



RAYMOND
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Doing Member Care In Red Zones: Examples From the Middle East

The term “Red zone” refers to those areas of the world where there is intense stress on a regular and sometimes daily basis, brought on by perceived or actual danger and threats to one’s safety. This is true regarding many parts of our world, but it is particularly true in the Middle East, where I have served for the past 25 years. These Red zones are dangerous just by the mere fact that living and ministering in one of these locations places the individual, couple, family, and/or team at risk. Some examples of Red zones in the Middle East would include areas within Gaza and the West Bank, Lebanon, Yemen, and Syria, to name just a few.

Mission personnel who live in a cross-cultural context usually experience plenty of stress to tax their resiliency skills and reserves. It is no easy task to learn a new language, a new culture, and a new set of verbal and non-verbal cues, as well as develop a new package of living skills. In fact, it sometimes takes two or more years to acquire sufficient skills before one sees any reduction in stress. When these adjustment stressors are added to Red-zone stressors, the mix can be incapacitating, producing fear, anger, volatility, hopelessness, and helplessness even in the best trained and most dedicated of personnel. The following are some of the dangerous experiences that can cause any location to turn into a Red zone. When coupled with the normal stressors of cross-cultural living, these experiences can thrust personnel onto the quick track towards emotional, physical, or spiritual burnout:

- Potential threats of robbery, rape, or abduction.
- Death threats.
- Active repression of Christianity by governments and/or militant religious leadership.

Several “Red zones” exist in the Middle East and pose potential danger to the well-being of mission personnel. Red zones are specific areas marked by ethno-political tensions, instability, and potential or actual violence. The author looks at the warning signs of Red-zone stress, offers suggestions for persons living in Red zones, and provides guidelines for administrators and leaders to help their Red-zone personnel.

- Terrorism and intense anti-Western sentiment.

- Random acts of violence, attacks, and shootings.

- Being in close proximity to local people who have been shot, wounded, maimed, and/or killed. This stress intensifies if some of the people affected are known.

- Political instability and political violence which create warlike/coup-like conditions.

- Unchecked anger, hatred, and violence directed towards expatriate Westerners or towards those seen to sympathize with disavowed groups/causes.

- Armed civilian and government warfare activities with clashes in civilian areas, increasing the potential of danger, injury, or death if a person is in the wrong place at the wrong time.

- High unemployment, low wages, and large-scale hunger and physical needs which are accompanied by violence and political upheaval.

- Extremely poor economic situations, which can lead to an uncharacteristic rise in theft and armed robbery, especially of Westerners or the upper class.

- Curfews and travel restrictions.

This list could go on with increasing intensity and vividness. Any one of these characteristics by itself would not necessarily constitute a Red zone. However, when these Red-zone stressors appear in clusters of three or more in a specific location, then the area would be classified as a Red zone.

A good example of this would be the Gaza Strip in Palestine. Given the conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis, the observable characteristics of a Red zone are clear in this location.

- Death threats have been made on Western personnel serving with various organizations.

- Death threats have been directed toward local Palestinians who have not followed the “prescribed group resistance.”

- Palestinian and other Christians have found themselves the target of mili-

tants who verbally abhor alcohol sale and usage of any kind. In addition, the Christian community found themselves struggling to maintain their Christian identity and at the same time participate in the activities of the Muslim majority population vis-à-vis demonstrations, violence, stone-throwing, fire-bombing, and other acts of resistance. (Christianity here often involves more of a cultural heritage than a lifestyle and relationship with God.)

- Random acts of shooting and bombings occur on a regular basis. Israeli settlers and soldiers have wounded and killed Palestinians regularly in demonstrations, drive-by shootings, ambushes, and assassinations. Palestinians have wounded and killed Israeli soldiers and settlers who live and serve in the occupying army in the Gaza Strip. By the end of 2000, the death tally in the most recent conflict between Israelis and Palestinians was over 400, the vast majority being Palestinians.

- Nearly every Palestinian family has been touched by the wounding and/or death of family members. Therefore, it is very common for Westerners working in the Gaza Strip to know someone who has been wounded or killed.

- The closure of the borders between Palestine and Israel has played havoc with the local Palestinian economy. Palestinian businesses are not able to get supplies for their companies. Therefore, employees for those businesses are not able to work. Palestinians who work in Israel are not able to cross over to their jobs. As a result, the unemployment rate for Palestinians in Gaza has been reported to be approaching 50%. The average income is about \$2 per day. Personnel working in such conditions find themselves extremely stressed, guilty, and saddened when they see such widespread poverty and so many unmet physical needs 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

- Terrorism is widespread. No one knows where the next attack by the Israeli soldiers or by Palestinians will happen. But the fact is, it *will* happen, and it is very likely that it will be close. As a result, cur-

few and travel restrictions are commonplace.

