

MOBILIZING LABORERS IN THE 90s: WHAT IS IT GOING TO TAKE?

■ This article summarizes lessons about mobilization Caleb Project has learned in its first decade of ministry. The final goal is to take Christians from an initial commitment to missions to strategic involvement in world evangelization. The obstacles are formidable but progress is being made through innovative new models of mobilization.

By Ted Elder

The basis of what I'm going to present this morning is from a process Caleb Project has gone through since 1989. We decided to slow down since we've been in business for almost a decade and want to understand what God has done. Have we been effective in ministry? Are we reaching our goals? Is this really worth doing? Is it worth the investment that we're putting in it? So we went into this long evaluation process and the result of this process was a short paper published in the October 1990 *IJFM* on pages 125 to 127.

I will use the diagrams that you find there. The first question we asked in trying to judge our effectiveness was "what is our goal, our strategic objective in mobilizing Christians to complete world evangelization." Sounds like a great thing but "how do we measure that?" We were pretty much at consensus (and I'm sure everyone here would be at consensus) that completing world evangelization means viable churches established among all the unreached segments of the globe. We want to be mobilizing the church toward the accomplishment of that but how do we measure that? Is that how many people we challenge to missions? Is it how many people commit their lives to it? Is it how many churches send, how many missionaries are sent, or how many peoples are reached? How do you measure that and especially for us because we're not actually doing it. We're trying to be the catalyst for that to happen.

It's very difficult to measure what impact we are having in mobilization. We asked ourselves "what is our goal in strategic involvement?" How do we want to see individuals in churches stra-

telegically involved? This means they're in roles of going, sending or mobilizing, in such a way that it's not short-term—they're going to do for a while and then drift back—but a solid long-term involvement. They no longer need constant prodding to continue to be involved there. They're locked in on the goal of completing world evangelization and they have some strategic role in that.

We developed a chart illustrating the stages of getting to this strategic involvement (See *IJFM* October 1990, pages 125-127). This model was designed for an individual but I think it would work also for groups or churches. We start with initial exposure to some kind of unreached peoples thinking—Biblical and global awareness. What do the Scriptures say about the primacy of the expansion of God's kingdom and the church's role in that? What are the needs? If that vision develops of what can be done then a Christian makes a general commitment. He'll be committed to doing something about world evangelization. That's a macro picture.

It might be helpful to also look at the micro version. This is a more realistic view of what actually happens. It is more of a spiral that individuals go into, they get some little bit of information, they take little steps of action, and then grow in their vision and commitment. That's the way we've seen it happen with the Calebites that we work with—they're moving slowly and steadily towards strategic involvement. They get a little bit of information. They take a small step. They make a small commitment, then their mission vision increases—spiraling upwards. It's not

sudden—it's a process.

The second diagram illustrates what was is actually happening. A whole lot of people being exposed: eighteen thousand at Urbana every three years; Caleb Project Traveling Teams speak to thirty thousand people every year about the unreached peoples; fifty thousand go each year on some kind of short term mission. There are so many different ways that North Americans are getting exposed to the unreached peoples. There's a lot of initial exposure. Then Biblical and global awareness receives a little less attention. The vision of what can be done receives less than that. Finally, a general commitment to do something is a little less than that and then there's a big drop-off between the those people and strategic involvement in missions.

We use this Caleb declaration which is also the Edinburgh 80 pledge. (See reproduction on next page). We challenge people to sign it. We've seen five thousand people sign that serious pledge. We don't just pass it out and say "anybody who wants to can sign it". We talk to people about it. Five thousand people have signed up and yet still, not many of those are making it down to "I'm specifically committed to mission" and then actually making it to the field. In our evaluation we came to the conclusion that very few of the many who were being exposed and who were making some kind of a commitment, are actually getting to strategic involvement. There's a lot of people that are excited about unreached peoples. Compared to fifteen years ago, there are so many more Christians today who are familiar with the terminology. They're for world evangelization. They want to

The Caleb Declaration

By the grace of God and for His glory,
I commit my entire life to obeying
His commission of Matthew 28:18-20,
wherever and however He leads me,
giving priority to the peoples
currently beyond the reach of the gospel
(Romans 15:20-21).

By signing the Caleb Declaration I commit myself...

