

Supervising trainees

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What are the most helpful ways for church leaders to relate to ministry trainees for their growth in gospel ministry? What can we put in place, at the level of the local church, that will best facilitate the development of godly leaders? How can those of us saved sinners who are gospel workers be instruments in the lives of other saved sinners who are ‘trainee gospel workers’? The following suggestions are not intended to be a heavy and burdensome law but rather a framework for thinking carefully about the different aspects of supervising a trainee and a way of sharing out the load of responsibility. Where there is detail it is meant not as a prescriptive Mishnah but as a practical aid – wisdom for forestalling problems and making the most of traineeship. Above all we pray that the Lord would do what is ultimately his work – raising up courageous, humbled, Christ-exalting, Bible-teaching, compassionate workers for his harvest field.

Model

The Apostle Paul entrusted gospel ministry to Timothy, Titus and others who entrusted it to others... all the way to us (2 Tim. 2:2). But *how* was the gospel entrusted? In what *context* was it passed on? The Pastoral Epistles give a window into what Paul's 'entrusting' involved and there are also passages in Acts and in Paul's church letters which describe his method. Here is a particularly succinct one:

"But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he was served with me in the work of the gospel." (Phil. 2:20)

Notice 4 elements:

- **Relationship** – 'as a son with his father.' We need to be careful that this kind of language is not abused.¹ The similarity here is specifically to their relationship as they are *serving together*.² But this is still relational language. There is warmth (cf. 2 Tim. 1:2) and the implication of fatherly 'encouraging, comforting and urging' (1 Thess. 2:11-12).
- **Service together** – 'served with me.' This is on the job training. Hands on ministry opportunities. Travelling together. Side by side, life on life. So the trainee is able to observe the decisions, character, passion and teaching of the senior gospel worker (2 Tim. 3:10) but also the senior minister is able to observe the life and ministry of the younger and give feedback.
- **Gospel work** – 'in the work of the gospel.' The gospel is the foundation and focus of the traineeship. We are proclaiming not ourselves but Christ (Phil. 1:18), the God who humbled himself to death on a Cross (Phil. 2:5-11) and who wraps us in his own righteousness (Phil. 3:7-9). This gospel must never be assumed. The senior and younger are both seeking to know Christ more themselves (Phil. 3:10-14) and working for the joy of others in Christ (Phil. 1:25).
- **Proving** – 'has proved himself.' A traineeship is a time of testing. This is true in the sense that, through hardship, temptations and the rigors of gospel service, faith is refined (1 Pet. 1:6-7). But particularly there is a testing of whether there is the competence and character for long-term gospel ministry.

Safeguards

"Any organisation in which personal work occurs must have clear policies, procedures and guidance to ensure that this is conducted safely and to avoid dependent and unhealthy relationships being able to be established."³

We cannot prescribe what exactly those policies, procedures and guidance should look like. The most important thing is to have thought through this area and have some communication of this in place. A few things worth considering in regard to avoiding dependency and unhealthy relationships might be:

- Having a number of different people relating to the trainee in different roles – as described [below](#).
- Investing serious time in [induction](#), making clear what exactly constitutes healthy and unhealthy relationships,⁴ how concerns can be raised and how confidentiality will be handled.
- Ensuring that 1-to-1 meetings take place in an open context.

¹ The simile must not be overextended. There is absolutely no suggestion here or anywhere in the NT that the dynamics of obedience, authority, discipline, dependence and responsibility that govern the relationship between a small child and a parent should map onto the relationship between a senior gospel worker and their trainee. See below on Safety.

² As a father and son in the ancient world would often work together, the son learning the trade of the father (2 Kings 4:18; Matt. 13:55; John 5:19-20) so here with Paul and Timothy.

³ Thirtyone:eight recommendation.

⁴ E.g. being explicit that intimidation, manipulation and humiliation are unacceptable.

