

Using “Vacation” Trips Home to Prepare International Students to Permanently Return Home

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Description:

International students often find that returning to their home country is even more difficult than coming to America. They have changed and their country has changed while their expectations have not. This change is even greater if they became a believer while in the US. While going over the issues they will face back home using re-entry curriculum here in the States helps, there is nothing better than using their “holiday” trips home to prepare them for their future transition. These trips can also be used to get information about the students’ home culture to be used for future students from that culture. In this workshop, we will explore some ways to use these important trips to help these students adjust to home and also to help your ministry.

Workshop Objectives:

- The workshop participant will know some of the issues returning student face.
- The workshop participant will feel the urgency of preparing student for the return home.
- The workshop participant will be exposed to the concept of using regular “holiday” trip home as a vehicle to prepare the student for the return home.
- The workshop participant will learn the positive benefits of using this tool.
- The workshop participant will construct some models of using this tool to prepare students for returning home.

Outline:

I. It is important to prepare students for returning home...

- Reverse Culture Shock

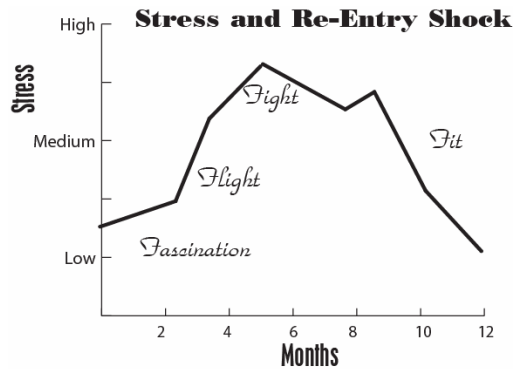
I was gone for three years, and I thought it would be easy going home. But I realized that in three years, I had changed and so did my family and friends. That’s three years of change for me and three years for them. My time away was really six years not three

- Student from the Philippines

My family greeted me warmly when I arrived. But after a few days I began to feel something was wrong. So I talked to my mother. She asked me, ‘Have you forgotten your Chinese customs? You talk when you should remain silent. You speak about matters that are only of concern to men. You speak openly of your feelings and desires. This is not the way of a Chinese woman. We keep our thoughts to ourselves.’ As she spoke, I realized what had happened to me. Americans are much freer in expressing their thoughts. I had gradually adopted some of their ways...

- Female student from China.

THE PROCESS OF CULTURAL RE-ENTRY



(Adapted by John Eaves from *Think Home* by Lisa Espineli-Chinn, 1987, International Students, Inc. I.c., Colorado Springs, p. 51.)

Stages of Cultural Re-Entry¹

- ◆ *Fascination Stage*-This is an exciting time to be reunited with family and friends. Now the students can eat their favorite foods once again, and savor the relationships, the smells, and the sights that signal they are back home. Their “mission” is accomplished; they're welcomed by family and friends as "celebrities." This may last anywhere from a few days to a few weeks.
- ◆ *Flight Stage*-The newness and their “celebrity” status wears off. Daily demands of living and working begin to create frustration. They may experience uncertainty about the future or their job search, and anxiety begins to set in. Things that did not bother them as much before like traffic, pollution, or certain people now are now major annoyances. People don't seem interested in hearing about their stories about America like they first did. They may begin to withdraw from situations which involve interpersonal conflict, differences of opinion, or misunderstanding. They may find themselves sleeping more than usual, and feeling overwhelmed emotionally without knowing exactly why.
- ◆ *Fight Stage*-Frustration and anger can begin to get the best of the students as they focus on the negative aspects of life back home rather than the positive ones. They tend to be critical and distant in their relationships. Sometimes, they want to be around other returnees like themselves because of their shared overseas experience. They feel like they have more in common with them than with others. They may entertain thoughts of going back overseas or attempt to recreate their US lifestyle back home.
- ◆ *Fit Stage*-Most people will reach a point where they are able to resolve many of the initial frustrations with returning home and begin to balance out the positive and negative aspects. They begin to feel more productive, and learn how to successfully integrate what they have learned and experienced overseas within a home context.

¹ John Eaves, *Preparing Your International Friend for Life Back Home* (Colorado Springs: International Students Inc., 1998), 9-10.

