Member Care Update

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Ethnê-MC Update **Issue 3: January 2008**

A very happy new year to you, and welcome to the *Update*! The special topic this month is **Promoting Health and Managing Dysfunction in the Mission/Aid Community**. Our monthly reports inform you about important member care resources, news, and topics. We especially want to further equip people with member care responsibilities who are focussing on mission/aid personnel in least-reached people groups (LPGs). In addition to the mission/aid emphasis, each report usually contains material from the international humanitarian, health, business, and human resource sectors. Each report is archived on our web site: **www.ethne.net/membercare**. Feel free to share the *Update* with others and your networks! May our Lord bless you throughout this new year.

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His good heart made him a good shepherd; he guided the people wisely and well.
Psalm 78:72—The Message

Stay alert. *This is hazardous work I'm assigning you…*
Be as cunning as a snake, inoffensive as a dove. ***Don't be naive.***
Matthew 10—The Message

In this Issue: Promoting Health and Managing Dysfunction

SPECIAL RESOURCES: Tools to further equip you for member care

- *Five excellent books to help with health, restoration, and dysfunction.*

1. *Guide to Managing People: 47 Tools to Help Managers* (2006) Society for HR Management
2. *Restoring the Fallen: A Team Approach to Caring, Confronting, Reconciliation* (1997) Wilson et al
3. *Snakes in Suits: When Psychopaths Go to Work* (2006), Babiak and Hare
4. *Governance Matters: Relationship Model of Governance, Leadership, Management* (2003) Stahlke
5. *Where Egos Dare: The Untold Truth About Narcissistic Leaders (2000)* McFarlin and Sweeny

SPECIAL EVENTS: Gatherings to help you connect/contribute to the member care field

- *Guatemala: Central American Member Care Consultation—Report; November 2007*
- *Petaling Jaya, Malaysia: Pastor to Mission Workers Conference (PTM); March 2008*

SPECIAL TOPICS: Current issues and approaches related to member care

- *Wise Doves and Innocent Serpents—Staying Healthy in Mission; by Kelly O'Donnell*

Excerpts of a key article on dysfunction—in 12 languages. **http://mcaresources.googlepages.com/**

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The *Update* is compiled on behalf of the *Ethnê-Member Care Network*. We are a growing *network of colleagues* from different nations and organisations. Our passion is to see the least-reached people groups (LPGs) experience the transforming love of Jesus Christ. We are committed to help provide and develop member care resources in order to support the diversity of people/senders who are working among LPGs. Our *Network* is part of the Ethnê to Ethnê Movement (**www.ethne.net**).

Email: mc@ethne.net
Ethnê-MC Website: **www.ethne.net/membercare**
Subscribe: Ethne-MC-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
Unsubscribe: Ethne-MC-unsubscribe@yahoogroups.com

SPECIAL RESOURCES: Tools to further equip you for member care

- *Five excellent for promoting health and restoration, and managing dysfunction.*

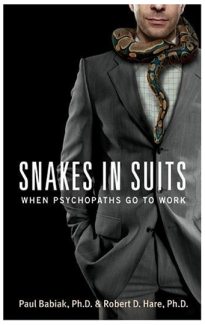
1. Guide to Managing People: 47 Tools to Help Managers (2006) Society for HR Management

This book is a compilation of brief articles from *HR Magazine*. It provides expert information for managers and human resource professionals in several areas: recruitment, diversity management, motivating workers, skill development, assessing performance, problem behaviour in teams, effective communication, etc. There are worksheets, self-assessments, and checklists that accompany many of the articles. **Available from: www.shrm.org**

2. Restoring the Fallen: A Team Approach to Caring, Confronting Reconciliation (1997) Wilson et al

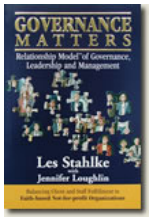
This book is an in-depth case study on deception, moral failure, and healing. It is written by an "offender" and his support team that provided tough accountability and care for restoration. It is also very relevant for in the mission community. Quotes: "Unfortunately, there seems to be an unwritten rule that if you believe in forgiveness… then you should not be tough or confrontative. This is a dangerous approach, particularly…where patterns of sin and deceit have existed for a long time. The perception of the problem by those in need of restoration is usually so distorted that they may never truly come to grips with the issues.... ...[be careful not to simply] reframe the offense…into a "spiritual problem"…it is quite simple for the offender to accomodate to such a reframe: just have a religious renewal experience, and then the "problem" will dissolve...True restoration is achieved through a process of discipline that recognises both grace and responsibility as it seeks to guide the person back to a God-centered life." (pp. 15, 117, 200).

