

While your Newcomer Orientation may consist of several different components, we will discuss only the areas related to language and culture learning.

### Pre-Field Communication

Ideally, your Newcomer Orientation begins several months before the new learners arrive on the field.

1. We suggest that you (a) read the ICCT Coachnotes, "Becoming an Effective Language Coach," for an overview of what a coach should be, know, and do, and (2) note the aspects of language coaching that are particularly applicable to your situation.
2. Contact each of your new learners.
  - Be upbeat and encouraging about language and culture learning.
  - Explain your role as their language coach.
  - Assure the new workers that you will "be there" for them.
  - As appropriate, describe (usually in general terms) your field language and culture learning policies and procedures.
  - Suggest resources they may wish to bring (e.g., CD-ROM language learning programs, introductory language textbooks, books and articles containing information about the language and culture). If good tape recorders are not available on the field, insist that they bring one for each learner. If they will not have audiotapes available to listen to on the field, a digital voice recorder may be a better choice than a tape recorder.
  - If they have not read books and articles about topics such as overseas living, cross-cultural adjustment, the target culture, etc., suggest a reading list to be worked through before coming to the field.
  - If they have not attended or do not plan to attend a pre-field second language acquisition learner-training program (such as the ones offered by ICCT and MTI), strongly encourage them to do this before coming to the field. This is particularly important for older learners, those learning two languages and/or more difficult languages, and those who are most likely to be "at risk" learners.
  - Invite questions.
3. Find out as much about your learners as you can. The more you find out before they arrive, the better prepared you can be to help your learners.

Samples of types of information you might gather before learners arrive on the field:

- Betty, age 58, is scared to death of language and culture learning and she's afraid she'll not succeed. Her husband, however, is a whiz at it. In addition, he will have a key administrative position on the field. The home office has decided that even if Betty never learns the language, they want this couple on the field.
  - Ruth is a high-energy learner who excels when allowed to "do things her way." Even though the home office doesn't know specifically what "do things her way" means, it's clear that she's not like most new learners.
  - Jim and Nancy appear to be the ideal couple for long-term overseas experience. They are highly motivated and gifted language learners who, after a short term in Africa gained a better command of the language and culture than any of their peers, Jim and Nancy are eager to throw themselves into language and culture learning and they will do whatever is needed to develop the level of proficiency they need.
4. After gathering as much information as possible, you should begin to prepare to deal with the kinds of issues that are especially relevant once they arrive. For example, for Betty (above), we suggest that you begin to learn how to deal with psychological barriers to effective language and culture learning such as fear, anxiety, low self-esteem, etc. Also, read about working with older learners.

### On-Field Newcomer Orientation

We suggest you think of on-field Newcomer Orientation as consisting of two phases: (1) initial orientation, which may be a few days in length, and (2) on-going orientation, which extends throughout the first year or more of on-field living. The length and focus of each phase depend on factors such as the time you have for orientation and your expertise in various areas.

## Initial Orientation

### 1. *Begin to build a solid relationship with each of your learners*

Building a good relationship with each of your learners should be an intentional aspect of language coaching. If for each learner you have a relationship built on trust and mutual respect, you will be much more successful in your coaching role.

### 2. *Find out more about your learners*

One of the most frequent mistakes I've observed is that coaches view their initial days of newcomer orientation more as a time to inform new workers about policies, procedures, etc. rather than also as a crucial time for gathering information about learners that will impact the language and culture learning process.

Be sure to find out more about the learning styles of your newcomers. (Highly recommended: the learning styles instruments in *LinguaLinks*.) Take time to discuss the likely strengths and weaknesses of each learner's learning style and total profile. Include suggestions for taking advantage of strong areas, dealing with weak areas, etc.

### 3. *Explain language and culture learning policies*

Make sure learners understand what is expected of them and, as much as possible, "buy into" the goals and objectives, procedures, accountability and assessment practices, etc., of your organization and field.

### 4. *Encourage learners to develop and/or maintain healthy attitudes*

Effective long-term living and ministry are dependent upon healthy attitudes toward the national people and culture and toward the process of language and culture learning. (Highly recommended reading: Holden, Greg. 2001. "Newcomer Attitudes Toward Language, Culture, and People." In *Helping learners develop second language proficiency*, L. J. Dickerson (Ed.), 55-62. Colorado Springs: Mission Training International. )

### 5. *Help learners define their individual needs and goals*

This is the perfect time to begin to involve learners in decisions that affect their learning. Not only will this provide more meaningful learning experiences, but it will also enhance their motivation and help them to get started right by taking some responsibility for their own learning.

### 6. *Encourage learners to develop a variety of relationships*

Within their first week in the host country, newcomers should begin to develop relationships with nationals. To help facilitate this, you can introduce them to nationals who can answer questions, show the newcomers around, help them learn how to use public transportation, use a public telephone, make purchases, and deal with other immediate survival needs. Do everything you can to encourage both the nationals and the newcomers to continue this relationship.

### 7. *Provide learner training as needed and as time and your level of expertise permit*

Make sure each of your learners understands the basics involved in the process of language and culture learning. With the learners' input, decide which learning training areas should be addressed immediately and which can be dealt with more effectively at a later time.

### 8. *Assist as needed in making arrangements for language school, tutors, and/or helpers, as applicable*

Generally after the first month or two, learners can make their own arrangements with tutors and/or helpers.

### 9. *Recommend appropriate resources*

The language coach is the ideal person to collect a wide range of resources for learners. This can include information about the language and culture (generally books, articles and Web sites), a variety of audiotapes and videos that provide listening practice at different levels, pronunciation exercises, books written in the language, tapes and other materials from past learners, etc. (See ICCT Coachnotes: "A Resource Center for Language and Culture Learners.")

## On-Going Orientation

For on-going orientation, consider scheduling training sessions of 1-3 days at appropriate times throughout the newcomer's first year or two of on-field living.