- Culture and Perception
 - “One of the functions of culture is to provide a highly selective screen between man and the outside world. In its many forms, culture therefore designates what we pay attention to and what we ignore.”
E. T. Hall, *Beyond Culture* (Garden City, N.J: Anchor Press, 1977), p.5
 - International Students have become bicultural – they use the glasses of both cultures to interpret what they see
 - This is either conscious or subconscious... WE NEED TO HELP STUDENTS MAKE IT CONSCIOUS SO THEY CAN USE IT AS A TOOL TO HELP WITH THEIR TRANSITION BACK.
- Student who became Christians Here...
 - It is especially hard...
 - They are Tri-Cultural – Three Worldviews (Biblical/Theological, Home, American)
 - But their uniqueness makes them specially suited to make a difference.
- It’s important to be proactive about preparing students for returning home from the beginning!

II. Some Specific Difficulties Students will Face and Some Advice from Previous Students.

• Adjustments Are Many for Returning Students

Adjustments - The following are some of the types of problems or adjustments a returnee may encounter after living abroad:

Cultural & Social Adjustments

- Identity confusion-They might ask, "Who am I? What is my true culture?"
- Unrealistic expectations for life back home . Changes in lifestyle or fashion
- Friends or relatives too provincial in attitudes
- Different pace of life
- Family or community pressure to conform.
- Loneliness-feeling out of place
- Lack of modern conveniences
- Indifference from others about their overseas experience
- Adjustment to noise, pollution, city congestion
- Speech mannerisms misinterpreted
- Unfamiliar with new slang and jargon
- Role or status changes
- Envy or distrust in relationships

National or Educational Problems

- Changes in country's conditions, national priorities, policies, views

- Political climate not helpful to their professional activity or advancement
- Economic uncertainties
- Bureaucracy-how effective or efficient?
- Observed lack of national goals
- Dissatisfaction with political situation
- Relevance of U.S. education
- Lack of resources for research
- Absence of professional educational programs to keep up with field
- Little opportunity to improve skills
- Incomplete fulfillment of educational goals in U.S., and implications back home

Professional Adjustment

- Inability to work in chosen specialty
- Facing an oversupply in the job market-no openings
- Absence of inadequate translation of foreign scientific terminology.
- Feeling of superiority due to US training.
- Isolation from academic and scientific developments in career field
- Non-recognition or appreciation for foreign degree
- Jealousy of colleagues
- Low compensation-few benefits
- Over-concern for quick material success

- Impatience with rate of promotion
- Perceived lack of commitment by co-workers
- Absence of colleagues who "speak the same language"

Spiritual Adjustment

- Finding a home church
- Being accepted in the local church, or accepting the local church
- Difficulties finding Christian fellowship.
- Their Christianity may be culturally American, and not necessarily relevant to their home culture
- Miss the support of close Christian friends
- Opposition to their Christianity from family, friends and the workplace

(Espineli-Chinn, *Think Home*, 33-34)

• Advice from Returnees

What Advice Returnees Give*

Church/Christian Fellowship

- Quickly get involved in a good Christian fellowship
- Keep in touch with the local church

Culture/People

- Be willing to adapt myself to customs of my country.
- Try to accept your own culture and love your own people.
- Identify fully with the local people.

Family

- Keep in close touch with families and friends at home. Take note of the changes that happen to them.

Identity

- Knowing that we are perfectly understood and accepted by God even though nobody seems to understand what we are going through.
- Having a secure identity of who you are in Christ, a healthy cultural identity and a wider perspective to accept differences.

Other Returnees

- Keep in touch with other returnees especially those who live in the same area.

Relating with others/Expectations

- Stop saying "In America..." because people who I am talking to do not have any experience in the U.S. as I do.
- It is very important not to push my experiences in the U.S. with others.
- Do not put too much expectation on going home, nothing is the same.
- Don't expect that everybody wants to listen to your experience in America.
- Rather have a humble, listening attitude. But at the same time, don't hesitate to share your experience when requested or when appropriate
- Don't expect to receive; be ready to give and be the one to serve your people.

Relationship with God

- Expect difficulties. Deal with them with God's power.
- Establish close fellowship with the Lord before you leave the U.S.
- Study the Bible and know what God requires of you.

Vision

- Try to find a positive opportunity in your home country that the Lord has prepared especially for you.
- Try to help foreigner in you home country, who are in similar situations as you when you were in the U.S. Ministering to them gives you a sense of worthiness and joy.
- It is necessary to practice some useful methods and ways for ministries in the Church which we learned and experienced in the USA as soon as possible after returning home.
- Have a vision, shared with an important person (friend or pastor) in North America for prayer and accountability.