1. To actively seek God and my role in His plan for the world, starting today.
2. To serve God any time, any where, any way.
3. To live a lifestyle that demonstrates this commitment.

Signed _____ Date _____

Having committed my life to obey His Great Commission, I pledge to encourage the above signer in his/her commitment to world evangelization by regular interaction and prayer.

Signed _____ Date _____

do something but when it comes to actually being strategically involved, the numbers drop down very drastically. Very few actually make it all the way through the pipeline. That fact brought us to the point of saying "why is this happening? Why are so few people getting to the end of the pipeline and being strategically involved?"

After more study, we listed five major hindrances or major problems toward people getting through the pipeline. The first one is the distractions. We've come up with four major distractions.

First, our generation goes for comfort. They're not willing to get out and tough it out.

Second, parents' objections. I don't know anyone who I've talked to who didn't express the concern, "I don't know if my parents would go for this." Even if they're Christians who are in favor of missions, they're not in favor of their kids being involved.

Third is romance. People who are solely committed to missions and are headed overseas often marry someone who could care less about it. They get sidetracked and eventually don't get there or they get there and then have to bail out later.

Fourth, they get so far into debt, either in school or after they get out of school. They're successful. They buy a car. They buy a house. Then they get interested in missions. They're committed to it but they're locked in to a mortgage and it often takes them a long time to back out that.

With all four of these distractions, you could say the issue is Lordship because if they were going to follow

Christ no matter what, then none of these things would matter. That's true but, in another sense, this generation is struggles with these things.

The second hindrance is inability, lack of giftedness to be effective among unreached peoples. There's a lot of Calebites who say "I'm ready. I want to go plant churches among the unreached peoples. Who do I call? Sign me up." Well, who do they call? There's not a place that they can just go sign up and do it. Consequently, it's just the Indiana Jones or the Lee Iacocca types who make it to the unreached peoples. They figure out themselves how to get there. That's not so much true with some of the tribal work where you can get a missionary visa. But in the vast unreached and restricted-access areas, there are few mission agencies who are figuring out how to help people get there. Frontiers is trying to get people all over the Muslim world but primary way they work is to find someone with a vision to lead a team. They will then back that team up. But they're not helping people in a really aggressive way actually do that.

Getting there is more on the burden of those who are going and so its only the real visionaries who are going to scale that wall no matter what. Most people just aren't gifted like that. Most people aren't the trail blazing, innovative pioneers. Should none of those people be involved among the unreached? I don't think so. I think there's a lot of people that don't have those gifts who are needed in other roles but they need others to facilitate them. That's why I'm excited about this nonresidential mission program

because that's going to help a lot of people with other gifts get to the field who wouldn't get there on their own.

The third hindrance, another inability, is lack of wholeness. Many Calebites we run into and people the traveling teams speak to are excited about missions and committed to the Lord but they've got some deep wounds in their life. They were abused as kids. They grew up without parents. They're latchkey kids. There's deep personal hurts that haven't been resolved. Unless they get the pastoral attention and have the ministry of the spirit in their lives, they are going to be forever handicapped from being effectively used. It's not like one or two. The vast majority of this generation, even those who are committed, are limited to some degree in this way.

The fourth hindrance is assumed spiritual maturity. We can't mobilize, just giving people the information, assuming that people are getting the pastoral help they need and they're committed to the Lord to do whatever. Sometimes we lapse into thinking all we need to do is show them in the Bible that God's interested in world evangelization and show them the facts of the unreached peoples and explain church planting to them and then they'll do it. Well, it's a lot more than information. A lot of mobilization we've seen assumes the spiritual vitality and maturity of the person. The whole issue for many of the potential missionary candidates is that they don't have churches to send them. One of the things we counsel people to do is go and invest in their home church for several years. Then they'll have a church to send them and receive the pastoral attention they need.

The fifth hindrance is short-sighted goals. This is the crux of some of what we found out in our study. Mobilization was targeted back on that chart at getting people to make a general commitment to say "I'm committed to reaching the unreached" and then we assume that from there, they'd pretty much get there. People made the commitment to be an overseas missionary but they didn't get there. Some of our goals have been short-sighted in thinking that once we got people to make that commitment to unreached people, they'd get there. But there's so many steps between here and there; they aren't getting there on their own.

