? Why were they painful/stressful?

What did you like most and least about your fellow workers?

What did you like most and least about the nationals?

Are your actions what you want them to be? What is your assessment of them?

Are you satisfied with your feelings, your emotions? How do you feel?

How would you describe your relationship with God right now?

How are your relationships with family and friends?

Can you concentrate, think logically and clearly?

Re-Entry

States of Re-Entry

Excitement:

* Greeting friends and family
* Eating special foods
* Enjoying cultural habits/traditions
* Attention from home church (sometimes)

Re-Establishment:

* Trying to set up previous patterns
* Having expectations based on the way it was and should be now
* Loss of “special” status, which may lead to relational conflicts
* Questioning of self-concept (who is the real me?)
* Sense of loss (things are not the same and never will be)

Striving for control of your world to lower stress:

* Loss of direction (who am I now?)
* Sense of this stage of life being temporary and surreal
* Questioning whether to return to the field or return to the ‘mainstream’ again
* Criticizing the home culture and church
* Loss of being on the ‘front lines’

Re-adaptation OR marginization:

* Begin to feel a part of home culture OR remain an outsider
* No longer a coping pattern but an adjustment (integration)
* Bring to the home culture a new perspective
* Cosmopolitan (at home in all countries or places)
* Greater sense that this world is not our home

How to Cope with Re-Entry Stress

Prepare for re-entry stress before you leave home. Recognize that when you come to love people in another place, there is always going to be pain. You will never be completely at home again, because part of your heart will always be elsewhere. That is the price you pay for the richness of loving and knowing people in more than one place.

*Returning home is like being in two worlds.*

Dr. Miriam Adeney, a Christian anthropologist, tells her students that they “will never be able to go home again…they will probably always leave part of themselves behind, and thereafter will be split…and home may be in more than one place. But that is the price they pay for the richness of having experienced more than one culture deeply.”

1. Expect some of the same areas of culture stress as you experienced when going overseas. Allocate time and energy to cope with these. Review coping strategies.
2. Realize the importance of balancing between readjustment and maintaining new values.
3. Consciously apply your theology of culture (seeing both patterns of exploitation, idolatry, loveliness, and kindness) to your home culture.
4. Cultivate a network of people who have been overseas with whom you can discuss (and if they are Christians, pray for) the needs of the world, so that they can be mutually supportive in thinking globally.
5. Cultivate friendships with people from the region where you lived such as international students or businessmen.
6. Help your friends and your church know what questions to ask you. Try to look at you ministry from their context and tie your concerns to their values.
7. When you want to talk about your overseas experience more than they want to hear, put your message in “I need” frames: “I need to work through this.” Often they will listen, not because they care about your information, but because they care about you.
8. From the beginning of your time overseas, keep records that will help you talk and write to people back home. Record your first impressions in detail. Record anecdotes periodically. Now and then, reflect on what you are learning in light of the context in which you will have to report back home.
9. Help your church figure out where to use you in an ongoing way. Analyze their ministries and your gifts, and then make a couple of proposals to the church as to how you could serve, integrating what you have learned overseas with the priorities of the church. Don’t wait for them to come to you with a proposal.
10. Recognize that your American supporters may be under a great deal of stress themselves. Be prepared to counsel, comfort, pray for and bless them as much as to receive their counsel and care.
11. Some practical suggestions:
    1. Find other returnees with whom you can share and have fellowship.
    2. Give yourself time to readjust; be patient with yourself and with others.
    3. Recognize and accept which transition stage you are going through, and remember that “reverse culture shock” or “re-entry shock” is a normal part of the process of returning home.
    4. Have a good sense of humor.
    5. Let your re-entry work for you: use it as a growing process to continue learning about yourself as a bi-cultural or multicultural person.
    6. Appreciate the opportunity you had to go abroad and the commitment to return home.
    7. Find someone who can give you a current briefing about your community, church, culture, country, job situation, and people you know.
    8. Review the most significant changes you have undergone while out of the United States and the implications of those changes.
    9. Review your great expectation in returning home…how relevant and realistic are they?
    10. Keep a clear perspective and remember that God is with you!
    11. Plan how to answer “How was the trip?” in 10 seconds and in one minute.
    12. Determine a moment to share that encapsulates the trip.

Conflicting Values

*We need to be careful not to come across as “I’m better than most Christians because I’ve been overseas.”*

1. Preoccupation with Materialism:

Back in the United States, the desire for material comforts and possessions is a dominant theme. Are you prepared to face this fact if you are returning from a culture where people are content with little or have only the basic necessities of life? Has your sensitivity to basic human needs been heightened by your experiences abroad? What responses might you have to affluence, waste or overindulgence?

