

Highly Effective Missional Teams

Dr. Neil Tibbott
Director of the StreetGospel Project
www.neighborhoodswork.net
July 26, 2004

Summary:

In this article, Dr. Steven Ogne discusses how teams strengthen the potential for multiplying churches and ministries. Practical insights combined with common pitfalls help illustrate ways for leaders to effectively mobilize more people for ministry outside the walls of their church buildings.

Highly Effective Missional Teams –

“An Interview with Steve Ogne”

By Neil Tibbott – Director of the StreetGospel Project
July 26, 2004

The StreetGospel Project exists to equip churches for street level, low entry, highly doable community development projects. In this interview with Steve Ogne, internationally recognized expert on Church Planting Movements, Neil explores how team formation influences the fruitfulness of street level missions. Steve talks about his life lessons learned from years on the field as an observer and practitioner.

SGP: So, Steve how did you get your start in Ministry?

Steve: I was actually challenged as a High School student to help out with the Junior High class at our church. My senior pastor recognized some gifts and a hint of calling so he extended an opportunity for me to serve.

SGP: You started early.

Steve: I did, but I soon discovered that my gifts were better utilized in other places. Not that I didn't like the kids, I just saw more fruit in other areas.

SGP: When did you make the transition to Mission Team formation and in particular Church Planting?

Steve: During seminary I went on staff with Calvary Community Church in Westlake, California. The church was just starting and they needed a guy to do Christian Education ministries so I signed on to form children's ministry teams, youth ministries and Single Adult ministries.

SGP: What did you learn during those years about forming teams?

Steve: In a nutshell, the strength of the team is determined by the contribution of the members. Their contribution is largely determined by two factors: their passion and gifts.

That was true in my life as a young leader and I still see that pattern consistently demonstrated in highly effective teams. One
Neil Tibbott © 2004



“The strength of the team is determined by the contribution of the members.”

Ogne

of our tendencies as leaders is to bring people into ministry roles because we have a need. That may work for the short-term, but for teams to be highly effective they have to be built around Gifts and Passion.

Here's an example of what I'm talking about... When I was the CE director for Calvary I spotted a woman in our congregation with a tremendous amount of passion for young children AND a gift of administration. I immediately invited her to serve as our pre-school coordinator. It seemed like a no brainer. But within the year she was weary and wanted a change. What we discovered together was that her passion involved helping babies outside the walls of the church and interacting with those young moms. Out of that honest reflection we formed a Crisis Pregnancy Center around her gifts and passion. And, it's a ministry which is still active today in our city.

SGP: It sounds like matching gifts and passion is also critical to sustaining ministries. What other principles have you discovered which strengthen teams to go the distance?

Steve: Before I answer that question let me say that I'm finding that many people in churches want to be released for ministries outside the walls of their church building. However, churches often lose those leaders and connection with the ministry because we don't appreciate the level of passion people have to serve their communities. If we would empower their ministries we would preserve the relationship with the leader and have a significant impact in our neighborhoods.

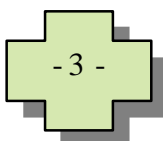
SGP: Now, you're talking our language. How do you keep those leaders encouraged in their ministries for the long run?

Steve: It's obvious, but when people are motivated they stay with their projects. I've also learned that churches can provide support that strengthens those teams. Many times, however, these entrepreneurial leaders don't want the church's help, partly because of their past experience where the help they received wasn't helpful.

SGP: What would be considered encouraging from the leader's point of view?

Steve: Specifically, when we build teams we facilitate a communication process, up front, which helps clarify the initial vision and values of a new team. As the ministry develops we

Neil Tibbott © 2004



continue to talk about how the vision and values are changing to reflect the reality the team discovers while doing their work. Entrepreneurs seem to appreciate the flexibility to start their adventure and the ongoing communication which helps the vision emerge and gain focus.

We also communicate expectations for involvement for the team members. We include expectations like when will the team meet and how often, but we also include expectations for relationships and accountability. Reporting is never a favorite exercise for entrepreneurs, but whether the report is given on paper, email or face to face it helps gauge the progress the team is making and perhaps identify hindrances. Actually, conflict on teams is one of the most disheartening aspects of volunteer ministry. Adequate reporting and coaching helps identify when teams are struggling with conflict, or with their progress.