3. Snakes in Suits: When Psychopaths Go to Work (2006), Babiak and Hare



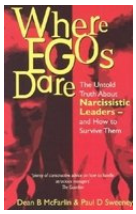
This book "is a compelling…look at exactly how psychopaths work in the corporate environment…You'll learn how they apply their "instinctive" manipulation techniques--assessing potential targets, controlling influential victims, and abandoning those no longer useful--to business processes such as hiring, political command and control, and executive succession, all while hiding within the corporate culture. It's a must read for anyone in the business world, [and mission/aid sectors!] because whatever level you're at, you'll learn the subtle warning signs of psychopathic behavior and be able to protect yourself and your company -- before it's too late." **Available from: www.snakesinsuits.com**

4. Governance Matters: Relationship Model of Governance, Leadership, Management (2003) Stahlke



The strapline of this excellent book is "Balancing Client and Staff Fulfilment in Faith-based Not-for-Profit Organisations". Six core processes of organisations are discussed: communication, decision-making, conflict resolution, planning, delegating, and accountability. One especially helpful section is "The Seven Deadly Sins of Organisations:" weak governance, abusive leadership, vague direction, unclear roles, unclear expectations, poor staff-job fit, and confusing forgiveness with accountability. **Available from: www.governancematters.com**

5. Where Egos Dare: The Untold Truth--Narcissistic Leaders (2000) McFarlin, Sweeny



This book "is a fascinating exposé of this seamier side of leadership…The authors shine a welcome spotlight on…the psyche of the egocentric leader and the devastating effect it can have on individual and organizational performance. The…stories told here clearly show how damaging a powerful ego can become when allowed to flower into excessive narcissism….[The book] provides you with the tools…to re-establish a sense of control over your job and to protect yourself and your company from destructive behaviour."

SPECIAL EVENTS: Gatherings to help you connect/contribute to the member care field

- *Guatemala: First Central American Member Care Consultation—Report; November 2007*

For a Spanish summary of the five-day training/networking, **email: cuidadointegral@comibam.org**

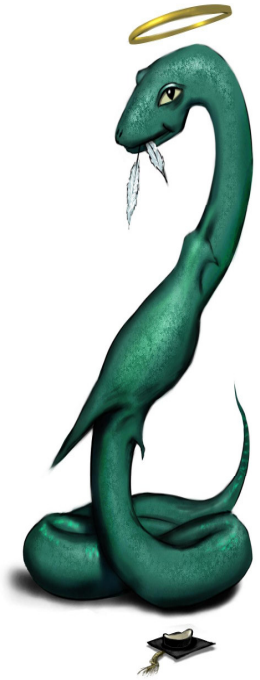
- *Petaling Jaya, Malaysia: Pastor to Mission Workers Conference (PTM); 24-28 March 2008*

Asian member caregivers are strongly encouraged to come! **email: david.modesto@gmail.com**

Wise as Doves and Innocent as Serpents?

by Dr. Kelly O'Donnell

Adapted from *EMQ,* 1/07. For the full article/12 languages: **http://mcaresources.googlepages.com/realitydose**
Chinese, Korean, Bahasa Indonesia, Hindi, Arabic, Russian, French, German, Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese, English
For current reflections/resources on dysfunction see: **www.COREmembercare.blogspot.com**



In this article I review two important areas for healthy relationships in Christian mission/aid. They are the role of human ***dysfunction*** (problems resulting from significant weakness and wrongness) and the role of Biblical ***discipline*** (correction helping to restore people and organizations). Upgrading our skills in these two areas is fundamental for managing conflicts better. How do we help people and organizations that negatively affect others—and sometimes many others—over time? And what type of help or discipline is appropriate? I want to look realistically at our "**relational reality**" in Christian mission so we can learn from our impasses and struggles. My intent is not to blame but rather to build our "**relational resiliency**".

"Dysfunctional" is a good term that when used carefully can help us understand people and organizations better. By dysfunctional I mean a consistent pattern of relating to oneself and others that is hurtful or **"toxic"**, characterized by such things as authoritarianism, closed/secretive communication, high control, and denial of what is actually happening (see Table 1). Such dysfunction can be compounded when no one sees it clearly, when it is imbedded in more functional behaviours, or when no one wants to or can do anything about it. It can be further compounded by the various ways that all of us from different cultural, theological, generational, and organizational backgrounds approach relational discord (e.g., how to be "respectful" yet honest when discussing concerns).

Table 1. Signs of Organizational Dysfunction (based on Hay, 2004; Aterburn, Felton, 1998).

- **Poor leadership and management as evidenced by:**

High control, withholding information, rigidity, legalism, intolerance of questioning, punitiveness, blaming others, not admitting one's problems, keeping up the image of the organization at all costs, high priority on giving money to the organization, limited accountability; influential people with pervasive character deficits, narcissistic traits, bruised backgrounds or addictive behaviours; poor history of staff retention/relationships.

- **Lack of satisfaction and optimism in staff as evidenced by:**

Feeling one is "dispensable", lack of work/life balance, lack of opportunities for development and learning, not being able to talk openly about the "reality" of the situation, not expressing one's feelings unless they are positive, not being able to make "mistakes", not doing anything outside ones "role", not being able to trust, not having the freedom to make mistakes.

