



Discipleship revolution: TRAINING FOR TRAINERS PROCESS

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Steve Smith

Beyond Ministry-as-Usual

Ying Kai, a Chinese-American church planter and pastor, served with his wife Grace as a missionary in an Asian city where they were able to start a new church every year. In the year 2000, though, Ying's assignment changed. He was asked to reach 20 million people in a corner of one of Asia's many crowded countries. Ying's new assignment was of such magnitude that ministry-as-usual would never succeed in reaching the teeming millions who were flooding into the cities and factories.

In October 2000, as Ying sat in CPM (Church Planting Movements) training, his eyes and mind were fixed on a poster in the room: "How many of my people will hear the gospel today?" Ying knew that ministry as he had practiced it was not sufficient to win the millions of lost in this new area. Something had to change.

As he prayed and meditated, the Lord brought the Great Commission to Ying's mind:

*"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and **teaching them to obey everything** I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Mt 28:19–20, NIV, emphasis added).*

The Lord gave Ying these insights:

Go, not come: The Great Commission says we are to go, not invite people to come to us. We must go to where the lost are, and train the new believers to also go to the lost, into factories, homes, shops and neighborhoods.

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To discuss this article with T4T practitioners and me, join us at the new interactive MF website, at MissionFrontiers.org—Steve

Everyone, not some: We must make disciples of all, not just a few. We typically choose whom we want to share the gospel with, trying to pre-judge who might accept it. But God said to share with everyone. We cannot predict who will believe and whom God will use to birth a movement.

Make disciples (trainers), not church members: We must not satisfy ourselves with making converts and church members. Jesus commanded much more. He wants true disciples. And what do true disciples do? They obey Jesus' commands, including witnessing to others and training these new believers to do the same. So every disciple must be a trainer.

Ying and Grace engaged their new assignment determined to see people in only one of two categories: **lost or saved**. If someone was lost, then Ying and Grace witnessed to him. If he was saved, then they offered to train him. As they met believers, they scheduled times to train (disciple) them every week. Ying expected his trainees to reproduce what they had learned by witnessing to others and training those who believed.

Ying called this process of training, Training for Trainers (T4T). T4T trains believers to witness to the lost and then to disciple and train them in a reproducible way. The discipleship training process includes new group and church formation along with leadership development. T4T is training trainers to train trainers to train trainers, reproducing themselves generation by generation.

In an average week, Ying and Grace might invest in 20–30 different training groups. As the number of groups continued to grow, Ying and Grace began to meet with groups only once every two weeks. This enabled them to add another 20–30 groups on the second week of their training cycles.

As Ying and Grace trained these believers to be trainers of trainers, they found that many would witness, some would start new groups, and a smaller number would go on to train their new group members to repeat the process. By living out this spiritual principle of training people to be trainers of others who would in turn train others, hundreds and then thousands began to come to

faith according to this New Testament pattern:

The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. (2 Tim. 2:2, NASB)

In the most recent survey of the Kais' ministry, more than 1.7 million people had come to faith and baptism. On a monthly basis, around 2,000 house churches and small groups are being started in villages, urban high-rises and factories.

T4T Around the World

Over the last few years, many people have been emulating the T4T process around the world. Once they understand the process and adapt it for their context, they often see significant growth in their ministry. On the other hand, when believers have just copied the method without understanding the process or adapting it to their context, the results have been mixed or even dismal. It is the process of training trainers which must be understood and adapted appropriately for each cultural context that enables believers to implement the kingdom principles of T4T.

In 2009 we convened a meeting of practitioners from nine urban CPMs. The criterion for attending this summit was that the work in the city had to have at least one hundred new churches at the level of at least the third generation. [Third generation means that the outsider (missionary) started the first church (1st generation) and trained them to start a new church (2nd generation) which then started a new church (3rd generation).]

Of the nine Asian urban movements represented at the summit, each of the missionaries was seeing significant numbers of conversions, baptisms and new church planting. As these urban missionaries reported the common factors contributing to their respective movements, perhaps the most revealing was this: Each one of them had learned T4T, adapted it to their own context, and were training believers using the T4T process.

T4T has birthed new CPMs within Hindu, Muslim and tribal/animist contexts among both literate and non-literate peoples. We have even seen T4T beginning to bear multi-generational fruit within church cultures in the USA.

T4T is not a silver bullet to give you a church planting movement; only the Holy Spirit can produce a CPM, but when understood and applied appropriately, the principles and tools of the training process can help position your ministry to live out the Kingdom principles God delights in using.

For CPM practitioners witnessing these significant results, it has been a discipleship re-revolution harking back to the first-century discipleship movements of Acts. It has been a return to the original discipleship revolution of Jesus calling all people to 1) follow Him and 2) fish for men (pass it on)—Mk 1:17.

The Fruit of T4T

Since Ying and Grace first launched their T4T discipleship re-revolution in November 2000, the Kais and their band of trainers have multiplied into hundreds of streams of multiplying disciples and churches. These streams have produced more than 1.7 million baptized believers in a decade of obedient witnessing and discipling. Along the way, these brothers and sisters have left more than 140,000 new house churches in their wake in what is likely the fastest-growing Church Planting Movement in the world.