- In the Gaza Strip, one of the most densely populated locations on earth, political instability is a reality. Aging leadership and the more militant political youth often have a clash of ideologies. Sometimes these clashes can turn violent to various degrees, from shouting and fights to shootings and death.

- Anger at the unquestioning support that the West gives Israel has led to hatred being directed towards Westerners and Western businesses.

Life in the Red Zone: A Case Study

The following is a family case study that illustrates what I mean by Red-zone life and the effects it has on personnel. I have changed the family information to protect their identity, but the Red-zone details are factual.

Rob and Carol are first-term international workers who have been living in a Red-zone area for three years. Both are educated to the master's level. Before overseas service, they were highly successful in their Western context and were leaders in their community and church. Both are energetic, highly motivated, and very focused on the task of reaching their unreached people group. Rob and Carol have three teenaged children. As a family, they have learned the local language and fit in well with the culture.

Rob, Carol, and their children have had their share of bumps in the past three years. The children had difficulty at first adjusting to the new culture. They experienced normal adjustment problems of attending an expatriate school outside of the Red zone and at the same time living within a Red zone. The marital relationship between Rob and Carol weathered the stressors of the initial adjustment to their new location.

However, the stress that Rob, Carol, and their children have experienced in the past year and a half was compounded by

the intensity of the stressors in their Red-zone location. Almost all of the Red-zone stressors above were present in their lives on a daily to weekly basis. Three examples which added to their daily stress were (1) Rob and Carol had to buy protective glass for their vehicle because they had been stoned by demonstrating youths; (2) they had to vary their travel routes daily, in order to avoid military roadblocks and demonstrations by militant crowds; and (3) several times they were not able to contact or pick their children up from school because the military had closed their travel routes.

All of these stressors are adversely affecting Rob and Carol's relationship in every area of their lives. Let us look at some of the key areas that have suffered.

- *Relationship with God*—Rob and Carol have lost joy in their relationship with God. They have little to no time for devotional time and prayer. They are "in the desert" spiritually.

- *Relationship with self*—Areas of "margin" (i.e., having time and energy for restoration and renewal) in their individual lives are at a minimum. There is little time for relaxation, family, or friends. There is no time for exercise. There is a marked lack of energy and initiative

- *Relationship as a couple*—It seems that many conversations lead to a disagreement or an argument. There is not much mutual encouragement, and nagging has become a way of life in the way Rob and Carol relate to each another.

- *Relationship with children*—There is tension between the parents and the children. Nagging has become a part of this relationship too. The children talk a lot about going back to Europe or leaving the Red zone and living closer to their friends outside the Red zone.

- *Relationship with local people*—Barriers seem to arise more often in their relationships with nationals. As the needs of the local people increased exponentially, Rob and Carol's ability to meet their human, physical, and hunger needs decreased at the same rate. This is one of

the biggest producers of stress, and it produced guilt, sadness, and frustration in Rob and Carol

■ *Relationship with colleagues*—Since Rob and Carol live some distance from their colleagues, it is difficult for the colleagues to understand Rob and Carol’s situation. Instead of talking more with their colleagues, Rob and Carol became more distant, making the void of discouragement wider and the voices of encouragement weaker and less frequent.

As you can see from this brief description of Rob and Carol’s Red-zone experience, they are well on a “crash-and-burn trajectory” of emotional, physical, and/or spiritual burnout. I am not sure how much longer they could have handled the Red-zone pressure-cooker context without relief or intervention. In fact, the ever-present pressures had the potential to cause them to reassess their call to missions and potentially lead them away from the unreached people group to whom God had specifically called them. Rob and Carol’s Red-zone scenario is all too common in the areas of the Middle East and in other Red zones of the world.

Proactive Steps

What can help Rob and Carol’s scenario and similar circumstances of other personnel living in Red zones? What could they do to help themselves? What are some proactive steps that they could take to release some of the pressure from their “Red zone pressure cooker”? Two key strategies are (1) to learn to recognize the warning signs of individual Red-zone stress and (2) to develop ways to deal with that stress, especially by establishing clear personal, couple, and family margins. Dr. Kenneth Williams (2000, p. 171) defines *margin* as “a sufficient reserve of time, energy (spiritual, emotional, interpersonal, and physical), and money to provide for our needs and the needs of others.” Personal development of margins allows our bodies, our emotions, and our spiritual lives to be

healed, restored, and renewed from the effects of Red-zone stress.