The problem is further complicated when there is not proper accountability in place, or when there is not enough history with a person or an institution to really confront it and require verifiable changes. I am not talking about how to handle situations where folks simply differ (which is usually the case fortunately), but rather where there is significant personal and organizational dysfunction. So in other words organizations and people, whether they are aware of it or not, or willing to admit it or not, have a "toxic" influence on people. And as a result, unless we are spiritually discerning; "street wise"; well-versed in the behavioral science areas of systems, recovery, clinical disorders; and grounded in the full counsel of Scripture regarding the conflict resolution process, we can end up being "wise as doves" as we interact with others who may be "innocent as serpents." **Truth without grace may be brutal, but grace without truth can be lethal.**

The sad fact is that many times we can be seriously **'duped' by dysfunction**. Here's how.

- **Deny.** The first task of dysfunction is to conceal itself. "Don't ask about problems, don't tell about problems" is a pervasive, core, unwritten rule. In short, deny reality.
- **Downplay**. If that does not work, then the second task becomes getting folks to minimize it by downplaying its negative impact, stating that the group/person is going through a "normal" stage of adjustment; or simply changing the subject. Relational unity/conformity takes precedence over relational truth/connection.
- **Distract**. If that does not work then the third task is to distract from the real issues, "feign pain" and get sympathy, or admit that something in a fuzzy way is "not exactly right" and perhaps refer to problems as being largely a matter of having different perspectives/preferences. There is little commitment to acknowledge real issues and little capacity to address them.
- **Discredit**. If that does not work, then the fourth task, which can actually occur simultaneously with the previous three, is to discredit those who point it out, no matter how sensitively they try to do so. A common mistake of leaders/consultants who are trying to help is to overestimate one's ability to understand and deal with dysfunction…and to also not be wounded (e.g., discredited) in the process.

Table 2. Ten Suggestions for Dealing with Dysfunction/Toxicity

1. There is a continuum of responses to carefully consider. It ranges from prudently withdrawing and protecting oneself (Proverbs 27:12) to prudently confronting and holding one's ground (Proverbs 25:26). Act with integrity, without wavering, based on your convictions and wise advice.

2. Confrontation of serious dysfunction is done as a group, with solidarity, not by oneself. Get ongoing, experienced, outside consultation, at times including legal advice. Well-intentioned colleagues wanting to help, yet with limited understanding of dysfunction/discipline, can create even greater problems. Refer to any organizational policies for conflict resolution, grievances, and whistle-blowing.

3. Confrontation is usually a necessary step (e.g., clinical/recovery interventions) prior to or as part of mediation and reconciliation approaches. This assumes though that there are people willing to take some risks and that there is an authority structure in place for leverage and accountability. Always include an historical review to help identify pervasive patterns. In mercy, focus on truth and justice, and don't get side-tracked or duped simply with anyone's real, embellished, or contrived "pain."

4. Core parts of the reconciliation process in dysfunction/toxic situations include truth, justice, contrition, forgiveness, restitution, and discipline. Prematurely seeking for reconciliation is never helpful. In certain situations, the reconciliation process takes years. And without verifiable contrition and change, sometimes all we can do is "cut our losses", move on, and entrust ourselves to our faithful Creator (I Peter 4:19). Forgiveness though, is a command in Scripture to intentionally pursue (Mathew 18: 21,22).

5. Impartiality and objectivity do not necessarily imply neutrality. Don't be afraid to take a stand. But beware of seeing any party as being "all bad" or "all good". Truth, packaged diplomatically, is usually a good way forward. Talking in terms of behaviour patterns rather than personality problems, and situational influences rather than dispositional inadequacies, may help make the input/process more acceptable. But be realistic: certain pervasive and ongoing character/systemic issues are not usually amenable to change.

6. Make room for cultural, generational, gender, and organizational variation. Difference is not deviance. Preferences are not usually pathogens. In many cultures, direct approaches may not be appreciated, no matter how diplomatic or respectful one is.

7. Expect there to be diverging accounts of "truth" and deflecting responsibility, plus being misunderstood, manipulated, and blamed. It is a messy process. One must be willing to live with compromise, incomplete closure on important issues, minimal contrition, and partial justice.

8. True trust is earned and not assumed. One needs good reasons, over time, to deeply trust others where there is a history of dysfunction. Trust is slowly built, easily broken, and slowly rebuilt.

9. If you think you are going crazy as you deal with toxicity, you probably are. Dealing with toxicity takes a high toll on our sanity. Get outside reality checks and support. Don't overestimate your ability to repel toxicity or to avoid becoming toxic yourself. Bitterness defiles. Resist it! (Hebrews 12:15).

10. Maintain a solid Biblical perspective: Our Lord cares for us often by refining us through desert experiences and through injustices. He zealously loves others, even dysfunctional people, as much as He loves us; and we are all major debtors in need of unmerited mercy (Matthew 18:23-35).