

Meet Partnership Pablo

by Paul McGuinness
adapted from "Walk This Way"
www.WalkThisWay.world

We think we can partner with just about anyone.
On the contrary, a great partner fits a specific profile.

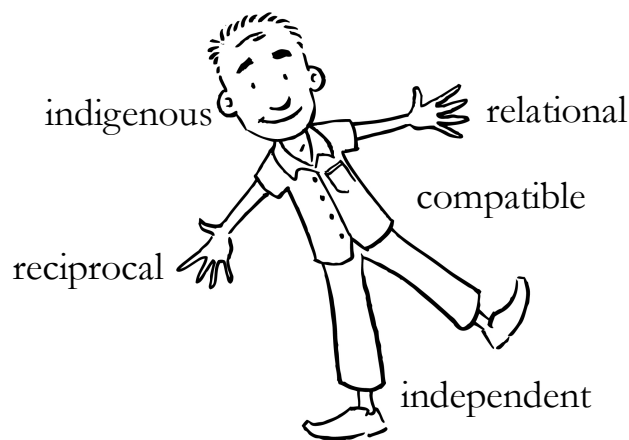
For most churches, organizations and believers, forging global partnerships is new territory. It's not a well-worn trail. It is drastically different than sending a missionary to another country. Building a healthy cross-cultural partnership is not at all the same as hiring national leaders in an international community. Neither of those approaches – sending missionaries or hiring nationals – results in the kind of reciprocal connection that a partnership provides.

A true partnership is a mutually beneficial, two-way relationship in which both sides offer some of their strengths and resources, as well as receive some benefits and added value.

If that's what you're interested in, then there is someone I want you to meet. You see, by definition, a partnership is not something you can build on our own. You need to share a vision, lock arms, and move forward with another church, organization or people group. You need a partner for the path. But how do you find one? How do you know where to look or even what to look for?

Allow me to introduce you to Partnership Pablo.

Profile of a Partner



Independent: Standing on His Own Two Feet

A great partner has established independence and is standing on his own two feet. He is walking a bold path, moving toward a homegrown vision, employing and/or empowering national leaders, and making his own decisions based on the local conditions. He is not being driven by outsiders like foreign donors, U.S. churches, western boards, or even well-meaning missionaries. A potential partner has moved from dependence to independence. Great partners are ready to move with you from independence to interdependence.

Unfortunately, well-meaning U.S. churches and individuals sabotage the process toward independence time and time again. Rather than helping global pastors and national churches to struggle through the growing pains between dependence and independence, donors step in and hire or support nationals to continue the work they are doing in their native community. It is such an appealing option that well-intentioned Westerners rarely see the damage it causes. It seems like we are clearing the path and paving the way for effective ministry. “If we could just subsidize their income,” we tell ourselves, “they could be free to focus on ministry. And thanks to a great international exchange rate, the cost to us is so small. How could we not offer this national pastor our support? Now he can quit his other job and focus all his energy on the ministry.”

This scenario is not at all uncommon. The traditional missions model attracts lots of international Christian leaders. Many come to the U.S. hoping that we will support and send them back to their communities. Lots of churches are intrigued by that option, and entire agencies have been built on the model of hiring nationals. It’s promoted as a great global opportunity with “lots of bang for your buck!” The trouble is, this path is not healthy, not sustainable and not reproducible. The national leader will stop earning a local income and instead rely on funding from abroad. That’s not sustainable. His church may see that he’s now taken care of and stop giving sacrificially to support him. That’s not healthy. Furthermore, after watching this process unfold, young, potential pastors and leaders conclude that the path to ministry isn’t a local path, but rather one that must detour through the U.S. in search of donors. That’s not reproducible. Consequently, rather than helping these global leaders forge a truly independent and indigenous movement, we invite them to become dependent on us, making it impossible for them to move toward the other two stages of maturity. The path we’ve created is literally moving them in the wrong direction and keeping them in unhealthy dependence, rather than encouraging healthy (albeit challenging) independence.

I have no doubt that the stated goal is to eventually transition to independence. If that’s the case, then



why build such elaborate dependence on foreign funding? Why not begin with the value of independence and figure out how to make that part of the DNA? *Do the hard work early. Build independence into the fabric from the very beginning and look for potential partners who have done the same.* A great partner is one who is independent, standing on his own two feet and looking for an opportunity to walk with you towards interdependence.

Compatible: What's at the Core?