U.S. Relationship

- Have a good fellowship in the U.S. They will pray for you and write to you.
- While in the U.S. at earlier stages think about developing skills that will help you get a job upon returning home.

* Based on a global survey on returned Christian international students by Leiton E. Chinn, 1988. Used with permission.

- III. “Holiday” Trips Home Proactively Prepare Students for Going Home Long Term
- The Concept and How it is Framed
 - Student who has a discipleship relationship with an American decides to go home for a break.
 - Students is given an “assignment” (see below for content) by his/her mentor
 - Another possibility, student goes back to home country on mission trip or on a family visit with American friends.
 - Student acts as cultural interpreter for Americans
 - Forces student to consider their culture with critical lenses
 - Americans ask questions similar to found in the “assignment” throughout the trip based on their observations to help student consider issues of transition.
 - Debrief the student, perhaps with the “Who’s Going Home?” Inventory
 - Students are told that the purpose of this exercise is threefold: 1) to help them to prepare for their return home, 2) to get information for the ministry to make it better, 3) to help former students by showing the ministry’s concern for them even in their home country. It is both altruistic but also beneficial for the student and so more likely to happen.
 - Goal of “assignment” questions and activities
 - Get students to look at their culture critically.
 - Get students to look at their personal cultural change critically
 - Get students to plan preparation for their adjustment in returning to their country long term.
 - Get students to consider how their new-found faith (if they are Christians) affects how they live in their home country.
 - Expose student to “church experience” in their home culture and issues related to it.
 - Help students develop a support network including a local church and former students who could share or help to inform their experience of re-entry.
 - Get information about the country/culture and its re-entry issues for future students
 - Have the students learn from people who have “been there” already.
 - Follow-up former students by means of the students visiting them.
 - Benefits
 - Students will see what the Body of Christ is like both in their helping the U.S. Ministry by their report but also by seeing how the Body of Christ is different in their home Country but still the same united Body.
 - Students see and are attuned to cultural issues first hand and so they are more likely to take them seriously

- Students can learn about the issues of re-entry when they still have time to learn, reflect and plan without the pressure and expectations that comes with being at home long. They can be more intentional about putting what they learn into practice.
- Students can check on former students and show the love of Christ that way but also start to develop a support network back home.
- Accountability structure for returned students.
- Ministry gets information about culture, country and city to pass on to future students from that area.
- Students are encouraged to be proactive about their transition early.
- Results/Examples
 - According to Wichit Maneevon, given two students who did the same American re-entry preparation training (See ISI Books in bibliography), the one who purposefully went home and did the assignments did better in re-entry than the one who didn't.
 - M(artha) - Current Student – Visited Church, etc.
 - K(ay) - Former Student – Missions trip to area where moving to for re-entry.
- Example Questions

ICF HOME ASSIGNMENT

Questionnaire and Homework for those Returning to Their Home Country

Wichit Maneevon – ISI Staff – Escondido, CA

Here is some homework for you folks when you go back to your home country. Don't worry, you cannot pass or fail, in fact, there are no wrong answers. We are doing this for two reasons: first, to better prepare students to be faithful and fruitful Christians before they eventually return home. Second, to re-familiarize you with your home environment so that you can find a healthy and well balanced church where you can grow spiritually, develop your God-given talents and gifts, and finally, to worship and serve God... We will meet with you when you return to find out the results of your research and homework. For those of you who are not returning soon, please write and tell us your results when you are done.

Note: Please begin this process as soon as possible or the opportunity and interest will quickly slip by.

