

# Engage Links

## ESTABLISHING LINKS

Links are a tangible expression of a GBC's commitment to supporting our engagement workers. These individuals or teams are centered around an individual, couple, or team leader. They can serve as the primary link between the church and the workers.

Simply put, Links are individuals or groups of church members who deeply love their workers. They advocate on behalf of the workers to the church and advocate on behalf of the church to the workers. This is accomplished most basically by ongoing communication, prayer, and relationships. Because of the bond with Links, workers can be open and honest, allowing the individuals or team to see their strengths, weaknesses, successes, failures, and needs.

## WHAT IS THE VISION FOR LINKS?

There are two major roles for Links: care and representation. Success depends on their ability to fulfill these roles from the time that the workers prepare to leave for the field until they return.

### Care

Many workers live in physically, emotionally, and spiritually challenging environments. Some are raising children far from extended family. Others struggle with cultural adjustments and language barriers. Most significantly, all serve on the front lines of spiritual warfare. For survival and spiritual health, workers need assurance that they are not alone and that others in the body of Christ love them and are committed to their welfare and success. Workers need empathetic listeners—compassionate, caring friends who are not in a supervisory role. This also involves identifying specific needs that the individual/team can meet or organizing others in our church to meet them.

### Representation

Among the church, Links champion the workers and their ministry. They call for ongoing participation in the workers' lives and ministries even though they are far away. Through the efforts of Links, the sending church can sense a healthy ongoing connection to the workers and the ministry, and vice versa.

## NOTE ABOUT SAFETY

The priority is to be sure the Link clearly understands any security issues the worker wants the Link to follow. The Link must understand that this is serious and that failure to follow such procedures could jeopardize the worker's work, ability to remain in the country, and even his/her safety. **THIS CANNOT BE TAKEN LIGHTLY!** This has been violated in the past.

## WHAT DO LINKS LOOK LIKE?

A simple foundation for Links begins with committed leaders. They are usually the ones who have the deepest connection with the workers. They may have even been personally recruited for the task by the workers. Team leaders take on the responsibility of keeping team members accountable.

Each Link looks different. If candidates are responsible for cultivating their teams before being sent out (which we recommend), the quality of the team will depend in large part on the candidates' level of investment. The teams' success or failure also correlates with the Engage Pastor's encouragement,

training, and accountability for team leaders, as well as the workers' willingness to stay connected from afar.

It is important to clarify expectations of commitment for joining a team. A good balance is to ask team members to commit to the workers' next full term, which is usually 2-4 years. This keeps the initial commitment from appearing neither indefinite nor whimsical. Depending on team members' seasons of life, people may need to step out of their Link. It is wise, therefore, to set the expectation that team members must replace themselves if they cannot finish the term. Otherwise, workers might face the difficult task of recruiting new team members themselves.

## WHAT DO LINKS DO?

### Meet Monthly

Links usually briefly meet each month for prayer, updates, projects, and communication with the workers.

### Pray

The most critical role of Links is to pray together as a team and on an individual basis. The workers should ease this process by providing up-to-date prayer needs.

### Stay Connected

It's rare for workers to maintain healthy relationships back home. Part of providing care for them is the commitment to stay connected. Team members should make a goal of personally connecting at least once a month. This can happen through emails, videos, social media, texting, handwritten letters, or any number of creative ways. The Link needs to find out the best/preferred way the worker wants to communicate with them. The Prayer Mobilizer is a good source of this info since the Engage Pastor has already informed them of each worker's preferred method.

### Send Care Packages

Nothing says "I love you" to workers like a box full of American goodies. Links should seek to send a specified number of care packages to the workers each year. The Global Engagement Team will cover the cost of the packages, though a request for funding needs to be submitted to the Engage Pastor.

### Visit

It won't be possible for all teams, and it isn't a requirement, but entire teams or individuals may visit their workers on the field, if/when practical/convenient for the worker & the Link. This could be a life-changing experience for both the Links and the workers.