Moving to the next quality of our friend Pablo, we come to the torso – the body and core that forms the center of our global brother. This area represents the heart, the beliefs, and the motivation of a potential partner. At the center, there must be compatibility between partners. Specifically, we're looking for shared doctrinal beliefs and basic theological alignment. Here's the key though: we're looking for shared belief and alignment around the core issues of our faith, not personal preferences.

You'll do well to gain clarity about the levels of your beliefs. Ask yourself which of your beliefs are core and which are peripheral. Identifying what's at the center allows us to focus on the beliefs that are most important. It also reminds us that our distinctives shouldn't divide us. That opens up so many opportunities and introduces so much freedom. Knowing what's at the core will give you clarity as you pursue global partners.

Consider what happened in Karogoto, Kenya, when the local pastors began to recognize who their teammates are. Like many Kenyan villages, Karogoto has a "village center." It may not be the geographic center, but it's a place clearly understood to be the heart of the community. Here you'll find the shops, main road, gathering places and churches. Deliverance Church is on one end of the square. God's Grace and Glory (G3) is on the other end. Just down the road from G3 is the Lord's Vineyard. Across the road from Deliverance is Antioch Baptist. No matter which church you attend, you're coming to the same part of the village on Sunday!

Sadly, there was a time not long ago when, even though they shared such physical proximity, these churches had almost no interaction with each other. Even worse, their leaders and congregants had negative interactions with each other. They chose to emphasize what made them different from one another, failing to see the common core that bound them together. Thankfully, that's no longer the case.

Inspired by the leadership of Pastor Harrison Wabiru, five of the pastors of Karogoto now serve on the community's leadership council! Drawn together by a vision for unity and



transformation in their community, they focus less on the needs of their particular churches and more on the opportunities in the community-at-large. Consequently, they've shifted their attention from the distinctive beliefs that make them unique to the core creed that binds them together. Each is a genuine follower of Jesus, and each is playing his part in the Body as Christ builds His church. Suspicion and competition have been replaced by trust and brotherhood. It's a beautiful picture of partnership. And here's a literal picture of the partnership.



From left to right, we have Pastor Robert (Agape Church), Pastor James (Deliverance Church), Pastor David (The Lord's Vineyard), Pastor Steven (God's Grace and Glory), and me, Pastor "Muriuki" (Parker Hill Church). Pastor David from Antioch Baptist Church couldn't be with us that day.

Motivated by their partnership with each other, our church has come alongside this leadership council. They've demonstrated that they are compatible with one another, and, in the process, invited us to share in that compatibility. As we initially interacted with them, we recognized that there is alignment around the core issues of faith. We also realized that, by coming alongside them, we could be part of the transformation they were moving toward. My hope is that now we can bring that same mindset of compatibility that we've discovered in a global setting to our local context. What if, not just overseas but here at home, we were bound together with those who share a core creed, rather than divided from those with doctrinal distinctives? Think of the impact that would make. Think of the statement that would make.

Compatibility is an essential part of the partnership profile. Be sure that there is agreement at the core. When you discover compatibility with independent believers, then you're on the path toward partnership. You're not quite there yet though. There are three more elements to look for in a partner.

Indigenous: The Face of the Place

Your global partners need to be indigenous. You're looking to come alongside the *national leaders* in a particular global community. Your partners need to be "the face of the place." Certainly outsiders (like us) have a role to play, but that role must be secondary to the role that the indigenous people of God play in their communities.

God is at work not just here, but everywhere. He is omnipresent and that presence is offering grace and moving toward redemption. God was present and at work long before the first outsiders entered the picture. So when we, as outsiders, enter a new context we want to identify and join the work of God among the indigenous leaders within that particular context. (*Walk This Way* addresses the question, "What if there is no Pablo?" In other words, how do you build partnerships in places that are unreached and unengaged. Purchase the book at www.WalkThisWay.world.)

There are far too many examples of outsiders forging ahead without the wisdom of national leaders. Think of the church buildings that litter the African continent, buildings designed, built and funded by Americans under the oversight of an American missionary. Picture the hospital in South America that's directed and staffed by North Americans who receive their funding, direction and shipments of medical supplies from abroad. Consider the elementary school in Asia that gets its curriculum from the West and is powered by a revolving cycle of teachers serving one-year commitments. These churches, hospitals and schools are not indigenous movements. The "faces" of these places are foreign.