People like participating on teams that are fun and making a difference. So besides regular, friendly communication teams need to have a few members who have the skills to accomplish their objective. As I see it, adequate development of the team is critical. When volunteers feel like they can show up, give some time and make a difference, that's a team that will remain motivated and thrive.

And, its worth mentioning, when teams work well together with love for one another and serve joyfully, their ministry connects more effectively with their neighborhood.

SGP: It seems like you've seen the opposite.

Steve: One thing that drives me nuts is seeing teams out there on the streets serving Jesus with such a driven, heartless approach to people that they misrepresent Jesus. I understand that sometimes people serve in leadership or as volunteers longer than they should, but someone needs to wake up and make some changes.

My son went on construction project to Mexico recently where he observed some of his teammates standing around watching others do the work. He didn't understand why kids would drive to Mexico in the summer heat, spend their money and not jump into the mission project. Its true that "standing around" is one response to culture shock, but let's realize that what we do and how we treat people reflects our "proclamation" of the Gospel.



“conflict on teams is one of the most disheartening aspects of volunteer ministry.”

Ogne

Now, the upside with this story is the way the leadership responded to the challenge of keeping their workers motivated and involved. They made up contests to infuse a healthy sense of competition. They also had evening campfires where they had fun, rewarded innovation and honored everyone's contribution. Leadership can provide significant encouragement which keeps teams together and working effectively. When they're productive and having fun, team relationships also tend to thrive.

SGP: Do you see these kinds of problems with Community Development projects serving in our local communities?

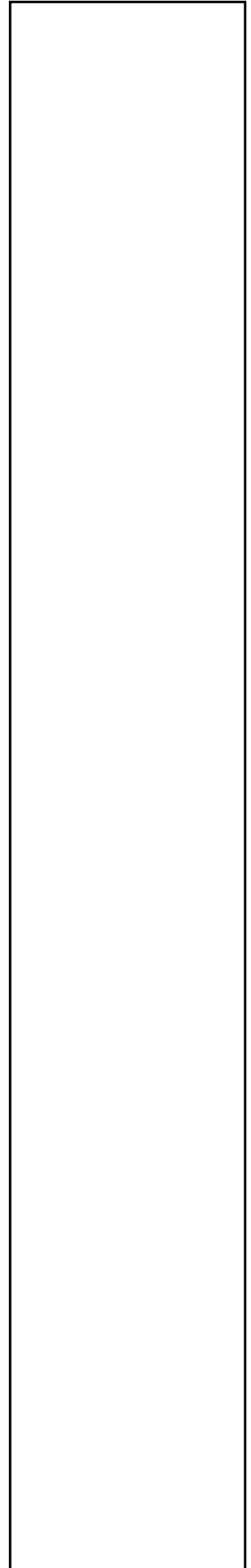
Steve: I guess I see two extremes, the one I've already mentioned where teams are so task oriented that they give the wrong impression and the other when they are so relational that the team never gets around to accomplishing their objectives. If the team has joined together to have a good time and hang out, and that's their mission, then fine. But let's not call that local missions. I've also seen this happen with new churches. The core group has so much fun being together that they never actually get around to inviting new friends to join their group, or lead people to Christ, or even start a church.

The most effective mission teams are formed around people who understand the need to integrate tasks and relationships. The team leader is largely responsible for gauging how that goes, but everyone needs to understand those kinds of expectations up front. Leaders model how to be productive with grace. Leaders keep the vision alive.

SGP: Do you think formal training or seminars help at this point?

Steve: I'm philosophically opposed to training for those purposes even though I teach at a Graduate School and lead seminars around the country. For mission teams, I prefer seeing an active reflection process put into place that emphasizes rest and fun and vision casting and learning from one another.

Boy Scouts do this really well when they go on back packing trips. They carry their load up a mountain all day long and at night they sit around the campfire to talk about the day's journey. They find out who has blisters and who has mole skin. They talk about what they brought that doesn't need to be in their packs the next time. They also laugh and joke a lot which helps them get ready for the



trip home. We need to do more of that kind of active reflection with our mission teams.