- Considering a range of meeting models in addition to 1-to-1 – e.g. 2-to-1 (Priscilla and Aquila with an Apollos), 1-to-2 (Paul with a Silas and a Timothy)⁵ and team / small group meetings.
- Following good HR practices where the trainee is employed and avoiding any suggestion of a future job being offered if the trainee is a volunteer.
- Considering training for those involved in the supervising/mentoring/care of trainees to raise awareness of issues such as power imbalance, favouritism, narcissism and the power of the ‘inner ring’ dynamic.⁶

Roles

Definitions vary, and there is some overlap, but it is possible to distinguish various roles in the life of a trainee representing different modes of relating to and developing a trainee.⁷

Role	Stance	Provides	Area	Focus	Name
Trainer	Proactive	Content	Ministry development	Convictions, skills	
Coach	Responsive	Sounding board	Ministry development	Problem solving	
Supervisor	Proactive and responsive	Structure, Accountability	Ministry development	Productivity	
Mentor	Proactive	Modelling, wisdom	Ministry and personal development	Competence, discipleship	
Counsellor	Responsive	Personalised ministry of the Word	Personal development	Emotional, spiritual	
Encourager	Responsive	Support	Personal development	Healthiness, sustainability	

The point is not that a pastor or leader with responsibility for a trainee needs to be all these things themselves. Rather they would do well to ensure that the structures are in place and all these roles exist around the trainee. Particularly in the case of Mentor, Counsellor and Encourager, these roles should normally be filled by someone of the same gender as the trainee.

Trainer

In terms of formal, structured, didactic training, this role will often be very largely fulfilled by the staff of a ministry training course – perhaps one used by a number of churches in a region or network. However it is good for the pastor and other staff members with responsibility for a trainee at the local church level to also see themselves as trainers:

- a) Having a training mind-set shapes your whole approach to having a trainee.
- b) The local church will need to give training on exactly how specific tasks and ministries are done in that particular context (policies, polity, culture and context).
- c) You will know the trainee best, their strengths and weakness and which areas of understanding, ministry and life skills need extra training input.

That local level training could take the form of:

- Induction and Orientation (see [below](#))
- Church-based ministry training sessions – either with trainee(s) only or with everyone in the church requiring training on a particular ministry (e.g. on children’s, seniors, tech)

⁵ For more on this 1-to-2 or 1-to-3 model, often used in medical training settings, [Josh Monteiro, Discipleship in the greenhouse.](#)

⁶ [C.S. Lewis, The Inner Ring.](#)

⁷ Adapted from James A. Dodd, *Coaching Church Planters*, Mission to North America, p11.

- Reading a book on a particular doctrine or aspect of gospel ministry or godliness – one-to-one or in a group – perhaps expecting some kind of report, contribution at a book group or a practical project flowing out of the reading.

Coach

This is an important role in the development of a trainee. It could be a senior staff member at the church but should not be the supervisor. It could be a mature congregation member with skill in the area of coaching or a gospel worker at another church – in fact an outside perspective can be very helpful, enabling the trainee to open up honestly about weaknesses. The point of a coach is not to have the answers but to help the trainee through the process of reflecting on their ministry challenges and finding answers for themselves.

[The coach's job is to] help them to define and solve the issues and challenges they're confronted with in light of the Gospel. We don't want ministry clones or ministry drones. A coach's role is to nurture theologically sound, self-aware problem solvers who know whether or not something is a problem, where to go, and to whom they can go to find solutions to that problem. (Derek Hanna, Director of Training Geneva Push)

So a large part of the role of a coach is to be a sounding board. They are providing (perhaps literally) a blank sheet, prompting the trainee to write down on it their thoughts and then showing them what they've written to help them see the issues and options more clearly, draw connections and formulate solutions.⁸

Issues to talk about could include:

- Personal leadership
- Ministry leadership
- Thinking about vision, strategy, tactics
- Thinking about the future – next term or post-traineeship
- Decision making
- Conflict resolution
- Partnership development / support raising

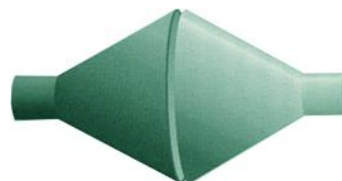
The basic tool of coaching is questions:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| • Where are you now? | • Why do you say that? |
| • Where do you want to go? | • What (and who) do you need to know to make this decision? |
| • How are you going to get there? | • What is God doing in this ministry situation? ⁹ |
| • What's stopping you? | |
| • What are you going to do about it? | |

One way to avoid a teacher-pupil dynamic developing is simply to reflect questions back – “What do you think?” The coach's role is not to deliver content (that's the Trainer) but to provide structure and space.

A particularly helpful framework for a coaching conversation is the GROW model (see below). The 'shape' of the conversation is something like this:

There is a widening as you explore the topic and all the possibilities and then a funnelling in again as you help the trainee to focus on the way ahead.