Come Journey with Us

Beyond having a heart and desire that people come to know the Lord, we must put discipleship into action. Jesus taught His disciples not only to baptize but also to “teach them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Mt 28:20, NIV). For this reason, each of us must have a way to witness, disciple, start groups or churches, develop leaders, and mobilize other believers to do the same. Otherwise our ministry consists only of theories that may or may not get implemented. T4T offers a clear process to effectively apply kingdom principles that often get neglected.

In Training for Trainers, practitioners intentionally use the word “trainer” instead of “disciple” because of the many misconceptions associated with the English word “disciple” that might hinder our understanding of the biblical mandate. The biblical idea of discipleship includes the idea of “passing on” what has been received, not just personally growing in Christlikeness. Too often, our understanding of “disciple” and “being disciplined” carries the idea of receiving but not giving. Jesus taught His followers to pass on all they received:

Freely you received, freely give (Mt 10:8, NASB).

“Trainer” conveys the idea of someone who both grows in his loving obedience of Jesus and passes on what he learns to others through his witness and training of others.

An All-Inclusive Process

In ministry, many of us use one tool for evangelism, another for discipleship, maybe one for church planting or starting new groups, another for equipping leaders, etc. There is nothing wrong with that, but

what we have found with T4T is that it can be an all-in-one process of accomplishing all of these things well. It helps to bring all of these together in a balanced process that builds sustained church planting movements. It helps believers to know what to do at each stage when people say “yes”—yes to listening to the gospel, yes to following Jesus, yes to baptism, yes to becoming church, yes to witnessing to others, etc.

T4T is not a set of lessons, though T4T does include lessons. T4T is not a six-week outreach, though it does include outreach. Instead, T4T is an all-inclusive process of training believers over the course of 12–18 months to witness to the lost and train new believers to form reproducing discipleship communities generation by generation. T4T truly is a discipleship re-revolution—a return to the original discipleship revolution of the New Testament.

The All-in-One Process of T4T

[Jesus said,] “A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go work today in the vineyard.’ And he answered, ‘I will not’; but afterward he regretted it and went. The man came to the second and said the same thing; and he answered, ‘I will, sir’; but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first” (Mt 21:28–31, NASB).

As T4T reports began to surface in 2004 and 2005, we originally thought it was just an evangelism tool. But we couldn’t understand why it was seeing such growth in new believers and churches. Then we realized that it was also a discipleship tool. As we examined it further, we realized it was also a church planting tool and a leadership development tool. In fact, T4T was accomplishing all the basic parts of a CPM plan well, developing new believers from one stage to the next as they were being disciplined/trained.

Gradually we came to see that T4T was more than just a multi-purpose tool, like a Swiss Army knife. Rather, it was a process that moves the disciple from *saying* “yes” to *doing* “yes.” The T4T process gives these disciples confidence and competence to move from one stage to the next.

A Discipleship Process

Repeat it out loud three times: “T4T is a process, not a set of lessons!”

As Training for Trainers has spread around the world, this is probably the most misunderstood aspect of T4T. Many people think that T4T is a six-lesson discipleship program that will somehow result in CPMs. They say: “I finished T4T [meaning six lessons]. Now what?”

T4T is an ongoing discipleship process that cascades for generations, and the challenges at each new stage

are an ongoing part of that process. It includes good biblical content wrapped up in a dynamic, life-on-life, loving process of following Jesus and fishing for men.

Each training meeting includes several important elements shaped by the central goal:

To build multiplying generations of trainers

Time-wise these are divided roughly into three “Thirds”:

First Third (Look Back)

1. Pastoral Care: Ask “how are you doing?” and take time to minister to one another’s needs in prayer, biblical counsel and encouragement.
2. Worship: Time spent praising God.
3. Accountability: Mutual loving accountability about how they were followers of Jesus (obeyed the Bible lesson last week) and fishers of men (bore witness and trained others) since the last meeting.
4. Vision-casting: sharing a vision of what God has designed them to become and what He plans to do through them.

Second Third (Look Up)

1. New lesson or Bible study—enough biblical content to obey and pass on to others

Final Third (Look Forward)

1. Practice: spend time practicing what was just learned to gain confidence and competence to pass this on to others
2. Set goals and pray: set goals for how to obey the lesson and to take the next steps in witnessing and training others; then re-commissioning each other through prayer.

God’s heart is for bringing in a harvest. He is looking for workers who are willing.

Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest”—Mt 9:37–38, (NASB).

The problem throughout history has never been with God—He is willing and passionate for His people to be reached. The problem is not the harvest—the Spirit is doing His part to prepare a harvest even among hard peoples. The problem is with us—we need to recapture the first-century discipleship revolution that turned the world upside down. We need a discipleship re-revolution. 🌐

To learn more about T4T, visit the new, interactive MissionFrontiers.org.