

MAKE HASTE SLOWLY

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Dear Team,

There are many ways we manage to humble ourselves. One way is to give a complement in a foreign language we don't really know and have someone tell us that we just said, "That dinner was the most **FLAVORLESS MEAL** I have ever had!" What we often don't realize is how inappropriate we can also be in other forms of communication in a different culture. Here is a brief scenario from the book *Make Haste Slowly* that describes a cultural communication barrier for an agricultural team "helping" a village increase crop production.

"These Natives are so conservative, they are stupid, they don't understand, they will never change, they are ignorant." The words of frustration poured out, as the agricultural team discussed the failed results of their efforts to improve the crops of the local people. After all, the first year was a tremendous success, and all that had to be done is to put fertilizer on the field! But the Natives also had choice words about the well-intentioned team of experts. "They're proud." "They're arrogant." "They don't care about others' feelings." And, "They're just here to exploit us." Communication and trust were completely gone. The investment of time and money for what should have been a sure success, had failed.

What really captured my attention about this story is not only what went wrong, but how it could have been prevented.

After the agricultural experts had spent a year helping the village dramatically increase their harvest, the villagers thought that their crops had done so well because their neighbors fields had been bewitched. They perceived that these outsiders somehow took control of the Spirit World so that their crops benefited at the expense of others. In the village culture, the punishment for witchcraft is fatal. Since it was obvious to them that witchcraft was involved in the success of the crops, no way were the villagers going to be accused of being witches and therefore, no way were they going to put fertilizer on their field!

In hindsight, the solution to the problem was simple. If the team of experts had taken time in the beginning to study and understand the people they wanted to help, the name calling, bad feelings and a failed project could have been avoided.



UNDERSTANDING CULTURE

The good intentions and potential for outstanding results that we bring to another culture are often not enough. What we often miss in our approach is an adequate understanding of the culture and society we hope to impact. We think to ourselves, "If they can only see what we can do for them they will appreciate it, and they will benefit." Unfortunately, as happened above, even though a community will surely benefit from our new way of doing things, if their belief system is threatened, there will be no long-term impact or change.

The lesson of the agriculture example is equally important for those of us working to bring the Good News of Christ to other cultures. Though most of us strongly affirm that we must consider the "c" words in everything we do – Culture and Contextualization – most of us don't really understand what that means. The result is that we can easily bring more harm than good to a people group, or simply be much less effective.

I have had to admit that I am being prideful, even arrogant, if I do not take the time to really understand the people I am trying to reach. The first tendency in our culture when our plan isn't accepted or doesn't work is to try harder – “Then they'll understand.” In reality, this is like talking louder to someone who is deaf, or doesn't understand English very well. It is futile. And, making our assertions, points, and efforts just a little bit “louder” is actually counterproductive. By understanding a people group and their culture, creative ways can be found to create an appreciation for change rather than animosity.

Because we have the technology, information, and resources available, there is really no excuse for not trying to learn how to be more sensitive to another culture. It is not just a practical issue but a spiritual issue of truly loving others. The book mentioned earlier, *Make Haste Slowly* by Dr. Donald Smith, has opened my eyes that good intentions, even with the best ideas can fail, or even be damaging to a community if not properly placed in context. Another example from the book shows how this can happen.

We often think that we will be culturally sensitive by taking one person out of a village, usually the brightest and best, and teaching them and training them so that they can be the change agent for the entire village. On the surface this seems like a wonderful way to bridge the gaps of language and culture.



However, in a “contextual society” that values relationship and community as the bonds that holds the society together, this may totally disrupt that system. “After all,” the villagers think, “Why should this one person be positioned above everyone else?” Or they may think, “Who does this young person from our village think they are telling us what we should do?” It totally upsets the balance of their community and relationships.

This example has given me a great appreciation for why we must work with people as a community. Our focus in most areas of India, for example, should not be so much on individuals but on the community as a whole where bonds and relationships are the basis for the culture, belief system, and even religion of the people.

IMPACT WITH UNDERSTANDING

The book *Make Haste Slowly* offers an eye-opening examination of cross-cultural missions and communication. The title is so appropriate for our often hyper-approach that wants to swoop in, save the lost or feed the hungry, and hope that we have made a lasting impact. Even long-term workers in one place for decades can miss the opportunity of bringing about true change because they do not truly adapt their plans to the culture.

The purpose of *Make Haste Slowly* is to equip those working with other cultures to demonstrate “wholeness in mission.” In chapter one, Donald Smith says, **“People are not a blackboard on which we draw our designs, but participants in development. They must be involved in determining priorities, choosing personnel, and carrying out programs jointly planned and accepted.”**

Make Haste Slowly gives a framework of how to think about ministry within other cultures. Many examples and stories are given and Smith helps us understand the differences of culture we often sense, but can't quite put our finger on. The book focuses on the following topics:

1. The basis of logic in the West and East - they are totally different from each other!
2. The basis of all communication and how it is done successfully in a cross-cultural setting,
3. Culture Shock or Culture Stress and the reasons why it happens - both to the foreigner and the people we impact!

4. How a structure of a culture can determine our strategy, and,
5. How change is brought about when one culture is trying to impact another.

The book can be purchased through the Worldview Center for \$8.95 at [Amazon.com: Make Haste Slowly: Developing Effective Cross- Cultural Communication: Books: Donald K Smith.](#)

May God help us as we seek to transform communities for Christ in ways that truly show His love.

For His Kingdom,

Jay Caven, Executive Vice President
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