⁸ See also Scott Thomas & Tom Wood, *Gospel Coach: Shepherding Leaders to Glorify God*.

⁹ This is what turns coaching into gospel coaching. At this point there is some overlap with the Counselling role but the difference between coaching and counselling is that the former is focused on overcoming issues related to mission/role while the latter is more focussed on the person themselves.



Supervisor

We have titled this whole paper 'Supervising Trainees' but here we are thinking of the particular role of managing the trainee's ministry – their time, energy, strengths, tasks and outcomes. The focus here is on:

- Keeping the trainee busy – trainees shouldn't be exploited and overworked as 'cheap labour' and there needs to be sufficient rest time to enable sustainable sacrifice but an equally common problem is lack of tasks to be getting on with. It's good for the trainee to be occupied with *specific* ministry or *specific* study for 40 hours of the week.
- Keeping the trainee productive – not micro-managing but not distant either - providing regular oversight, structure and accountability to ensure there is actual ministry and study output happening.
- Extending their range – as Orlando Saer says, 'get them diving in at the deep end... trying things they've never done before.'¹⁰

For some (probably many) trainees – this traineeship will be their first experience of 'work life'. So part of the role of a supervisor is to cultivate a good work ethic and good work habits. This will mean, for example, not assuming things like:

- Keeping time, arriving punctually
- Accuracy, attention to detail, excellence
- Hard work, going above and beyond, not clock watching
- Keeping a diary, scheduling, anticipating deadlines
- Loyalty and respect, to those more senior and more junior
- Gratitude versus entitlement
- Being proactive and seeking out ministry opportunities
- Making decisions
- Basic etiquette, social skills and dress sense

Good management of people is clearly a huge area¹¹ but a particular skill to focus on would be good delegation. This is something that many of us are inclined to avoid¹² but delegation is essential: it multiplies ministry, grows people, builds trust relationships, builds motivation and momentum and fosters creativity. Matt Perman (*What's Best Next*) talks particularly about 'stewardship delegation' where, rather than just give

¹⁰ [Raising our game in ministry training](#).

¹¹ Helpful resources are Andy Stanley, *Next Generation Leader: 5 Essentials for Those Who Will Shape the Future*; John Kotter, [What Leaders Really Do](#); Matt Perman, *What's Best Next*; Craig Hamilton, *Wisdom in Leadership*; [Google's 6 aspects of effective management](#);

¹² Craig Hamilton suggests that may be because a) we fear they might do the task worse than us; b) we fear they might do it better than us! c) we enjoy the ministry and want to keep it to ourselves; and perhaps most commonly of all d) because delegating takes more time (initially) than doing it yourself.

people simple mindless tasks to do with the aim of making our life easier, we entrust areas of service with the aim of building up the trainee. Such stewardship delegation will entail:

1. Giving both Authority (ability, authorisation) & Responsibility (accountability)
2. Envisioning - explain what Results you are aiming at for (the what and the why)
3. Giving Guidelines (when, where, how) – not too detailed or too loose
4. Giving Resources necessary (budget, people)
5. Explaining how much Communication is required along the way – this will mean thinking through the component tasks and what might happen and then detailing a) these are things you can just get on with and there is no need to report on them; b) these are things you can just get on with and I would like a regular report on how it's going; c) these are things which you can deal with but as soon as that happens let me know as soon as possible what happened and what you did; d) these are things I don't want you to do until we've talked first
6. Reviewing after the event or at and of term/year

Mentor

This is the key role of the senior staff member who has responsibility for a ministry trainee. This is the role most closely resembling the Philippians 2:22 model of a more senior gospel worker investing in a younger.¹³ And mentoring is something that millennials are particularly hungry for:¹⁴

- 85% of millennial leaders place 'on the job learning' and mentoring as their most preferred leadership development methods.
 - They want instantaneous, regular feedback – "I need to be given feedback on what I am doing" – an annual review is not anything like frequent enough.
 - They highly value access to senior leaders – 'to come really close, to be allowed to observe.'
- Information is available on Google but 'one-to-one time with a practitioner who is prepared to open up their lives and their leadership is gold dust to a millennial.'