Recognizing the Warning Signs

Over the years in the Middle East, I have noted five major warning signs of Red-zone stress, both personally and in colleagues. These are depression, suppression of feelings, lack of focus, constant fear, and spiritual dryness.

1. Depression

Some of the major symptoms of depression include sleeping too much or too little, lethargy, headaches, increased irritability and anger, lack of interest in pleasurable activities, changes in eating habits, avoiding responsibilities and relationships (e.g., watching numerous videos or spending long hours on the computer), addictive behaviors, withdrawal from others, and decreased intimacy between husband and wife. When a few of these symptoms begin to cluster together over a period of several weeks, depression might be present. It is important to consult with a health care professional.

2. Suppressed feelings

Fatigue, relationship struggles, psychosomatic problems, and psychological problems can be the result of unexpressed thoughts and feelings. The longer that these stressful experiences remain unprocessed—not shared with/discussed with confidants—the greater the possibility of further complications.

Bob is an example of what happens when someone suppresses feelings and thoughts. As the Red-zone stressors began to increase, Bob became more introverted. Instead of finding someone to talk with about his fear of death if he were kidnapped, he stuffed those thoughts and fears deep inside. When he was threatened with death at a roadblock, Bob told no one. He pushed those thoughts and feelings down deep. When he saw the injustice of the military towards civilians through unwarranted beatings on young

men, he drove those thoughts and feelings deeper within. He talked less and less with his wife and colleagues about his inner life and experiences. At the same time, he found himself becoming angry more often, especially with the local people with whom he was working. Everything they did, said, or did not do infuriated him. He found himself yelling at other drivers when he was driving. He snapped at his wife when she made simple requests of him. He was short-tempered with his children, and they often asked him, "What is wrong, Daddy?" to which he responded with a quick, "Nothing!" His life slowly became more reactive than responsive to people and events around him.

Bob began dealing with his anger in very unhealthy ways. He would often state things like, "I am not angry," "It's not my fault," "You're too sensitive," or, "I don't want to talk about it." His way of dealing with differences became one of angry confrontations or silence. As Bob's personal stress and tension began to build, most of his conversations became complaint sessions. Matters of the heart ceased to be topics of conversation.

After a year like this, Bob began to have panic attacks, during which he felt extremely out of control and thought that he was going to die. These panic attacks were frightening and sometimes debilitating. Bob would exhibit one or several of the following on an increasingly frequent basis: irregular heartbeat, shortness of breath, fear of death and dying, chest discomfort, or abdominal distress. He actually thought that he was having major heart problems.

Initially, Bob kept his panic struggles from his wife and colleagues. However, after a particularly scary attack, he confided in his wife and went to his medical doctor for help. After a complete physical evaluation, it was determined that nothing was wrong physically. However, things were wrong emotionally and spiritually. Bob's physician encouraged him to see a counselor. He contacted the member care specialist in his organization and was re-

ferred to someone in his location who was qualified and available to help.

Bob's counseling initially focused on his personal relationship with God. It was difficult for Bob when he realized that the most important thing to him, his relationship with God, was one of the first relationships to be affected negatively. In addition, the counselor helped Bob look at his Red-zone stressors, his thoughts, his feelings, and his fears from a biblical perspective, as well as from a physical and psychological perspective. After a little more than two months, Bob began to return to his outgoing and energetic lifestyle. His relationship with God returned to its primary importance. His role as husband and father took on new meaning. He learned to share his thoughts and feelings more freely with his wife and with a trusted colleague. He learned to share his fears more candidly. He began to look at his Red-zone context as a place where local people could see God in his life rather than seeing it as a place where God could not be found. Bob actually became more functional than he had been in the past. He related better to family, peers, and nationals, without panic attacks plaguing him and restricting his activities.

Not all cases like Bob's can be treated on the field within a Red zone. Sometimes it is necessary to remove the person and his/her family from the area, so that intervention can take place without the active stressors of the Red zone. This kind of approach assists the person(s) by immediately reducing the stressors and allowing them to process thoughts, feelings, and fears from a distance and from a location of safety and support.