1. Begin this project with **prayer**, asking God to help and guide you every step of the way.
2. Visit different churches (No LDS Mormon, Church of Christ-originating from Boston, Jehovah's Witness or Christian Science churches).
 - You can begin by looking in the Yellow Pages
 - Ask your friends if they are familiar with any
 - Find Christian bookstores and ask the people there if they can recommend any
 - Find out how many churches there are in your area
3. At each church you visit, find out the following:
 - How welcoming to new-comers are they? Did they do a follow-up?
 - Find out their style of worship and service format
 - What kind of church is it? Baptist? Non-denomination? Bring back the news bulletin that you find there and bring it here.
 - Check out their notice board. Are they involved in any mission work?
 - Do they have any Young Adult ministry? College group ministry? Working adult ministry?
 - Note your impressions of the sermon and take notes.
4. Find out what kinds of opportunities there are for service.
 - Talk with someone from the church (usher and especially the pastor) and ask them if they have any opportunities and areas they are opened to for service.
 - In fact, if you can find the pastor and if he/she has the time, you can ask them all the above questions for more accuracy. Also, you will have a person to contact with in the future when you return. Introduce yourself and tell them that you are doing a project and ask them if they are available to help for just a short while. I am sure they will be more than happy to do so.
 - Find out what kinds of Bible Studies, activities and fellowship groups they have during the week day and attend one if you can.
 - Revisit a church if you sense that God may want you to be in that church in the future or if you want to get more information.
5. Find out and visit Christian bookstores in your area
 - Find out what kind they are: Catholic? Protestant? Do they have many books?

- Buy the latest translation of a Bible in your language and some good books on Christian belief or Christian testimonies in your language; bring them back with you to ICF.
6. Find out if there are other Christian groups in the area
 - InterVarsity (IFE S), Navigators or foreign missionaries (who maybe teach E nglis h etc.) by checking the Yellow Pages, asking people in the bookstore or the churches you visit.
 7. Intentionally visit old friends/family which you will do anyway (Go out for food, coffee or just get together)...
 - Find out their reaction to your Christianity
 - Find out your own reaction to their response
 - E xplain why and how you became a Christian
 8. Call or visit former returnees.
 - S hare your life experiences in the U S A
 - Ask about their life experience since they have returned home; find out about the issues that they struggle with back home
 - S pend time in prayer for each other, if she or he is Christian.
 - Get an update of their address, phone or e-mail.
 9. How do you grade your spiritual walk when you were back home? Why?
 - Did you have a quality quiet-time regularly?
 10. What is your overall impression from this experience in living your Christian life back in your own culture during this period of time?

 By the way, don't forget to bring back souvenirs for the rest of us in the U S like something unusual or some local food that we cannot get in S an Diego. We look forward to seeing you again. A lso, don't forget the church camp at S an Bernardino at the end of A ugust. We'll have a party waiting for you when you return.

T H A N K S !!!!! H A V E A G O O D V A C A T I O N , S E E Y O U A G A I N S O O N !!

ICF, E scondido

From Wichit Maneevon – ISI Staff – E scondido, CA, wmaneevon@isiwebnet.net

Who Is Going Home?
A Personal Inventory of Perceived Life Change

Physical

1. Have you gained or lost weight?
2. Have you changed your diet?
3. Have there been any changes in the clothing you wear?
4. Have there been other changes in your physical appearance?

Social

1. How do you relate to people? Are you more (or less) outgoing or shy?
2. Have your attitudes toward the opposite sex changed?
3. Do you relate differently to older people than when at home?
4. Are you now more or less concerned with class and status issues?
5. Do you now prefer living by yourself?
6. What changes at home have affected you while you were away?

Academic

1. Do you now feel more or less academically competent?
2. What study habits have you changed?
3. Do you relate differently with your professors and supervisors than at home?
4. Are you more (or less) interested in helping your people with the training you have received in the United States?
5. Have your purpose and life goals changed since coming to America?

Emotional

1. Are you better able to express personal feelings to others?
2. Are you now handling your emotions differently than when you were back at home?
3. Do you have more (or less) compassion for people from cultures different than your own?

Political

1. Have you changed your views concerning the political situation back home?
2. Have your views concerning U.S. foreign policy changed?
3. Have you closely followed the political situation back home?

Financial

1. Are you more (or less) generous with your money and possessions?
2. Have you altered your buying habits?

Spiritual

1. Have you changed your attitude regarding the religious beliefs and practices of your family and friends back home?
2. Are you more (or less) open to differing views on religious issues?

(Adapted from Think Home, by Lisa Espineli-Chinn)

IV. How Can You Implement this in Real Life? Your Situation?

- Case Studies
 - Muslim Student
 - Non-Christian
 - Christian
 - Japanese Student
 - Non-Christian
 - Christian
 - Chinese Student
 - Non-Christian
 - Christian
 - Indian Student
 - Non-Christian
 - Christian
- Questions to Consider
 - What issues will the students face that they can think about before hand?
 - How can these issues be framed in a question?
 - What information do you need to know about the country/city that the student can get?
 - How can you frame the questions to encourage the students to answer them?
- Your Situation

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