There are three key modes:

1. Structured one-to-one meetings – a possible shape to these meetings could be: 15 min Review (thinking back over the last week); 15 min Read (the Bible together); 15 min Refocus (thinking forward to the coming week apply the Word); 15 min Record (make a note of action points, targets and arrange when to meet next).¹⁵
2. Observing the trainer – travelling together, eating together, talking together about all sorts of things. In particular it is great if you can a) include the trainee in staff meetings and b) include them as much as possible in your ministry – take them with you on a mission or visit. "You know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings" (2 Tim 3:10-11). Let the trainee see you how you deal with difficulties, sin, family, decision-making.
3. Observing the trainee and giving feedback – proactively make opportunities to watch them serving and then give feedback – lots of encouragement with perhaps one key specific learning/correction point to take away.

There are some very helpful suggestions for how this kind of mentoring can work from Orlando Saer, [Raising our game in ministry training](#). Some additional pointers:

- Remember Jesus Christ (2 Tim. 2:8). Paul, in his mentoring letters to Timothy and Titus never assumes the gospel, never assumes a security in grace or a love for Jesus. His mentees are quite experienced senior men by the point he writes to them but in every chapter of his letters to them he reminds

¹³ On the cross-cultural history of this pattern see [The ancient roots of mentoring](#).

¹⁴ The findings below are from [Millennial Leaders: Now is Our Time and this is Our Voice](#) (Forge Consultancy, 2018).

¹⁵ This meeting could shade off into counselling and the two meetings/roles could be combined. However, mentoring is more proactive – the Word spurring us in new directions – while counselling tends to be more responsive – starting with the condition of the heart and finding truth to apply to that. For more on one-to-one Bible reading see [here](#).

them of the Son of God who was slain for them, who has destroyed death, who is our life and is returning for us. The gospel is the substance and ever-present frame of the mentoring relationship.¹⁶

- Communication and content sharing – While the Bible is our key mentoring resource there are other things that we can helpfully share to encourage a mentee in their Christian walk:
 - SMS, WhatsApp, Emails, Letters – The Apostle Paul obviously wrote to his trainees. The more personalised and thoughtful the better. Remind them of the gospel and your concern for them, spur them on. A paper and ink message is probably the most encouraging of all.¹⁷
 - Books – A good book can be life transforming. Encourage the apprentice in their reading volume and discernment. Ask them questions about what they are reading. Lend them a book you have found helpful. Show them [how to make the most of a book](#).
 - Articles – Good articles (e.g. from Desiring God or 9Marks or The Gospel Coalition) that particularly address an issue or concern of the trainee.
 - Sermons – Of course the trainee’s primary feeding should be from the local church they are placed but it can be good to expose the trainee to a range of excellent faithful Bible teaching from different speakers and different cultures.
 - Music – Point them towards good Christian music (old and new) with excellent lyrics (e.g. Sovereign Grace Music or Emu Music). Help them to widen their musical horizons. Help them to be discerning.
 - Films – We don’t want to encourage too much movie watching which so easily absorbs huge amounts of time but there may be a few movies or YouTube clips that are worth pointing a trainee towards to help them widen their horizons / lighten up / see the needs of the world / understand history or culture better.
- Teaching them to obey. That is the Great Commission (Matt. 28:20). Not just education but training in obedience and a disciplined life (2 Tim. 2:3-7, 22-26). In practice this will mean:
 - Giving time to the application/implications stage of Bible study together – not allowing vagueness – pushing to get to really practical, specific personal applications and next steps
 - Discerning particular issues that may require work and progress
 - Asking accountability questions
 - Encouraging Scripture memorisation – choosing particularly appropriate and cutting verses – and following up later
 - Sharing practical wisdom – while being careful not to exalt our experience or place on people’s discipleship anything beyond Scripture, there is a place for godly wisdom and sharing of experience on how to fight sin and live well in God’s world.¹⁸
 - Rebuke and correction – things we naturally shy away from but they are acts of love and can be hugely beneficial, even a turning point in the progress of a trainee. Of course we need to examine our own hearts and ensure a gospel approach but we need to be courageous to challenge issues such as inappropriate relationships, poor work ethic, social media use or pride. Often the most effective way will be to raise a question: ‘What was your thinking behind X?’ or ‘Looking at this Scripture, how does this relate to what happened yesterday?’ or ‘How can you best glorify Christ in this area of Z?’
- Encouraging them to go out and evangelise and disciple others. We want there to be a viral effect – a John 4:42 and 2 Tim 2:2 cascade of those who have met Jesus going out to speak of him with others; those who have been mentored going on to mentor others. For this to happen we will need to:

¹⁶ As Sinclair Ferguson warns in his excellent *The Whole Christ*: “If we have legalistic spirits, their breath is felt in everything we do, including the counsel we give to others.”