### Help with Departure and Arrival

Some of the hardest times for workers take place when preparing to leave for the field and when returning home. There are many needs during these times. Links should be prepared to discover those needs and seek to help as much as possible.

### Receive Training

Unless Links have been global workers, they don't fully understand what workers face. But they need to know to care well. I suggest bringing in a global worker to give a personal testimony of the highs and lows and the grind.

Links will gather monthly for the first three months, to receive training from the Prayer Mobilizer. After that, the Prayer Mobilizer will gather the Links quarterly. We want to keep the Links fed with ongoing encouragement, accountability, and coaching. They will need a way to report about their workers. They will need a sense of community, of being part of something big and important. For the above reasons,

it's wise to gather them all at the same time rather than meeting one-on-one. If you need to have a few one-on-ones, you can schedule those in between group meetings, but meeting with everyone will be good for the team and will mean fewer meetings for the Prayer Mobilizer!

What will happen in these trainings?

#### *Encouragement*

Open by refreshing the vision. Affirm their importance. Make observations of a job well done and/or share how a worker has been blessed by them.

#### *Accountability*

Simply ask the question, "How's it going for you and your worker?" Then let them share. Stop often and pray for their needs and the worker's needs.

#### *Coaching*

Provide ongoing education. Choose a relevant topic. Make a brief presentation (not anything overwhelming). I recommend addressing these issues:

- Active listening
- Reentry care
- Team dynamics (see [Peace Pursuit](#))
- Soul care
- Prayer
- Spiritual warfare
- Sending church
- Read through [Holding the Rope](#) together

## HOW DO LINKS GET STARTED?

### *Prayer Mobilizer*

For GBC to execute Links well, the Prayer Mobilizer (from the Global Engagement Team) will oversee the Links. This person doesn't have to be an expert in global engagement, only willing to organize ongoing training, encouragement, and accountability for Link leaders.

### *Establish a Team Leader*

Each Link Team must be or have a faithful leader who is deeply committed to workers. The Prayer Mobilizer responsible for Link Teams needs to vet all team leaders and clarify their responsibilities.

### *Gather the Team*

Once the team leader is in place, he or she can contact others on the team or start recruiting for the team. The team should take time in the beginning to get to know one another and how they are connected to the workers.

### *Contact the Workers*

The team leader needs to contact the workers to let them know the status of the Link Team. They should also ask for prayer requests and invite the workers to the first team meeting via video.

### *Meet as a Team*

The team leaders need to coordinate a time and place for the first team meeting. It may help build camaraderie by meeting in a home and sharing a meal. Afterward, determine a regular time and place to meet. Ideally, keep meetings short.

## WHAT ARE SPECIFIC THINGS LINKS CAN DO TO CARE FOR THEIR WORKERS WELL?

### Educate

- Spend time with workers and their families before their departure. Get to know them and their kids on a personal level.
- Ask specific questions about their lives: What kind of work are they doing? What does a typical day look like? What are their living arrangements? What is transportation like? What is it like to shop for food or cook there? What is the climate and how does it affect them? How are they treated by the locals? How are their children treated by the locals? Do they work on a team? If so, how are their relationships within the team?
- Ask specific questions about the culture: What is the host culture's attitude toward time: slow or fast-paced? Do locals tend to be more task-oriented or people-oriented? Are the locals generally open to interacting with foreigners? What is their attitude toward Americans? How welcoming are the national and local governments to foreigners like themselves? What is the level of risk in operating in the host country? If a high level of risk is involved, what kinds of precautions do they take to do their work? What are the prevailing beliefs in the area? What is the level of oppression, including outright demonic activity in the area? How does this affect them and their family? How healthy is the local church? What kind of interaction do they have with the local church?
- Ask specific questions about their projects: What are their objectives? How are they pursuing those objectives? What obstacles have they run into? What are some encouraging aspects of the work going on there? What are some discouraging aspects of the work?
- Read up on current events in their country and/or region and ask how these events affect their lives and/or ministry.