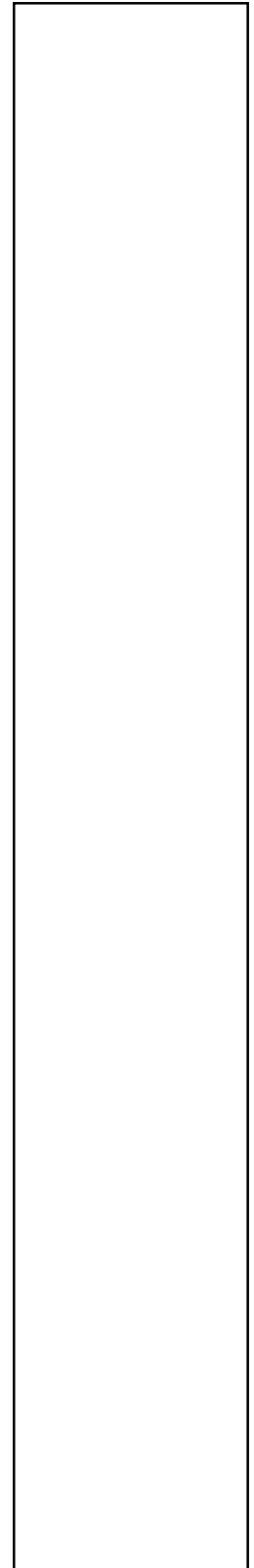
SGP: But, leadership capabilities are essential whether they were developed elsewhere or on the job. What are you looking for before you empower a leader to form a mission team from your church?

Steve: I look for a few things. First, I'm looking for an emerging vision. It doesn't mean they need to have the whole picture in their head, it's probably best if they don't. But I want to see a leader who can envision the possibilities. Second, they need to possess the ability to mobilize others to join the project. If they have an attractive vision and can motivate people to join the team, then I want to get behind it. Finally, I'm also looking for a leader with the ability to obtain funding. If they expect the sponsoring organization to come up with all the funding, or all the resources to get the job done, then they're probably not the right leader for the job. Leaders should be able to identify sources for funding whether it comes from the volunteers, or a grant or special offerings. Leaders with vision attract people and resources. Those are the kinds of people who ought to be empowered.

SGP: We talked earlier about the Crisis Pregnancy Center that your church started, were there any other street level ministries you helped initiate?

Steve: As a church and on a personal level, I've been involved with Habitat for Humanity projects. I like helping out with those projects because they tend to allow me to join them for a short-term commitment and make a contribution on a valuable project. One thing I've noticed about participating with those projects is that it's a lot more fun and rewarding when we get to do them "with" the new homeowner, rather than just "for" them. The energy on the job site is completely different when the future homeowner swings a hammer and talks about who will be living in that particular bedroom.

I think there's a principle for doable Community Development projects, as you call them. As much as possible these service projects should be done "with" instead of "for". It's more rewarding for everybody and I think it creates buy in for the next time Habitat wants to build a house. It also seems to help keep egos in check. We're not doing projects for people that bring us praise or a larger budget. We're constantly reminded by those we work with that the



gift of serving is about other people, not propping up someone's ego.

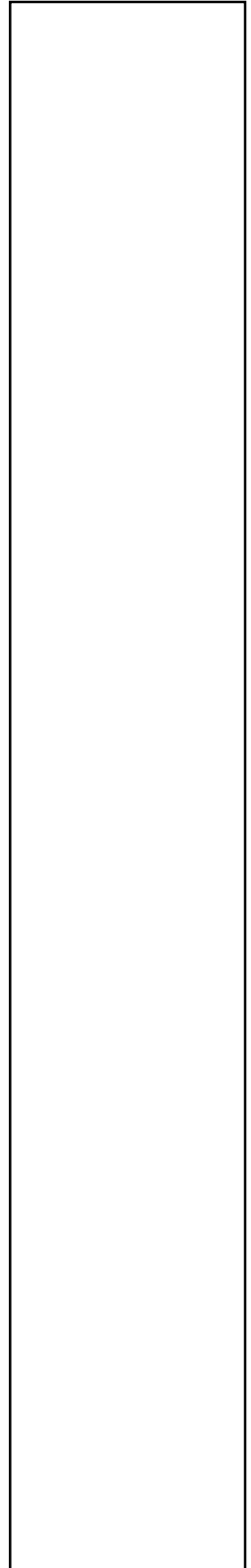
SGP: The StreetGospel project was formed to motivate and equip churches to start high doable community service ministries outside the walls of their church. Do you have any suggestions for mobilizing church members to get involved in those kinds of ministries?