¹⁷ All forms of communication can be potentially abusive. Ensure that everything you write – whether in a text message, email or letter, is such as you would be happy for anyone to read. Be aware of the difficulty of communicating tone in writing. In general writing should be for encouragement, information and invitation. Sensitive matters and rebuke should be communicated in person. Where a difficult or sensitive matter has to be communicated in writing it may be wise to copy in others as appropriate and legitimate for accountability.

¹⁸ There may also be helpful wisdom from Christian writers who help us to apply the gospel very specifically (e.g. Chester’s book, *Captured by a Better Vision* or Piper’s [A.N.T.H.E.M.](#) mnemonic for dealing with sexual temptation).

- Model a very simple, easily replicated style of mentoring and Bible-based discipling. We will need the trainee to see that there is nothing complicated about this; we are not sinless saints; this is do-able.
- Help them brainstorm non-Christians they could approach. And follow up: 'How did it go?'
- Give opportunities within the church for mentoring and discipleship.¹⁹
- Help them think through whether they should be pursuing gospel work longer term. It will not be the right thing for everyone but we certainly want to encourage everyone to maximise their gospel ministry and it may be helpful to raise the possibility of full time church or cross-cultural mission work. Some may not feel that they can pursue this unless someone gives them the permission to consider it. Some are clearly gifted in that direction and should be encouraged to consider it seriously. Some might have misconceptions about gospel ministry which need to be cleared up (e.g. thinking that they need a very special 'Call') while others may need some guidance in thinking through the options in terms of training / next steps. For more resources on this see [9:38 resources](#).

Things to avoid in mentoring:

1. A messiah/dependent dynamic.
2. A command/obedience dynamic.
3. An agony aunt/uncle dynamic. We are not there to dispense homespun advice or opinions.
4. Financial involvement.
5. Under emotionally engaged – being purely content-focused or task-focused²⁰ rather than relational, concerned for the trainee as a person
6. Over emotionally engaged – trying to be the trainee's best friend and most important source of emotional support²¹ – instead avoid an exclusive relationship or meeting in a closed-door venue
7. Formless or endless – have a regular meeting slot and expectation that these meetings will stop when the traineeship stops

Counsellor

This is a pastoral care role, not so much concerned with ministry tasks as with the trainee's spiritual state and heart responses to what they are going through. These issues may often come up in a coaching or mentoring context but it may also be helpful to have another person, particularly someone who is not the supervisor/manager of the trainee, who is able to offer this kind of interaction. This would be someone with solid biblical theology and ideally some biblical counselling experience and gifting.

Issues could include:

- Anger, anxiety, depression
- Dealing with fear & failure
- Dealing with praise & pride
- Dealing with temptation & spiritual attack
- Prayer life and Bible reading
- Fruit of the Spirit
- Idol identification, mortification of sin, taking off and putting on
- Gospel renewal and love for Christ

The flavour and purpose of these conversations is:

'Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm.' (2 Cor. 1:23)

¹⁹ A key observation of [Millennial Leaders: Now is Our Time and this is Our Voice](#) was that millennials both desire mentoring and also really want opportunities to mentor others.

²⁰ This is to confuse the mentor role with the trainer or supervisor roles.

²¹ This is one reason why it can be best to separate the mentoring, counsellor and encourager roles. However, even with the counsellor and encourager it is important not to emotionally over commit but instead point people to the Scriptures and the Spirit as their true counsellor and encourager.

