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How to Increase Your Support Income

Four support raising experts share their advice

The International YWAMer sought out the insights of four individuals who teach on personal support raising (and who raise support themselves). We wanted to know what YWAMers can do if they find themselves with an inadequate level of financial support.

Two of our experts are from YWAM:

Betty Barnett of YWAM Harpenden, England is the author of *Friend Raising: Building A Missionary Support Team That Lasts* and is Managing Editor of the new YWAM study Bible.

Steve Pontius of YWAM Tyler, USA has trained 280 staff as co-ordinator of a new personal fund-raising training program at this base.

We also included two experts from outside of YWAM:

Bill Dillon, author of *People Raising: A Practical Guide to Raising Support*, is Executive Director of Inner City Impact in Chicago, USA.

Holmes M. Bryant Jr., a fund-raising consultant, is Vice President of Evangelical Development Ministry, in San Bernadino, USA.

We asked them questions we thought most YWAMers would want to ask.

How do I know what an adequate support level is?

Betty: You need to first ask how much will be necessary for you to make it long term if you feel called long term. A lot of times I hear people say, "I can get by with this." However, "getting by" is one thing if you're a short-termer, but if you are talking about a long-term lifestyle, it will wear you down. Too many people who have supposedly "gotten by" have not made it for the long term.

Holmes: Principally speaking, you don't want to live above most of those to whom you minister. But you also don't want to live below them either. This could also hurt your ministry.

You want to have enough that you are not overly concerned about personal finances so that it becomes a distraction from ministry. It would be unbiblical not to provide for your family's needs, not to save for times of drought, not to get needed health services, and not to have enough for adequate food, clothing and shelter. In addition, unless you are depending on a government retirement program or a company pension plan, I would

begin saving early for retirement so you don't become a burden to others later in life.

Missionaries also need time off. Raise enough that you can take a nice vacation away from your responsibilities at least one week a year. And while I'm on it, don't ever use your vacation time to raise support—that's no vacation!

Steve: At the level to make you most effective in the call of God, not minimizing to survive, but maximizing effectiveness. It all comes down to obedience. God is the only one that can understand the full ramifications of His will for our lives and the "appearances" that speak to the hearts of others.

How can I raise my support level up to where it needs to be?

Bill: You need to prepare a strategy. Break down your list of contacts into three categories: Current Pledged Supporters, Special Gift Supporters—those who give occasionally, but not on a regular pledge basis—and Non Donors. Then you need to develop a strategy for each group.

For the Current Pledged Supporters, focus on asking them to increase the amount of their pledge. Sometimes I think we as missionaries think that once they have committed an amount to us that is placed in concrete. Situations change and there is no reason why they can't be challenged to play a greater role in your valuable ministry.

The same principles can be applied to Special Gift Supporters and Non-Donors. After reviewing each situation, provide opportunities for Special Gift Supporters to become monthly givers, or to give another, larger, special gift. Non-donors might be able to give a special gift or even become monthly partners.

When contacting people, maximize and do what is most effective. My advice: do everything in your power to sit down with these people face to face. Sometimes distance makes this impossible and then we need to settle for the second or third best. The most effective method is a personal visit. The next best, a phone call and least effective is a letter.

Will this work in every culture?

Holmes: Yes, it will work. I've trained nationals in Latin America and Europe, including Eastern Europe, and it definitely works well there. In Asia, however, it's culturally unacceptable to ask directly (for anything, not just money). There the ask should be more like a hint. That seems to work best.

Betty: I have a strong conviction that these are biblical principles, they are not cultural principles. Methods are definitely culturally oriented. Look for biblical principles and then weigh the various methods and ask yourself, "If I were the person receiving this kind of treatment, how would I feel?" Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

What if I don't feel led to ask people for money?

Holmes: If you don't feel led to ask people for money, try to determine who's doing the leading. Is it the Holy Spirit? Then do what He says. Is it God's Word? Re-read God's Word on the subject of asking for money.

God directed the children of Israel to ask the Egyptians for gold and silver before they left for the promised land. David asked the leaders of Israel for gifts for the building of the first temple. Jesus instructed the disciples to give. Paul asked the churches he had started for support for relief of the saints in Jerusalem. You can't say you're not led to ask because of what it says in God's Word.

Perhaps it's you that's leading you not to ask people for money. It's definitely outside the comfort zone for most of us. But God expects us to do things not within our comfort zone.

Somehow, many missionaries have gotten the idea that asking for money shows a lack of faith. Actually the opposite is true. James says faith without works is dead. You can't have faith that something is going to happen by sitting around waiting for it to happen. Hebrews 11, the great faith "hall of fame" chapter, lists people of faith. Many verses start with the phrase "by faith," immediately followed by something they did. Don't confuse faith with wishful thinking. Expressing your faith means taking action to make sure the money does come in.

Betty: If you feel that you have a calling to be silent about your needs, first of all I would just say you better make sure that is from the Lord and not just your own style preference, because most people would say, "Well, I just prefer not to." Just because we prefer not to doesn't mean that God doesn't want us to. He often wants us to do things that are uncomfortable.

