

# Best Practices in Missionary Training

By Steve Hoke, with David Dougherty,  
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“Best Practices” is a new name for an old idea. When we taste a great cookie at the church potluck and ask the cook for her recipe, we are recognizing a best practice. When we hear a great sermon and order a tape or CD, we are acknowledging a best practice in preaching.

“Best practices” has become a hot-button idea in business and industry in the last 20 years. Organizations now exist to help companies incorporate best practices so as to improve their planning, budgeting and manufacturing processes. Consultants charge \$2,000 + a day to advise companies on how to improve their business practice. This nuts and bolts approach to quality holds particular appeal in the current business climate of increased competitive pressure from around the globe.

Best practices is simply a description of excellent ways of getting the job done, whether manufacturing the best car, recruiting strong staff, ministering effectively to children and families, or even training missionaries. These standards of excellence are best established by qualified professionals who are engaged in the actual process we want to describe.

In January 2004 the National Missionary Training Forum (NMTF), a partnership of churches, agencies, organizations and schools committed to improving the quality of missionary training, formed an NMTF Task Force 2004-2006 to explore establishing Best Practice Standards in Missionary Training. This 18-member task force, composed of men and women from churches, schools and agencies across North America, has been working together to identify both standards for improved training, and pathways for implementing such missionary training. The concern for “best practices” does not necessarily indicate current achievement, but rather our aspirations towards high standards in missionary training practice.

## Identifying and Transferring Best Practices

The “Missionary Training Assessment” (MTA) instrument (which follows this article) was designed by trainers from churches, agencies, and schools working together who share a concern for improving the quality of missionary training for North American missionaries. It is designed for individuals and teams engaged in missionary training to evaluate their own training efforts. We hope it will catalyze further discussion and action within your church as you equip your prospective missionaries. The assessment tool which follows is built around seven assumptions, or standards, of excellence—“best practices”—in missionary training. We propose that:

- An excellent program of missionary training identifies the learning and performance needs of the trainees, the organization, and other stakeholders.
- An excellent program of missionary training is aligned with the values, mission, and vision of the parent organization.
- An excellent program of missionary training intentionally promotes spiritual formation, dependence on God, and Christian community.
- An excellent program of missionary training employs adult learning

theory and methods.

- An excellent program of missionary training makes careful use of spiritual, human, and financial resources.

- An excellent program of missionary training will have a clear, measurable, and feasible evaluation plan.

- An excellent program of missionary training is accountable to stakeholders and peers.

Under each standard are statements of critical areas contributing to that standard.

You may respond to the degree to which your training demonstrates each statement in terms of four response categories: YES!, Yes, Needs Work, or HELP!

Distribution: We have included a copy of the MTA instrument on the following pages so that you might pilot test it in your church. Distribute the MTA to any persons in your church who have a stake in your training outcomes, including missionaries, staff, training colleagues, pastoral staff, receiving field team leaders or former trainees. Ask them to complete the form as honestly as they can, providing additional suggestions or input, as they desire.

When used as suggested, this

assessment tool will help you clarify aspects of an effective training program, discover differences in staff perspectives, build consensus among trainers regarding assumptions and goals, develop or refine training goals, identify key areas for improvement, and contribute to achievement of your organization's training goals. The purpose of assessment is to improve all of our training programs so that missionary personnel are well equipped and Christ's Kingdom is extended.

A church's missions leadership team seeking to improve its training can learn from neighbor churches and other model programs in the APMC network. Such learning from others, and translating that learning into action, is a major advantage for your church and its missionaries.