'God-centered, Bible-saturated, emotionally in-touch use of language to help people become God-besotted, Christ-exalting, joyfully self-forgetting lovers of people.' (John Piper in *Christ-Centered Biblical Counselling*)

'Personal ministry done from a biblical worldview.' (Steve Midgley, [Biblical Counselling UK](#))

Key tools would include:

- [Reading the Bible one-to-one together](#)
- [Active listening](#) – esp. listening out for the Good (signs of grace), the Hard (suffering), the Bad (sin).
- Asking questions – e.g. Why do you say that? Is that true? What can I pray for you?
- Seeking to understand the root heart issues – desires and fears
- Replacing old ways of loving, thinking and behaving with new (Eph. 4:17-5:2)

This is a huge area where there is clearly a range of experience, expertise and intensity. [CCEF](#) and [Biblical Counselling UK](#) has excellent resources and training courses.²² However it is, at heart, simply one sinner saved by grace, loving, listening to and speaking words of grace to another sinner saved by grace. In the training context it can be as simple as giving an environment in which the trainee can safely 'offload' and then looking at the Scriptures for big truths about Christ's character and work and helping them draw connections between the two – their heart and the heart of God.

Encourager

One of the greatest needs of trainees (in fact for all of us) is encouragement: someone who is for them, in their corner, strengthening their hand in God (1 Sam. 23:16), pointing out signs of God's work in them (as Paul does at the start and end of most of his letters), pointing them to Christ's coming (1 Thess. 4:18) and warmly urging them to stand firm like Shammah (2 Sam. 23:12).²³

However, the encourager role is wider than providing verbal encouragement. It is concerned with whether the trainee is surviving and thriving as a person – physically, financially, relationally. It is what is called in mission circles 'member care'.²⁴ The questions here are:

- How are you sleeping?
- Are you taking a day off?
- Have you got any health worries?
- How are you doing stewarding your finances/time/energy?
- How are your family?
- How are your friendships?
- How is your accommodation situation working out?
- How is sustainable sacrifice looking? Are you more at the comfort end or the burn out end of the spectrum?

It's important that the encourager mind-set is shared by all those around the trainee (this is a cross-cutting theme) but it may also be helpful to have a dedicated person who is not the lead supervisor who can ask questions like: 'Is there anything you would like to raise with the senior leadership but feel you can't?' The encourager can then be something of an advocate/mediator in resolving tricky issues.

Other encouraging activities:

- Take the time to visit the trainee at their accommodation.²⁵ It might not sound like much but often it means a lot that you've come to them and it's not always them coming to you. Visiting often

²² See also <https://duntonald.org/category/article/instruct/good-news-for-real-life/>.

²³ Cf. 1 Cor. 15:58; 16:13; Phil. 4:1; 2 Thess. 2:15; 1 Pet. 5:12. On the great need for pastors to be encouragers see [Thabiti Anyabwile at 9Marks First Five Years](#).

²⁴ See resources [below](#).

²⁵ Where the trainee is living alone it may be wise for two people to visit them at the same time.

facilitates conversations that would not happen elsewhere and sometimes uncovers issues that would otherwise remain hidden.

- Invite the trainee for a meal.
- Quietly encourage others in the church to offer hospitality.
- Help the trainee to process what stage they are at in relation to [the transition cycle](#). This will be particularly crucial if the trainee has come fresh into the church from a different cultural context (or from overseas) but is relevant to all trainees who will be shifting role and stage of life.
- Act as a [coach](#) in relation to personal problems and crises – helping trainees take responsibility, find solutions and come up with an action plan.
- Pray for and with the trainee (2 Tim. 1:3).

N.B. trainees will often need most practical and emotional support in the first few weeks of their traineeship.

Meetings

In addition to informal/unstructured contact time and regular communication there are three important types of meeting between the trainee and their supervisor or other members of their support team.

Induction and Orientation

Early in the traineeship (i.e. in the first two weeks) or ideally before the start, the trainee should meet with the lead supervisor/trainer and all the members of the support team. The key purposes of the orientation session are:

1. Getting to know each other – sharing your testimonies and backgrounds
2. Discussing and managing the expectations that the ministry trainee has of their placement church – especially clarifying the nature of the [roles](#) and relationships, the support on offer and the frequency with which they will expect to meet you
3. Discuss and agree what the church expects of the trainee – especially what are the general [goals](#) of the traineeship, standards with regard to behaviour and management of time, and specific targets for this trainee.

Depending on whether the ministry traineeship is set up as a salaried/employed role or as a voluntary position, the church will present the trainee with either a contract, informal working agreement or volunteer agreement and probably also (or combined with it) a policies and procedures manual, which sets out such things as:

- Role, tasks and training
- Lines of authority, communication and pastoral care
- Code of conduct
- Statement of faith
- Disciplinary, grievance, whistleblowing and conflict resolution procedures
- Safeguarding policy
- Reporting and review

It will be important to go through this and ensure that the trainee is really clear and happy with it.