3. Lack of focus

Lack of focus is extremely hard on workers in Red zones. Personnel serving overseas usually have a high work/ministry ethic. Moreover, most are supported financially by special gifts and donations from organizations or persons in their home country who believe in them and in their work/ministry. Therefore, when a

lack of focus sets in and personnel begin to realize that they are unproductive, their sense of duty, dedication, and accountability to those supporters and to their leadership causes them to feel guilty. As the lack of focus continues, the feelings of guilt, failure, and unproductiveness, when added to other Red-zone warning signs, can cause the person to sink deeper into the quicksand of despair.

4. *Constant fear*

This type of fear pervades life during waking moments and even during sleep. It is something that gnaws at one's heart, mind, and soul. The fear can be a personal fear of death, dying, bombing, terrorism, abduction, rape, murder, robbery, spiritual warfare attacks, or any number of other fear-producing dangers and threats. This fear can be for oneself, a family member, a friend, or a team member. It can keep us from doing the simplest of tasks and can make our behavior erratic. After being stopped and threatened at gunpoint at a roadblock by masked militants one afternoon, I found myself fearing what was around the bend on every street I traveled for the next two months. I became very edgy because of the fear that was just below the surface of my thoughts and feelings.

5. *Spiritual dryness*

The deserts of the Middle East have been locations of spiritual renewal and the strengthening of relationships between man and God for centuries. Jesus and Paul are two prime examples of this. Monks have gone off to these deserts to live, in order to commune with God. God calls us at times into specific desert-type experiences to woo us and develop us.

Many times, though, the spiritual lives of our personnel have become dry and barren like those deserts. I know that was the case with me. Instead of being the place that drew me closer to God, there was a period during the most intense time of Red-zone stress when I wandered farther away from God. Prayer became diffi-

cult, if not impossible. I found excuses not to read His Word. In short, I cut off the source of hope—my relationship with God—in the midst of darkness. Consider some of the reasons for such dry, spiritual conditions:

- There can be a lack of spiritual preparation for the spiritual warfare present in Red zones. Either no one told us or we did not listen to the fact that the Red-zone location in which we find ourselves is a spiritual warfare battle zone.

- There can be a lack of believers or a lack of fellowship options with other believers in the Red zone. One of the biggest mistakes which sending organizations make is to send a “unit” out to a Red zone by themselves. Sending a couple to a remote location without team members or a support base with local believers is a prescription for intense attacks of spiritual warfare. Without the spiritual support from a team, they can be defeated and disheartened quickly.

- There can be an absence of corporate and personal praise and worship time. All of us need the encouragement, strength, support, and power gained through corporate praise and worship. This is even more necessary in a Red zone.

- There can be a lack of an adequate prayer support base around the world for the specific needs and challenges of Red-zone personnel. Such a base is essential for Red-zone personnel. Without it, we face the spiritual warfare battles alone, when the Father would have us face them with the body of Christ.

- There can be a lack of a consistent and established prayer and devotional lifestyle. The spiritual disciplines are critical for all people in Red zones. Prayer, fasting, Bible reading, worship, silence, solitude, serving, stewardship, and evangelism are all disciplines which will enhance Red-zone living. In practicing these, one's relationship with God will grow and become more intimate.

- There can be an inability to prioritize life's activities. Business, work, and

ministry can begin to take on more importance than being with God.

Such spiritual dryness can lead us to wander in the wilderness of the Red zone without direction, hope, vision, and, most importantly, without the sustaining relationship of the Father.

Strategies for Red-Zone Living

A strategy is a plan for achieving a specific purpose. In the case of Red-zone living, developing strategies for living is essential. Here are 10 strategies to help personnel deal with the stress of living within a Red zone.

1. Give others permission to speak into your life

One of the most important things that my wife and I did when we were living in a Red zone was to give another trusted couple permission to talk freely and specifically with us about our lives. We found that living in a Red zone caused us to develop fuzzy boundaries. That means that we kept saying to ourselves, “Things aren’t so bad,” or, “We can handle it.” Then when things got worse, such as a bomb exploding on the road just minutes before we passed by, we said, “That wasn’t as bad as I thought it would be.” However, when we kept moving our boundaries back, we were actually on a daily downhill slide, losing touch with our thoughts and feelings and losing the ability to cope in healthy ways. Our friends, who lived outside the Red zone, could urge us to leave the Red zone if they saw or sensed that we were beginning to minimize its realities and dangers. If they told us to get out, we trusted them enough to leave for a period of time (one to two weeks), in order to re-evaluate our situation to see if we were capable of continuing our work and ministry. Speaking into the life of another is the biblical principle found in Ephesians 4:25, where we are told, “Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.”