### Recent innovations in Missionary Training

Consider the following examples of how churches and agencies have learned from each other in the vital area of training:

- **Inter-agency cooperation in training:** For the last eight years, the EFMA and IFMA have cooperatively sponsored LeaderLINK, a leader

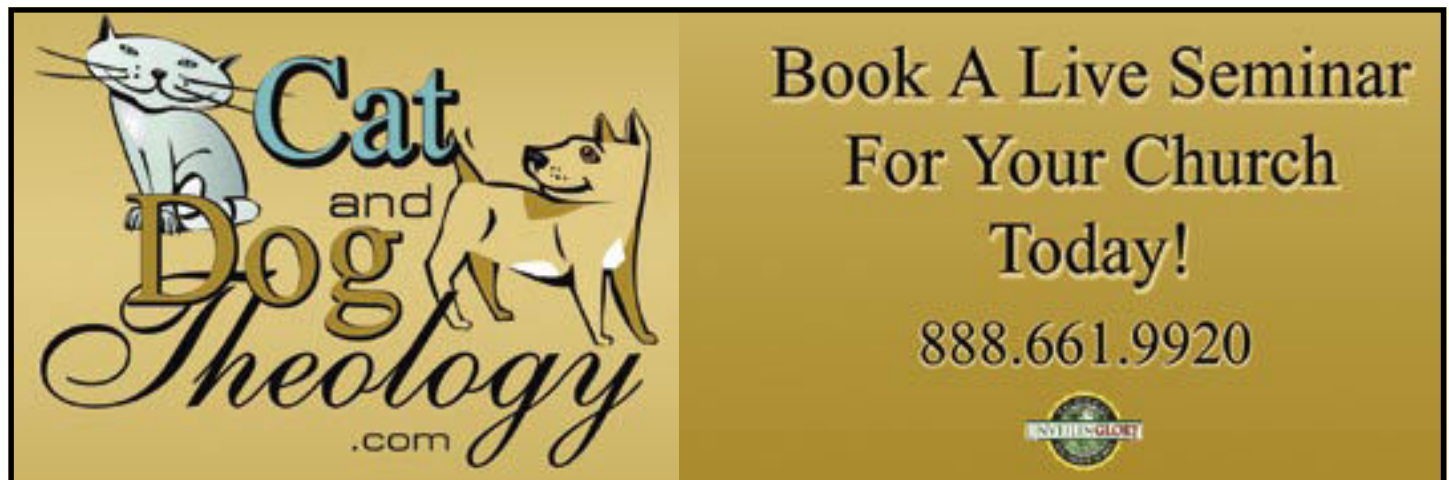
development program for North American mission agency personnel around the world. Each year one-week leader development workshops are offered in Africa, Europe, Latin America and North America.

- **The National Missionary Training Forum** has now been an annual training event since 1996. Currently held each January at the Missionary Learning Center of the Southern Baptist International Missionary Board outside Richmond, over 100 missionary trainers gather to share the latest research and innovations in practical missionary training.

- **The Mission Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance** has pioneered the use of profiles to benchmark pre-training competencies, and to establish post-training competency targets.

- **Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF)** has pioneered a four-level Leadership Development Program for its field leaders and missionaries, drawing from the research in leadership of J. Robert Clinton, as well as training methodologies from the Center for Creative Leadership.

- **Increasing numbers of churches** such as Crystal Evangelical Free



Church (Minneapolis, MN) and Xenos Christian Fellowship (Columbus, OH) are developing extensive multi-level programs in discipleship and missionary training for prospective candidates in their congregations.

### Getting Started: Some Practical Suggestions for Improving Your Church's Missionary Training:

- Pilot test the MTA with your missions committee or training team.
- Make the sharing and use of "best practices" in missionary training part of the role expectation for new people you bring onto your team.

- Rub shoulders with colleagues who just may have the next ground-breaking idea or are piloting an innovative approach in training. Pick their brains about what they are learning or trying.

- Scan the web sites of other key missions-minded churches to see if they are doing things in training from which you can learn.

- Keep abreast of the latest missions books on innovation and SOTA ("state-of-the-art") methods and technologies.

- Inquire about visiting the training events of other agencies and churches, or Invite others to observe your

events.

What's your latest "best practice"? Don't keep it to yourself. We'd like to borrow it!

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