Other issues that will be good to discuss – especially if the trainee has come from outside the church – will include:

- Accommodation situation
- Understanding the local community and context
- Understanding the church culture and leadership culture²⁶

²⁶ E.g. see [Helping new employees fit into organisational culture](#) and the suggestion of giving (even role playing) specific scenarios of appropriate and inappropriate behaviour.

- Local facilities (e.g. where to shop cheaply, where to go for a day off, doctors, dentists, hairdressers)
- Any local security concerns (e.g. don't go down this road after 9pm, don't walk with your iPhone out)

Regular meetings with the trainee

In addition to meeting in larger groups and serving alongside one another, it will be very important to have some structured regular meet ups with the trainee. Depending on who is assigned to the different [roles](#) and whether some of them are combined, the regularity will look different in different contexts but a possible plan could be:²⁷

Role	Regularity
Coach	1 hour once per month
Supervisor	30 mins once per week
Mentor	45 mins weekly, fortnightly or at least monthly
Counsellor	1 hour once per term or as needed
Encourager	Visit early on and then once per term or as needed

It should be noted that these timings may vary considerably depending on gender and culture and may well need to be longer. At the very least, someone should be meeting up with the trainee in an official capacity for an intentional hour together once per month.

End of term and end of year reviews

Ideally at the end of each term and certainly at the end of each year, there should be a formal review where the trainee and their trainer(s) can review progress, assess learning, discuss the joys and challenges and look forward to possibilities for the future. The review is based upon:

- A self-reflection report by the ministry trainee using a simple template (based on their personal targets and the training programme's goals)
- Written feedback from the supervisor and/or mentor
- Confidential input from two or three other people that the ministry trainee has worked with.

The review meeting itself:

- Should take a significant period of time – considerably longer than 1 hour – possibly a number of sessions
- Could take place 'off site' in a quiet location providing a suitable context for reflection
- Could involve the Encourager or someone else who is not the lead mentor/supervisor taking the trainee through an informal debrief²⁸ involving a series of open ended questions prompting self-reflection
- Should at least involve the trainee being able to express verbally their story of the last term/year
- May need to include an aspect of conflict resolution
- Could involve some Bible content – fixing eyes on the gospel and an eternal perspective
- Should involve prayer and thanksgiving
- Could involve celebration, food and/or a social element
- If the trainee is finishing their traineeship, and particularly if they are also leaving the church, this review meeting would be a time to help them transition well (Reconciliation, Affirmation, Farewells, Think destination).²⁹

²⁷ By way of reference, Colin Marshall ([MTS](#)) recommends weekly 1-2 hour sessions with a trainer/mentor and fortnightly sessions with a coach while [Redeemer City to City](#) asks their coaches to give: a) email responses as needed; b) phone conversations of 45-60 mins twice per month; c) one face-to-face meeting per month; d) one visit per quarter.

²⁸ Debrief can have a technical meaning, referring to a counselling session following a traumatic incident. Hopefully the traineeship has not been traumatic! For an introduction to this kind of debriefing (which has some insights transferable to non-traumatic debriefing) see [Debrief](#).

²⁹ [Building a RAFT: Transitioning well](#).

Appendix: Goals

In our development of trainees we will want to target three areas – sometimes called the 3 C's:³⁰

1. **Convictions (head)** – we want to instil deep convictions of the necessity and nature of word ministry, we want trainees to know and love the Bible more and to have their thinking formed by biblical theology
2. **Character (heart)** – we want trainees to grow in daily dependence on God, in godly loving relationships, in an appreciation of their own strengths and weaknesses and in a burning passion for the glory of God through the salvation of sinners
3. **Competence (hands)** – convictions and character are forged in the context of practical experience and we also explicitly train in the skills of evangelism, Bible teaching, leadership and various gospel ministries

At the same time we want to be aware of a fourth C – Context. The trainee has a context of:

- Family relationships and family history
- Friendships and potentially romantic relationships
- Cultural heritage and language
- Life story, formative influences, incidents, suffering and privilege
- Current living conditions and embeddedness in a physical place
- Membership of clubs and sub-cultures
- Financial situation
- Citizenship or lack of

We want to not only be mindful of this context, back story and the web of relationships within which the trainee is situated. We also want to equip them to engage in a gospel-hearted way with their cultural context and live out their Christian discipleship in all these dimensions.