Suggestions:

1. Do not be quick to condemn; realize that others have not had the same exposure to another way of life. Their preoccupation with “their world” as they know it is only natural.
2. Be prepared for a sensory bombardment if you are accustomed to simplicity in choice and lifestyle. An overabundance of goods, choices, etc., can overwhelm you at first.
3. Expect others to not fully understand how you feel when their “materialistic ways” strike you as sinful.
4. Doing Things the “Best” Way

This is often referred to as ethnocentrism. It’s only natural that every culture values its ways.

Is bigger, better, faster, and more accurate really best? Do other cultures have something to offer us? Expect to receive blank stares or an air of disapproval from your compatriots if you question traditional ways.

Suggestions:

1. Be on the alert for a “holier-than-thou” attitude. Do not be too quick to judge others for their ethnocentric stance or to think that your way is the best way.
2. Share your perspectives, but at the same time avoid becoming involved in arguments. Do not allow yourself to withdraw or refuse to discuss matters because of opposition.
3. Personal Worth and Recognition

Possibly one of the most difficult areas to address is personal fulfillment. Your questions may include: Was my service valuable? Will anyone recognize my contribution or my sacrifice? Will I be just another fish in a big pond? What will the situation be like upon my return?

Quite likely you are returning from a position where you were the focus of attention, where you felt needed, accepted and loved.

Suggestions:

1. Do not expect to be in the limelight for long after your return. Some may ask to see your slides, have you speak, etc., but soon you will be back to your “ordinary citizen” status.
2. Realize that your worth and recognition comes first from God. View your service as service to Him, not something with which to gain recognition and praise from others.
3. Do not allow yourself to feel hurt or sorry for yourself when people fail to notice you or your service. God does.

Look for ways to meet others’ needs; this will help you take the focus off yourself (Phil. 2).

Common Unexpected Situations

Frequently, returning missionaries are surprised or caught off guard by situations they do not anticipate. The following examples illustrate some of the more common situations. Along with these examples are some possible responses or reactions, plus some suggestions to help you deal with specific incidences.

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| **Missionaries Returning Home**  **Did Not Expect:** | **Reaction:** | **Suggestions for Avoiding Problems in the Future:** |
| To arrive feeling so physically and emotionally drained | Tiredness, lethargy | Schedule in several transition days of rest and relaxation between departure and home arrival. Do not over schedule your time upon return. |
| To feel so “foreign” upon return | Confusion, disorientation | Make yourself aware of changes within yourself before you return. |
| A “let-down” feeling after arrival | Disappointment, unfulfilled | Be prepared for a possible “let-down”; realize that you probably have been operating on an emotional “high” prior to and shortly after your return. |
| Readjustment to take more than a few days | Discouragement | Readjustment can be expected to take some time – more for some than for others. This is natural. |
| To be so out of touch with current issues at home (political, economic, etc.) | Embarrassment | Plan ahead to read and get caught up. Have someone send you news articles while you are away. |
| Their own personal values to have changed so much | Uncertainty, confusion | This often comes as a surprise to many when returning home. The extent of change can only truly be compared with the standard in your own culture. Attempt to define the changes that have taken place. |
| Others to see or understand things differently than they did | Frustration, discouragement | Remember that your perspective has changed – not theirs. |
| Others to show so little interest in hearing about your experiences | Discouragement, withdrawal | Take it as fact that others are usually not able to relate to your experiences as you would wish. Some are just not interested. |
| People to ask so many superficial questions | Irritation | Be prepared to face these questions. Develop ways to make transitions into what you really want to communicate. |
| To be so appalled at the values of your home society | Disappointment, discouragement | Be prepared for a somewhat greater gap between your moral values and those of your own culture. |
| Family possessive after initial return | Impatience, discouragement | Be sure to reaffirm your commitment to your parents and family. Reassure them that you are not “lost” to them and that you love them. Avoid coming on too strong with your experience. |
| Peers back home seem so insensitive to materialism and wastefulness | Irritation, disappointment, contempt | Do not allow yourself to slip into resentment, anger, or other responses that appear judgmental. |
| To see so much apathy and unconcern for the needs of the world | Anger, discouragement | This may disturb you, but do not become self-righteous or indignant over another’s response or lack of response. Lovingly try to inform them about the world’s needs. |
| To be so troubled over the imbalance of Christian workers at home versus workers abroad | Impatience, discouragement, disillusionment | Accept this imbalance as fact. Instead of reacting emotionally, plan how you can use your life and experience to challenge others back home to mission service. |
| People to be so ethnocentric in their perspectives | Rejecting, feelings of superiority | Remember that you do not have the right to judge others on the basis of your own “enlightened experience.” |
| To be ignored and not necessarily treated as someone special upon return | Disillusionment, hurt feelings | Even though you are a “special” person, do not view it as a right to have attention focused on you. Realize that others are involved in the routine of daily affairs. |
| To find a critical attitude developing toward their own culture or peers | Guilt, frustration | Keep breathing spiritually. Critical attitudes can easily slip in during readjustment. Some things definitely will bother you, but do not allow Satan to use these things to defeat you. |
| Feelings of superiority due to overseas experience | Guilt, aloofness | Review Philippians 2:1-11: “Regard others as more important than yourself.” |
| To feel so lonely | Unfulfilled, feelings of rejection | Especially if you have established deep relationships overseas, it is natural that you will feel the loss of friendships. Actively seek out new relationships at home. Get involved with people right away; do not isolate yourself from others. |