2. Get help

All of us feel depressed at times. All of us have fears. All of us have times of blurred focus on our tasks. All of us have times of spiritual dryness. These are normal occurrences. But when they become regular attributes, seek out help. Listen to what others are saying to you and what your body and reactions are saying. Get a physical exam to make sure that there is not something medically wrong that is causing some of your symptoms. Find a counselor or a trusted friend who can help you monitor what is going on in your life. Check in with a leader and/or member care worker in your organization, so that he/she can talk with you about your Red-zone stressors.

3. Remember the Greatest Commandment and God’s sovereignty in the midst of your troubles

First, in Mark 12:28-31, Jesus shares with us the importance of relationships and of staying connected. Of all the commandments, He said, “The most important one is this: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

Secondly, John 17 tells us we are *never* alone, no matter what our circumstances. We are never alone in the midst of our pain and suffering. God is always present to comfort, support, and encourage, whether the suffering is happening to us or to the people whom we serve. God is always sovereign in every circumstance. He will have victory in our lives and in the Red zones. We must keep this fact of Scripture ever before us, even when we do not recognize it. The fact of His sovereignty is not dependent on our recognition or awareness. It is dependent on the truth of His Word and the reality of His presence.

Those of us living in Red zones must stay connected with God. He is our main source of strength and hope. This is not some “obligatory God comment” but an important reminder about our relationship with Him. Stay focused on God and keep yourself immersed in His Word on a daily basis. Communicate with Him in prayer, even when it is difficult. He will answer.

4. *Be prepared for spiritual warfare*

Spiritual warfare, as outlined in Ephesians 6:10-20, is perhaps the most important area to be understood and practiced in Red-zone life. Prayer for deliverance, spiritual discernment, demonic oppression, and spiritual struggles “in the heavens” are not just abstract concepts but realities of life. Defeat in the battles of spiritual warfare can be devastating for field personnel. It is in these battles that we lose heart, lose focus, and lose the intimate relationship with our First Love.

Many of us in the Red zone were ill-prepared for what awaited us in the arena of spiritual warfare. One striking example was a couple, Tim and Laine, who were having some marital difficulties. As it turned out, the husband was very depressed. He constantly put himself down and downplayed his ability to learn Arabic and to be an effective witness. My wife and I called in another couple so that the four of us could pray for Tim and Laine. We prayed with them for two hours. During the prayer time, Tim heard a word from the Lord that confirmed that Tim was trying to do all of this without Him. In addition, Tim realized that the language helper whom he was using was involved in Islamic curses and had called some on Tim. Immediately after our prayer time, Tim’s entire countenance changed. A significant inner shift had also happened through prayer. Tim and his family returned to their Red zone, and he entered his spiritual warfare battle with renewed faith and hope. He became more intimate with the Father in his devotional time,

developed a prayer strategy and support base, and initiated strategies for dealing with the curses directed at him by his language helper. Later Tim reported that his entire attitude had improved, his marital relationship was stronger, and his depression had lifted.

There are divergent views about spiritual warfare; however, there are plenty of good, balanced books on the subject. Check with your pastor or colleague to see what books would be of most benefit for you from your biblical perspective. However, remember the importance of the armor of God. George Otis, Jr. (1998, p. 187) has a helpful perspective: “Putting on the armor of God is synonymous with daily surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. ... We simply dedicate our first conscious thoughts each morning to the will of the Master. Spiritual armor becomes lifestyle when, for the balance of the day, we choose to walk in the consciousness of His presence and purpose.”

5. *Work at marital growth*

Spouses must not take each other for granted. It is so easy to neglect this relationship because other things seem more important at the time. Needy people, ministry demands, deadlines, and other tasks call out for our time and energy. At the end of the day, there is little left for your spouse. When you add Red-zone stress to this picture, you can end up as two individuals in a marriage who have lost the time, energy, and will to work on that relationship.

Growing apart does not occur overnight. I have worked with couples in missions who have grown so far apart that they have become two people living alone together. When this happens, the possibility of marital infidelity is just around the corner. Make time for your spouse. Maintain spiritual growth as a couple. Work at keeping the flame of romance burning. Date your spouse. Have fun and play together. Get away alone as a couple, even if it is only for a night. Be diligent to communicate clearly and regularly. Take

advantage of marriage enrichment opportunities and retreats. Your relationship has the potential to sustain you in the midst of any Red-zone storm or stress.