Beyond these hindrances we have identified five different aspects of mobilization. The first one is "what kind of challenge do you give in mobilization?" Is it a general challenge "hey, do something?" Or is it invitational and direct saying "this is what you could do. How about if you come and do this with us?"

The second aspect is "what kind of contact do you have in your mobilization?" Do you just stand up in front with a message challenging people to do something or is it more direct, more personal, more relevant and targeted to that specific audience?

The third aspect is "what's the basis of your mobilization?" Is it just information? These are the facts or is it involvement. I think one of the great things about short terms is that people are mobilized because of what they are *doing*. People are involved with international students and they're getting mobilized that way. This is especially true with the boomers and the busters. They're not going to be mobilized by the facts and information alone. Its going to take personal involvement.

Fourth, "what's the focus of our mobilization challenge?" Is it global? Is it that there are so many unreached peoples, you should do something about them? Or is it, "Have you heard about the Kurds in Syria? There are this many of them. This is how you could do it. Why don't you take on this challenge?" This is a "people specific" challenge and many people can get a hold of that easier than saying there are 12,000 unreached peoples.

Fifth, "what's your approach?" Is it laissez-faire where you're just saying there's all these things to do now do something for God or is it facilitative saying, "What do you want to do?" and then helping people through the steps, facilitating their decision making, facilitating them from commitment to strategic involvement—not just assuming that they're going to get there on their own.

We put both of those things together, that first chart and the mobilization spectrum and came up with a new two-dimensional diagram. All of the higher numbers are up on this left side because

at the early stages of mobilization, the awareness, exposure, and initial vision. Initially, you can challenge people with a global focus up on this side but once you get down to committed to do something, people need much more people specific, facilitative, direct, and personal approaches. The general challenge to do something just isn't working for the broad scope. So we've started to make some adjustments at Caleb Project based on these things. We split up our single strategic objective into two. The first one is facilitating a movement of Christians committed to completing world evangelization. We want to raise up awareness and commitment to world evangelization. But the second thing is facilitating those who are committed to strategic involvement because very few of the committed without facilitative help are getting to strategic involvement. We need to provide structures and help or whatever they need to get there.

One way we have attempted to do this is by taking people on short trips directly to unreached peoples. We take them to the mosque to watch Muslims pray and let them talk to the mullahs. We let them meet Muslims on the street

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to try to share the gospel with them—and just to listen to them. Then, we take them on prayer walks around the city where they haven't talked to any Christians. There's no Christians there saying what would God do in this place. Later they talk with national Christians, if there are some, about their struggles, their problems, and their vision. In this way, the baby boomer pastors will be mobilized by seeing their church members do something then if they just have the facts about world evangelization.

We've seen Joshua Project research has been facilitative because its taken people who are committed to missions directly to the field. They spend three

months there trying to answer the question, "if you came as a long term missionary what would you do?" They are on their own face to face with unreached peoples—but with our help and training they're solving those questions themselves. They are wrestling with them so that they know what it means to be strategically involved. What we're doing with Joshua Project now is trying to multiply instead of doing it ourselves. We're trying to farm out what we've learned as much as we can so that other groups can do this kind of thing in any version they want to.

Another thing that we've done is to adjust our Follow-Through program. We used to get people to sign the declaration, send them a newsletter, and they mail us a report on a monthly basis to keep them accountable. Now we've divided this into two stages. The first stage is the broad focus. We're being much more direct. We've set up four modules of information with videos of relevant baby boomer stuff we mail to them. We let them know that if they want to grow in their vision, this is how they do it. They follow step-by-step through the modules and then they make specific commitments. We're setting up a whole other program called "guidance and placement" which is similar to what Inter-Varsity Missions has done with "Fishpond," a missions placement service. We're investing much more time in relationship with them, asking them questions like, "who are you, what gifts do you have, what vision do

you have, what church backing do you have, what needs do you have?" We try to help them in specific and practical steps to get overseas.

Another thing that we do with our traveling teams is to emphasize not just the big meetings but the one-on-one appointments after the big meetings. We are putting a stress and focus in training and equipping our travelers to counsel people one-on-one about who are they and what they can do. ■

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