Steve: Part of it comes down to what ministries we talk about on Sunday morning and who gets the funding. Most of time churches commit most, like 80 or 90% of their resources to ministries that serve the church. When I talk with church planters I challenge them to develop just as many ministry teams for projects outside their church as they do to serve the new congregation. They come up with all kinds of reasons for focusing on their own programs, like "everything we do is outreach" or "we don't have enough people". The thing I'm learning is that God is raising up people to serve the Kingdom, not just one church. If we empower those leaders we keep the leaders and connect with the ministry.

SGP: What else have you done to mobilize leaders?

Steve: This may sound too simple to count, but consider this... take care of the leaders you already have. This includes honoring the contribution your current team members make and honoring the alumni. One of the things we did was create an alumni pool for our mission teams. These are leaders who served on boards or gave significantly to ministries in the past. We send them regular information about the ministries and involve them like once or twice a year in ministry summits that tap into their strengths and previous contributions. Sometimes their expertise helps solve a critical problem that the current team didn't know how to deal with. Other times a former leader spots a critical need and steps back into the ministry for another season to help out with their gifts.

I hate to admit it, but in the past I've written off "burned out" leaders. This is a mistake. There was a story in our local paper about a man who served as a Boy Scout leader for 50 years! Only 15 or 16 of those were as the Scout Master. We need to learn something from that. People want to make a contribution, and they also need to be refreshed. I've made it point to honor our alumni and welcome their ongoing contribution to the ministry even though they don't show up every week.



SGP: Our research shows that perhaps the most effective means for mobilizing more local mission activities, outside the walls of the church comes from raising up leaders and sending them out in new ministries. It's a multiplication process rather than maintenance process. Do you have any thoughts that would help connect that with churches?

Steve: I think you're on the right track by focusing on identifying and empowering the leader first. So, I don't know if this will help, but I've found that multiplication of a ministry is often hindered by the initial vision. When the project was developed in the first place it never envisioned the possibility of spinning off branches in another location or releasing leaders to do a similar, but different work with another team. Sometimes multiplication doesn't happen because we don't believe it will happen. Our ministry dreams are built around preserving and maintaining, rather than on what's needed to have a lasting, even expanding Kingdom impact.

SGP: What you're talking about sounds like the parable of the mustard seed. The Kingdom of God continues to multiply becoming a place of sanctuary.

Steve: That's the way the Kingdom of God expands. And, I'm glad you mentioned sanctuary. To many times leaders are sent out into the harvest field with out coaching and then we expect them sustain their momentum forever. In some cases new churches and ministries start that way. Most ministries, however, need to be more real about the emotional and physical limits of their leadership. There needs to be adequate time for rest and reflection and a healthy concept of sharing leadership roles. Leaders who go the distance know how to involve others. Growing ministries can become a place of sanctuary for leaders as well.

I also suggest ministries implement a coaching process and an apprenticeship program. Eager interns do wonders to strengthen ministries and they sometimes become future leaders. That's how I started.

SGP Could you recap the 3 or 4 key concepts that empower teams and leaders.

Steve: Here it is, I hope it helps.
Empower leaders with a passion and gifts
Invite team members to participate with a clear sense of the expectations
Engage in on-the-job, just-in-time training AND Have Fun!

Neil Tibbott © 2004



Neil Tibbott oversees the [Street Gospel Project](#) in Seattle which explores how ordinary Christians are making a difference on the streets where neighbors live, work and play. If you have stories to contribute or want to participate in an ongoing look at how doable community development is making a difference on the streets of our cities visit <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/StreetGospelProject/>. Or, send an email to ntibbott@yahoo.com. www.missio.us