But if you truly feel that God does not want you to share your needs, then you need to obey what the Lord is telling you to do. You need to be silent in terms of letting your needs be known, but you should certainly follow the same principles that George Mueller and Hudson Taylor did with keeping up with relationships and keeping up with letting people know what's happening in the ministry. If you feel led not to let your needs be known, your primary responsibility then is to keep handling the relationships right and to ask the Lord what else He wants you to do.

What if I'm in a country far from home? How can I build my support base from there?

Holmes: A personalized letter to existing partners asking for an increase is what I would do first. Then write to those who have supported you in the past, but not recently. It's easier to get support from a previous partner than to get new partners. Last, write to those who have received communication from you but have never given financially. In each of these letters, start with something personal about your relationship with them.

Let them know early in the letter why you are writing. Then take several paragraphs to build your case for needing additional support. In most cases, this will take more than one page.

Ask very specifically. Let them know what amount you want them to consider giving. If at all possible, follow up with a phone call to get their decision. Otherwise, give them a convenient way to respond to you—a response form with several options and a pre-stamped envelope addressed to you. Beyond this, there is little you can do except plan a trip back home. You will always be able to raise more money face-to-face than any other approach.

Betty: If there are individuals that could be advocates for you from a distance, you might be able to send them photos and other info and they could gather a few of their friends and on your behalf they could consider raising support for you. But it's critical to make visits back home, at least periodically. I know many mission agencies suggest visiting every three to four years. I think that's way too long, but I know in some of our ministries it's the only realistic thing. If that's the case, we should go back for a quality amount of time because it's through those personal visits we have with people where things really happen. Sometimes it seems like you can't leave your work in order to go back home. But you may only have a short-lived work if you don't go back home, so it may be the wisest long-term investment. You really need to pray that through.

Bill: I strongly recommend that such missionaries do not leave until 100 percent of their support has been secured. Once you leave your home front you have actively left your support network. Here are the people you have developed friendships with over the years. They will be the people that can offer their support and lead you to other supporters.

What if I've run out of people to contact?

Holmes: This, unfortunately is a very common problem, but one that's relatively easy to overcome. Ask existing partners for the names of their friends.

Here's how you do that. "Jim, there may be another way you can help. What are the names of some of your friends that might share our mutual concern for reaching people with the gospel?" Don't ask "Do you know anyone..." You'll find that most people can't think of names right away. After you ask, suggest some categories: "Perhaps there's someone in your Bible study..." Suggest only one category at a time, then let them respond. Other good categories are your church, or their business associates.

Getting contacts in this way is best done face-to-face. Very few people will respond to this by mail and not many more by phone.

Your success in this area will be directly proportional to how well you do at support maintenance. If your partners feel loved, appreciated, communicated with, and treated like partners (i.e., they get credit for the success of your ministry), then this shouldn't be too difficult. But if you've neglected your partners, they are not going to be willing to

give you the names of their friends so you can neglect them too.

There are precious few other ways to get contacts, especially when your work is overseas. This one works best.

Betty: In the daily course of life and ministry, be alert to those relationships God brings across your path. In many cases, I think you can have plenty of people who will consider joining your support team if you are faithful in keeping up with those relationships God brings to you. Sometimes it's a one or two-hour conversation we have with someone we just met and we don't realize God might want us to have a long-term relationship. If we've had enough of a conversation with them and it feels like we've really connected, we might say, "Hey, would you be interested in being on my newsletter mailing list?" Or, "I'd love to keep in touch with you. Would you feel all right about that?"

What if I didn't do a good job in raising support in the first place?

Steve: Who has? I feel this is a very fluid area. We need to proceed prayerfully so that we can adjust and learn as we go. Don't be afraid to back up. It's not defeat. It could mean fuller obedience. Ask the Lord how to effectively tackle support raising from where you are now.

Betty: If you've done a poor job in the first place, I think it may be wise to walk in humility and ask for forgiveness and try to rebuild those bridges that perhaps you've burned.

What if I'm terrible at this?

Betty: Maybe you should have more advocates working with you. Maybe part of it is to identify what it is you do well and what your strengths are in the midst of this, because I can't imagine you have none. For those things you don't do well, are there people in your church who could help you in that way? Could you let your needs be known in that way, going to some of these trusted friends or maybe your pastor and say, "You know, I'm really lousy at this, and I don't know how to go about it; it's very unnatural. Is there any way you can help me? Do you know anybody I could team up with in order to do this, who has some of the strengths I'm missing?"

Holmes: Always remember this: your presence is more important than your presentation. People give to people primarily based on relationships, not based on your cause or your ability to present. Don't let your lack of skills paralyze you into inaction. At the same time, you need to be diligent to practice. Become good at it, even if you don't enjoy it. As long as you're a missionary, you'll never get to the point where you don't need to raise support. So you might as well decide right now to make support raising a way of life, just like way-of-life evangelism. Even when you have full support, do something every month to strengthen your support team.

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