6. Exercise

In the Red zone, our bodies can suffer from lack of physical exercise. It may not be safe or acceptable just to go out and exercise. Our usual exercise and eating habits can change. Consequently, our emotions and spiritual life can be affected negatively, because our heart, mind, soul, and strength are all intertwined. If one area suffers, such as the physical, the other areas are affected. A frequent question that I get from both men and women about exercise in Red zones is, “How and where do I exercise in my Red zone?” A stationary bicycle, a treadmill, step aerobics, and isometrics are all excellent ways to exercise. Videotapes can be purchased covering all aspects of exercise and can be followed in the privacy of your living room in front of a TV.

7. Develop confidants and close friends

Many married people would say, “My spouse is my best friend.” That is great. However, at the same time, all of us would benefit greatly from having at least one same-gender confidant in our lives. This is also true, of course, for singles. One of the first things that my wife and I prayed for when we moved into a Red zone was a friend for her and a friend for me. I needed someone outside my marital relationship with whom I could relate as “guy to guy.” As a rule, men usually do not cultivate a “best friend” relationship so easily. Women in Red zones usually have an easier time in finding that special friend. When you have a friendship like Ruth and Naomi or Jonathan and David, it will bless you and challenge you in your life and ministry. My Red-zone best friend was a strength and support to me, and I became that for him. It takes precious time and energy to develop such a friendship, but the benefit for both of you will be worth the effort.

8. Give encouragement

There are two statements in Scripture that tell us to do something daily. The first is Luke 9:23, “If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me.” The second is Hebrews 3:13, “But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called ‘today,’ so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.” Without regular encouragement, we can lose hope, vision, and focus. With it, we can do far beyond what we thought possible. Encouragement is a two-way street—it is mutual. Encouragement is both a discipline and a practice. If we are not encouraging others daily, we all run the risk of being “hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.” A network and ethos of encouragement for one another while in a Red zone is a good antidote for despair. It helps us see the potential good and God’s power even in very difficult circumstances.

9. Take time to talk about and process issues

When anger, fear, hatred, and frustration begin creeping into your Red-zone life, find someone with whom you can talk about these issues. Intentionally seek out your spouse, your best friend, an accountability partner, a colleague, a member care specialist, or others. When we lived in a Red zone in the late 1980s and early 1990s, I found myself on the dangerous ground of hating the soldiers who were killing and maiming the people to whom God had called me. As that hatred began to grow, I realized that I was slipping outside of God’s presence and will for my life. My wife and my best friend helped me work through many issues, helped me renew my relationship with the Lord, and helped me maintain a good perspective on life.

10. Play and have fun

Set apart time for relaxation, renewal, and recreation—have fun! These kinds of experiences have the potential to make our Red-zone living more bearable. Play

games, go on a hike, or do other activities as a couple, family, group of couples, group of singles, team, or any other kind of grouping. It takes our minds off our Red-zone lives and allows us to step away from those ever-present worries, fears, frustrations, dangers, and stresses.

During the height of the “Intifada” (the conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis in the late 1980s and early ’90s), tensions were extremely high. We were stressed because many people we knew had been beaten, imprisoned, or shot. On top of that, we were upset by the constant roadblocks, curfews, and tense atmosphere. One weekend, about five families decided to take an all-day hike in the Judean wilderness. We hiked down canyons, forded streams, laughed, talked, and played along the way. Our minds and bodies totally disengaged from the tension of the West Bank. We returned to our homes exhausted but rejuvenated. Our physical bodies had been stretched to the maximum. Our emotions had been allowed to run free and play in the Judean hill country. Our spirits were renewed as we talked and laughed with our colleagues, who all had two things in common—our faith in God and the stress of living in a Red zone.

Guidelines for Administrators and Leaders

Sending agencies have an essential role in the lives of their personnel who live in Red zones. Mission leaders such as field directors are often the first-line, main member care providers in many situations. Here are a number of things for administrators and leaders to do, based on my experiences in living in Red zones, working as an administrator, and helping as a member care specialist.

Suggestions: Five Things to Avoid

1. Avoid overstatements

If you have never lived in a Red zone for six months or more, be careful not to overstate the phrase, “I understand what

you are going through and feeling.” People in Red zones are extremely sensitive. Statements like this are not received well by Red-zone personnel. This is especially true when administrators and leadership make such statements from the safety and security of their home offices in Western countries.

2. Avoid downplaying danger and stress

When talking with your personnel in Red zones, be careful not to trivialize, negate, or over-spiritualize the Red-zone dangers and stresses that they are experiencing. The best thing that you can do is speak from a caring and compassionate heart that feels the pain and the hurt of the Red-zone person and that does more listening than speaking.