I'm not being critical of the people, the passion or the impact represented in these examples. The sacrifice, commitment and dedication necessary to pioneer works like these is beyond what I could offer. I honor the commitment and respect the people who develop these kinds of works. However, because these projects are not built on indigenous leadership they don't represent the kinds of things that we are looking to partner with. At their foundation, they are fundamentally different than something built by national leaders.

When you look for partners, you must look for indigenous leaders who are developing a plan that fits within their context and is built with their resources.



Partner with someone who is authentic to that community and doing something that is indigenously sustainable and reproducible.

Finding and nurturing something like that will take *a lot* more time. But it will have *a lot* more potential for bringing lasting change to the community. Indigenous leadership is the key to lasting transformation. That's why it's one of the primary things for you to look for in a global partner.

Reciprocal: Give and Receive

The last two qualities in a global partner are closely related. They are Partnership Pablo's two arms. One is reciprocity; the other is relationship. Let's talk about reciprocity first. This is what the Apostle Paul was referring to when he wrote to the Romans with the hope of being "mutually encouraged by each other's faith (Romans 1:12)." Like him, you should look to develop partnerships that are reciprocal, avoiding arrangements where the resources are only flowing in one direction. Instead, you want a back-and-forth, give-and-take, two-way flowing relationship.

This doesn't mean that both partners are offering the same thing to the relationship. That wouldn't be much of a partnership. If both partners had the same resources, insights, strengths and gifts to offer, then there would be no value in joining together. Healthy partners don't offer the same things to the relationship, but they do both offer something. Each partner needs to be aware of what he has to offer and be willing to offer it. This may not be intuitive, and it will probably take some time and conversation to figure out. Consequently, *both potential partners need to at least embrace the value of reciprocity*. They need to be on the same page about this concept. Early in the relationship, they may not know what they have to offer or what they need to receive. That's okay and understandable. They should, however, be open to the idea of establishing a give-and-take, reciprocal arrangement. In the course of conversation and prayer over a period of time, both partners will begin to identify resources they have that could benefit the partnership. If they've already embraced the value of reciprocity, then they will be poised to act accordingly. Like parts of a healthy body, both partners can offer something out of their excess that will contribute to something that the other partner is lacking.

Typically, we in the West are able to offer optimism, hope, creativity, and ingenuity. On the other hand, we have so much to learn from our brothers and



sisters around the world when it comes to living in community, walking by faith, offering compassion, and trusting in God's provision. As we share with each other, hear from each other, and pray for each other, our respective strengths spill over and begin to rub off on each other.

Perhaps a tangible example would be helpful. A few years ago, we collaborated with our partners in Haiti to provide a water solution for their community. Both partners (the leaders at our church and the leaders in Maliarette) had to bring something unique to the table in order to see any forward movement. Our Haitian partners had to drive the process. They needed to offer leadership and direction. This was their community and their problem. They had to develop their own solution since they knew better than us what type of water system would bring long-term benefit and sustainable development. They had to do the hard work of research, exploration, planning and budgeting. The project couldn't move forward until they proposed a detailed action plan that moved us toward a solution.

Ironically, participants from the West often want to offer a plan of action as their contribution to the partnership. We typically feel qualified to provide solutions and propose plans. Granted, our proposals may be helpful at times, but they are rarely the best things for us to offer to the partnership. It is much better for our national partners to offer the plans and proposals. The globe is smattered with examples of "solutions" that well-meaning Westerners developed, funded and implemented. The vast majority of these have failed to bring long-term, sustainable development.

So when it came to developing a solution for their water problems, our national partners in Haiti led the way. They analyzed the current realities, took stock of their assets and proposed a way forward. In the process, they recognized their need for support from outsiders. As is often the case in developing communities, the local people could offer a portion but not all of the financial capital needed to complete the project. Furthermore, since they were working against inertia and perhaps generations of inactivity, our Haitian brothers and sisters needed help building momentum and excitement. We quickly realized that those were contributions our church could offer! We could raise funds, inject excitement and kick-start the project. We began with a campaign called H2O4H (water for Haiti), which generated enough money to launch phase one of a water solution. Then, by sending short-term teams to serve alongside our partners, we were able to provide excitement in the community, creating momentum and mobilizing the members of the village to take action and continue down this path, a path that has led to clean water for the entire community!

Each partner brought a unique contribution. Both of us offered something tangible and critical to the solution. This kind of reciprocity is a beautiful thing. If you are looking for a partner, make sure before you proceed that the national leaders you are interacting with are committed to pursuing reciprocity.