Appendix: Cross-cultural mentoring

[Cross-cultural traineeships can be hugely valuable](#) but they also require more thought and care so as to overcome cultural and communication barriers, properly support the trainee and make the most of the opportunities for personal and ministry development.

1. **Boost the support.** In many ways it is a case of doing all of the above more and more. This might mean more regular meetings than you would have with a same-culture trainee. In particular the role of the [Encourager](#) will be crucial. It would be worth ensuring that this role is filled by a mature Christian worker, ideally from the same culture as the trainee (cf. Col. 4:11) or someone who has experienced another culture and is able to be culturally sensitive.
2. **Work hard on relationships.** As we said above, this is always important but in the case of cross-cultural mentoring it is absolutely vital. Sometimes trainees experience the church leadership only in strictly supervisor mode – focused on tasks, ministry output and professional development – and conclude that the leadership is not concerned about them as a person. Instead, in whatever role, be friendly, warm, personally interested in them.
3. **Cultural humility.** By definition we can't see our blind spots but we can at least be aware that we have a culture (!) and have blind spots. We all have different ways of communicating,³¹ showing love/appreciation, inviting/hospitality, even different ways of doing basic activities like cooking and washing. Some of this is just difference. Some of it is rooted in deeply held values, history and power structures. We are hyper-sensitive to some sins and de-sensitised to others. To learn these

³⁰ Colin Marshall, *Passing the Baton: A handbook for ministry apprenticeships*, p. 25, 56-57.

³¹ E.g. whether conversation is direct or indirect, [whether questioning is loving or hostile](#), [which topics are public or private](#),

differences will require spending time together, listening carefully³² and resisting the temptation to jump in and defend ourselves or correct the other until we understand better.

4. **Be aware of the wider family and context.** This is important for all trainees but is particularly crucial when working cross-culturally. Instead of treating trainees simply as individuals we need to have a concern for their (extended) family and community. We don't want to be intrusive and we certainly won't be able to understand the whole backstory perfectly but it's important to understand whether there are heavy expectations and pressures (financial or emotional) coming from the family and/or community during the period of the traineeship.
5. **Be aware of power difference.** Again, this is always an issue but is often specially important to be conscious of when there is a cultural difference between trainee and supervisor. Many non-western cultures have a more stratified, authoritarian social structures where those 'above you' must not be questioned. This will clearly inhibit open communication and mean that 'suggestions' can easily be taken as commands. Alternatively, a young person raised in a culture with a large power differential may react by swinging against that and have difficulty accepting instruction from anyone. Someone from a sub-dominant culture, who has witnessed a lot of abuse of authority and discrimination from the dominant culture may, understandably, chafe at authority, especially when exercised by someone from an 'oppressor' culture. As well as relationship and humility, a [Coaching](#) posture is particularly helpful here.
6. **Work for Christlikeness and fruit not cultural replication.** It is easy to train in such a way that what we most celebrate is a 'ministry competence' which is at best strongly enculturated and at worst simply a worldly competence that would have appealed in Corinth. By this standard, trainees of another culture will appear to be doing badly. However if we shift the emphasis (in what we're training for and looking for and celebrating) towards convictions and character, biblical godliness, the fruit of the Spirit and actual impact (i.e. people being helped towards Jesus) then it may be that those of other cultures turn out to be doing much better than we had thought.

Further reading

- Orlando Saer, [Raising our game in ministry training](#)
- Josh Monteiro, [Discipleship in the greenhouse](#)
- Andy Harker, [Revisiting Philippians 2:22](#)
- Colin Marshall, *Passing the Baton*
- [Andy Davis, Discipling Guys \(9Marks\)](#)
- [2 Timothy 2:2](#) (video, Harshit Singh, 9Marks First Five Years)
- [Kelly O'Donnell, Doing Member Care Well](#)
- [Member Care Associates](#) – lots of links
- [Global Connections Member Care Forum](#) – papers on member care



³² Sadly it is very easy to assume that we have nothing to learn from those from another culture. Sadly those of minority cultures often report the experience of being in a staff meeting where they were never asked for their wisdom and if they did contribute anything it was ignored. This is deeply discouraging for a trainee, an ugly sinful discrimination and misses out on the rich insights –cultural but also biblical and theological – from those with different cultural backgrounds.