3. Avoid conflict

Try not to react negatively to your personnel in Red zones, whether in person, on the telephone, or in emails. They may be quite difficult to communicate with and may not even realize it. They do not need the added stress of being in conflict with their leadership. There is a time and a place for dealing with difficult issues, but emails and telephone calls are not the right place. Save confrontations for face-to-face encounters outside their Red zone.

4. Avoid increasing personnel workloads

Try not to increase the work, ministry, or administrative loads of Red-zone personnel. Much of the time they are just trying to keep their emotional heads above the water, and any added responsibilities will only tend to increase the frustration, stress, and worry. One of the biggest workload problems that Red-zone personnel face is the “traveling spouse.” I know of many organizations that have some of their personnel traveling 30-60% of the time! This is a prescription for burnout for the one traveling. Also, it is a burnout prescription for the spouse who stays behind and “tends the fort,” watches the kids, and

handles all the other aspects of living. Usually the one who stays behind is the wife. In addition, the tension caused by this kind of intense, husband-wife separation can play havoc with the marital relationship, particularly for those living in a Red zone. Administrators would be wise to keep the travel of their Red-zone personnel to a minimum.

5. *Avoid making decisions without personnel input*

Try not to make decisions for Red-zone personnel without their input. Always seek to value their input, and include their input in your decision-making process. Not to include them in decisions directly affecting them will set you as leader in conflict with your Red-zone personnel. Try to make decisions for these personnel with them from within the Red zone, not from the comfort and security of a Western office location.

Suggestions: Ten Things to Do

1. *Provide a range of member care support*

Never be afraid to send help to your Red-zone personnel. They will appreciate it. Crisis response workshops, spiritual life seminars/retreats, marriage enrichment, family life and education consultation, career development, debriefings, and other such opportunities will aid your personnel greatly. Member care shows them how much the organization values them and invests in them. Remember to include “member care resources” in the annual planning, budgets, and strategy development. Good member care is proactive—far more than just offering counseling when someone struggles. As I have talked with various mission personnel over the past five years, including those serving in Red zones, one key request keeps coming to the surface: “We need member care in order to make it.”

2. *Keep in regular telephone contact*

Email is great. However, your personnel in Red zones need to hear your voice, and they need to know that you care, support, and encourage them. The frequency of your calls should be on a weekly basis to once per month, depending on how difficult their situation is. It would be helpful to have a set time and day on which you will call, so that your personnel are expecting to hear from you rather than being surprised by your call. Try not to mix a business call with a “checking in” call to people in the Red zone. You may think that you have checked in, but they will receive it as your doing business first and your checking in as an afterthought.

3. *Listen*

When you talk on the telephone, listen to what is being said and what is not being said. From a caring pastoral perspective, ask for their thoughts, ideas, and feelings. Listen for signs of over-rationalization, over-spiritualizing, hypersensitivity, fuzzy boundaries, or trivializing of their situation. Listen for unspoken cries for help. In addition, listen for the warning signs mentioned earlier in this chapter. Your personnel may not always realize just how in need they are. If you cannot determine what to do, you might want to set up a telephone consult with a member care specialist and your personnel, just to make sure that you are reading their situation clearly.

4. *Be an encourager*

You may be the main source of encouragement that your personnel receive, especially if they are in isolated locations by themselves. One of the major mistakes that organizational leadership makes in the placement of personnel, especially in Red zones, is the putting of one family unit in a Red-zone location by themselves. We place our personnel at great emotional and spiritual risk when we do not prepare and send out compatible families “two by

two.” A family unit needs the nurture, support, and encouragement of another family in difficult Red-zone locations.

5. Provide opportunities for breaks

Personnel living in Red zones need the opportunity to get away from the dangers of their location regularly. It is very difficult for individuals, couples, and families to stay in the “heat of battle” without hope of relief. Many organizations mandate such breaks and provide financial support at times to help personnel get away. A helpful amount of time might be two weeks every six months, but this should be determined in consultation with your Red-zone personnel, member care personnel, and other leaders. In some Red zones, these breaks would need to be out of country. In other cases, it might be somewhere away from the conflict zone but within the geographical country. Some organizations have set up “safe houses” that are available for their personnel as well as for those from other organizations.