### Pray

- Beginning six months before their departure, meet with the workers monthly for prayer.
- After their departure, communicate regularly to develop a working prayer list. Use the list to pray individually and as a team.
- Pray for your worker(s) in your small group, with your family, and in your own prayer time.
- Pray not only for the sent one(s) but also for the people whom they serve.

### Communicate

- Text, write an email, make a Skype call, or send a letter at least once a month.
  - Download a messaging app to easily stay in touch (WhatsApp, Signal, Telegram).
  - Email with follow-up questions from newsletters. (You won't be bothering them.)
  - Send birthday cards, anniversary cards, or Christmas cards.
  - Send them a gift card they can use online for digital goods, such as iTunes or Amazon.
  - Ask if they have any practical needs that the Advocate/Advocacy Team and/or the church body could help with.
  - Ask questions about their physical, emotional, and spiritual health.
  - Inform them of recent happenings with the church, in your own life, and around your city.
    - Send them pictures of you, your kids, your kitty, your painting project, etc.
    - Share what God is doing in your life, or a Bible passage He's used in your life recently.

- Understand that life on the field is just as full (if not more so) than life in the US and that you may not immediately hear back from them. If they don't respond within a week or so, try again. If they continue to be non-responsive, contact the Prayer Mobilizer.

### Represent

- Relate pertinent information about the workers to the Prayer Mobilizer.
- Find channels for communicating prayer requests to the entire church.
- Distribute the workers prayer cards to church members.
- Collect church members' email addresses to receive the sent ones' newsletters.
- Tell your friends about their ministry keeping in mind the necessary security issues. The Links may not give out the worker's contact info without their permission.

### Provide

- Ask if they need assistance in areas of personal business, such as preparing taxes or registering for absentee ballots during elections.
- If they will be coming home on furlough, ask them whether they need assistance finding housing or a vehicle.
- Help clean their residence and stock their pantry before they return.
- Coordinate meals and/or childcare for them the first week of their arrival.
- Send them a book you thought was meaningful, a movie you liked for a family movie night, or a worship song or album you love through the internet (send a gift download through Amazon).

### Departure and Arrival

- While they are in pre-field training, meet once a month for prayer and encouragement.
- As the departure date draws near, assist in packing, moving, shopping, and/or childcare.
- If possible, be present at the airport when they depart and return.
- Read a book about workers to better understand their experience.
- Read a book about reentry to better relate to them.
- If needed, assist in securing housing and a vehicle before they return.
- If possible, meet them at the airport when they return.
- When they come home, schedule time with them to ask questions, see pictures, and talk about life in their host country.
- After they return, pray with them about their host country, including their friends and contacts in the host country.

### Use Microskills

Workers often struggle to find the right person(s) to talk with about what's going on in their lives. They are faced day by day with the slow drip of having their routines, habits, and instincts flipped on their heads. Workers experience a more-than-average amount of "failure."

What do we do then for these workers? Do we need to pay for counseling for workers, so they have access to this type of resource regularly? Quite possibly. At the very least, you can employ some of the skills a counselor would have.

"Microskills" is a term utilized in the counseling profession to describe the competencies for effective communication needed to counsel a person to health. There are many lists of microskills that vary in length and depth. Skills that are found on almost every list that I've seen include:

1. Non-verbals - Making sure that the listeners' non-verbals match the situation, sometimes even matching that of the person they are talking to. Always maintaining appropriate eye contact.
2. Listening more than speaking - Working hard to be slow to speak.

3. Acknowledging what has been said - Repeating back to the counselee what they are saying.
4. Asking open-ended questions - Rather than yes or no questions, ask open-ended questions that cause them to say out loud what has only been said in their mind.
5. Confrontation - At the correct time, with relational money in the bank, challenging their line of thinking to align more closely to their beliefs about what is moral and what is wise.