Identifying & Expressing How I Feel

Words expressing…

ANGER

aggravated

angry

annoyed

appalled

bitter

cheated

cranky

disgusted

dismayed

disturbed

enraged

evil

exasperated

frustrated

furious

hateful

horrified

hostile

imposed on

incensed

infuriated

irritated

jealous

mad

mean

nauseated

offended

outraged

provoked

rage

repulsed

resentful

revolted

riled

spiteful

steamed

ticked off

troubled

upset

vicious

violent

wicked

HAPPINESS

amazed

blissful

calm

charmed

cheerful

contented

delighted

desirous

eager

ecstatic

elated

energetic

excited

fabulous

fascinated

fortunate

giddy

glad

good

gratified

happy

high

honored

hysterical

infatuated

joyous

jubilant

kind

loving

marvelous

nice

obsessed

pleasant

pleased

proud

relaxed

relieved

satisfied

soothed

thrilled

tickled

turned-on

wonderful

HURT

abused

alone

awful

betrayed

cheated

condemned

crippled

crushed

damaged

defeated

deflated

deprived

deserted

devalued

diminished

dreadful

forgotten

grief

horrible

hurt

ignored

insulted

intimidated

isolated

jilted

left out

neglected

opposed

oppressed

pained

persecuted

put down

rotten

slighted

snubbed

terrible

upset

used

INADEQUACY

bored

childish

deceitful

defective

destructive

empty

envious

greedy

guilty

helpless

inadequate

incapable

incompetent

inept

inferior

lazy

longing

mediocre

naughty

nutty

obnoxious

powerless

rushed

screwed up

selfish

ugly

unworthy

useless

EMBARRASSMENT

absurd

ashamed

awkward

clumsy

conspicuous

different

disgraced

foolish

humiliated

mortified

odd

quiet

remorseful

silly

strange

uncomfortable

CONFUSION

addled

ambivalent

anxious

baffled

bewildered

burdened

confused

dazed

disconcerted

distracted

dumbfounded

flabbergasted

flustered

frantic

frustrated

indifferent

jarred

jolted

muddled

mystified

overwhelmed

perplexed

pressured

puzzled

rattled

restless

skeptical

tempted

uneasy

vulnerable

SADNESS

abandoned

agonized

alone

anguished

bad

blue

burdened

dejected

depressed

deserted

despairing

despondent

disappointed

discontented

discouraged

disheartened

distraught

downcast

empty

excluded

exhausted

friendless

gloomy

heavy-hearted

homesick

ignored

isolated

jilted

let down

lonely

lost

low

melancholy

miserable

moody

pained

pathetic

pitiful

rejected

sad

scorned

slighted

sorrowful

sympathetic

tired

troubled

weak

weary

weepy

FEAR

afraid

agitated

alarmed

anxious

boxed in

concerned

CONFIDENCE

able

adequate

beautiful

bold

cornered

fearful

frightened

intimidated

jittery

jumpy

brave

capable

competitive

confident

nervous

overwhelmed

panicked

petrified

scared

shaken

determined

free

helpful

impressed

shocked

spooked

startled

stunned

tense

terrified

inspired

peaceful

pretty

powerful

threatened

trapped

uneasy

unnerved

worried

proud

sexy

useful

wise