Relational: In This Together

This arm is similar to the other. The first points to reciprocity; this one to relationship. Life is about relationships: God's relationship with people, their relationships with each other and our relationship with the rest of creation. Relationships are what is broken in this world, and they are what must be restored. All this to say, relationships are central to healthy global engagement. Healing *relationships* is paramount.

You need to keep that emphasis in the front of your mind as you consider possible global partners. Obviously on the front end of interactions, there is no way to know how deep and wide a relationship will become. However, you need to at least make sure that both sides are committed to building a relationship. That must be a high value, and there must be practices in place that allow you to live out this value.

When our church was looking for a partner in South Africa, we visited and interacted with several national leaders – pastors, educators and social workers. One in particular stood out because of the breadth of his work in response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. His organization had established care facilities, micro-businesses, hospice units and more. Needless to say, our team was impressed, so we started to evaluate this organization according to our partnership profile. They seemed to be operating independently, perhaps even interdependently. Their core doctrine looked to be compatible with ours. They were certainly indigenously led. I could see the potential for reciprocity in that they knew what they could provide and what they wanted us to provide. However, what they wanted us to provide let me know that they were not really interested in a relationship. Simply put, the contribution they were looking for from us was financial. Period. They simply needed more funds so they could continue to expand their work. I didn't get the sense that they had the time, energy or desire for another relationship. They weren't really looking to get to know and grow with us. Rather, they were inviting us to invest in what they were doing. That's not necessarily a bad thing. In many circumstances that would be quite appropriate. But it wasn't what we were looking for. We were looking for a relational partnership. They were looking for financial donors. I'm not sure we would have noticed that distinction had we not been intentional about including *relationships* in our partnership profile. We're looking for partners who are committed to relationships.

Let me quickly clarify one thing before moving on from this point. Don't be too quick to rule out a potential partner just because they don't provide the kinds of relationships you'd like. Often times,



when we think of global relationships, we think of personal interactions between U.S. believers and national believers around the world. In some situations, those are possible and valuable. In other scenarios, those kinds of relationships are not best. In fact, they may actually hinder some partnerships and endanger some partners.

Our friends at She is Safe (SIS) helped us understand this. SIS works to prevent, rescue, and restore women and girls from abuse and exploitation in high-risk places around the world. They are deeply committed to relationships, especially the redemptive ones that their indigenous teammates are building in the countries in which they serve. U.S. teams often want to visit these locations, but that's typically not helpful and often unwise. And even though SIS is committed to relationships, they are not willing to compromise their work around the world or jeopardize the safety of their partners in order to provide American mission teams a short-term global experience. As a result, your church may not have the chance to make the relational connections you may have had in mind. That doesn't mean SIS isn't committed to relationships. On the contrary, it is their commitment to indigenous, redemptive relationship that drives their decisions and makes them such an effective partner. Simply put, great international partners are committed to relationships: redemptive relationships in the countries in which they serve, and healthy relationships with global partners.

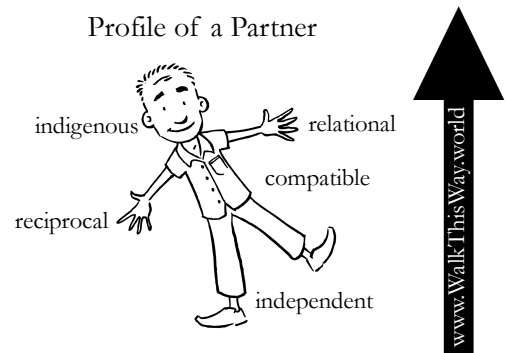
Hola Pablo

That's Pablo! He's a great global partner. He's standing on his own two feet of *independence*. At his core there's *compatibility* with who you are at your center. The face of the partnership is *indigenous*, showing the color and the culture of his national context. And he's reaching out with arms that are *relational* and *reciprocal*. That's who you're looking to partner with!

Walk This Way: With Whom?

Look for a partner who is . . .

- independent
- compatible
- indigenous
- reciprocal
- relational



Next Steps

- This profile is a portion of one chapter in *Walk This Way*. The complete chapter also contains a discussion about how to make partnership work in places “where there is no Pablo,” ie. in unreached and unengaged parts of the world.
- Check out www.WalkThisWay.world/partners for a listing of some excellent possible partners, including the **410 Bridge**, the **Global Hope Network**, the **Slavic Gospel Association**, **She Is Safe** and more.