6. Visit your personnel whenever possible

Visits are so important by a member care worker or leader from your organization or someone seconded from another organization. A stay for several days will provide you with much helpful information as to the difficulty and danger in that Red zone. It will allow you to walk alongside your personnel and to hear their joys, fears, difficulties, and hurts. In addition, it will allow you to minister to them. After you leave, your phone calls will take on added meaning to them and to you, because you will have a better understanding of their situation and therefore will be able to provide better support and encouragement.

7. Provide debriefing opportunities

Whenever any of your personnel get away from their Red zone for a break, meetings, conferences, or workshops, try

to provide some kind of debriefing opportunity. For some, a regular Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) might be in order, while for others, just listening to them and then helping them clarify their thoughts/feelings/plans will be beneficial.

8. Take directive leadership

The time may come for you as the leader to take a more directive leadership role for personnel serving in more difficult locations. If one of your family units appears to be slowly falling apart and heading for a breakdown, be ready to act on their behalf. Talk with them, and after consulting with others such as a member care specialist, be prepared to get them out for their own safety and well-being.

9. Monitor

It is important to monitor your personnel during and after their Red-zone service. Use your member care specialist to check in with them by email, telephone, and personal visits. If you do not have a member care specialist, then enlist the cooperation of another organization’s specialist to assist your personnel. Also, when your personnel leave the Red zone, see that they have opportunity to be involved in a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing. The CISD is a very valuable tool which can help your personnel process their Red-zone experiences and possibly keep them from having stress-related difficulties later on.

10. Develop a Red-zone protocol and strategy

Each organization would do well to develop a Red-zone protocol so that it can appropriately monitor Red-zone stability and appropriately respond to Red-zone crises. The protocol should be developed and communicated with personnel before they enter a Red zone, usually during pre-field orientation. Training in crisis and contingency management is also important. Some of the following things would be helpful to include in your protocol:

- Define a Red zone and have a way to monitor the degree of risk to personnel.

- Itemize work and ministry expectations of personnel.
- Provide exit strategies and clear criteria for departure.
- Provide opportunities for assistance from the organization and from a member care specialist.
- Provide resources for living in a Red zone (books on stress, exercise, spiritual growth, etc.).
- Outline an administrative strategy for dealing with Red zones (contingency plans). All administrators and leadership should be oriented to contingency management procedures.

Conclusion

Doing member care well in Red zones is the responsibility of all of us. First, member care is the responsibility of the personnel living in Red zones. Individuals, couples, and teams need to be proactive regarding their own member care. Each person needs to take steps towards developing healthy margins for living. Personnel need to be aware of Red-zone warning signs and the dangers inherent in not caring for oneself. In addition, they need to be willing to ask for help when they need it. Close friends especially provide a safety net of support and encouragement.

Secondly, member care is the responsibility of organizational and agency administrators and leadership. Good leaders do not just assume everything is OK just because they have not heard any cries for help. Rather, they regularly and sensitively check in with their Red-zone personnel. What they model and how they relate to personnel are key influences on the overall ethos and member care program of an agency. Dr. Eddie Pate, a good friend and field leader, made an excellent observation. He said, “In order to help my people make it long-term on the field (in Red zones), I need to do three things: Take care of my people, take care of my people, and take care of my people.”

Thirdly, member care in Red zones is the responsibility of the member care spe-

cialists from the field team, mobile member care team, or the organization’s home office. These specialists need to be available to spend quality time with personnel in order to assist them. In addition, they can apprise sending agencies about member care issues and needs. Member care specialists need to update their professional skills on a regular basis and make sure they have the breaks and support that they need as well. No one is immune from Red-zone stress! It would be helpful if member care specialists could live in a Red zone for a minimum of three to six months in order to better understand life and personnel in Red zones.

There is life in Red zones. It is possible to grow in one’s relationship with God, self, and others. It is possible to find security in Him in the midst of stress and danger. Moreover, it is possible to carry out the task to which Red-zone personnel have been called. The love and support that come via good member care are keys to really making it in these difficult settings. Red zones will always be with us. May the Lord give us wisdom and hearts of compassion as we faithfully minister to needy people in these areas and as we diligently care for our workers.

Reflection and Discussion

1. What kinds of dangers and stressors describe the Red zone in which you live or in which personnel whom you know live?
2. What are some likely warning signs which you might experience to help you realize that life in a Red zone is adversely impacting you?
3. List a few ways that your organization could apply some of the suggestions made in this article.
4. Identify some personal strategies which are/were helpful to your Red-zone experience and which might be helpful to others ministering and living in Red zones.
5. What are some ways to further support national Christians who live and are “stuck” in Red zones?

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