



Common Feelings of Re-entry

Knowing what to expect goes a long way toward softening the blow of re-entry. The following are a few emotions that returning team members commonly experience.

Emotion: Isolation and loneliness- Having experienced poverty up close and personal, some team members may feel isolated upon returning home. They may feel loneliness, as if marooned on an island alienated with no one around, at least no one who views the world the same way as they do. They may find themselves withdrawing—writing letters, reading books, not socializing as they had before. One **solution** is to contact the team leader or a teammate—someone who has experienced similar feelings.

Emotion: Rebellion- Rebellion is an emotion that can create problems if left unaddressed. When team members return home and find that few of their friends and associates share their passion for the cause of poverty housing, some team member's rebel, sometimes becoming angry at those who do not empathize. They may view negatively the lifestyles and values of those who previously were their friends. These feelings must be addressed. One **solution** is to seek support from someone who has been through the stress of re-entry, someone who can empathize. A clergy member, team leader or teammate can offer that support. Often, all the stressed team member needs is a sounding board. It is okay to be angry but the feelings must pass without striking out toward others.

Emotion: Disillusionment- It is not uncommon for returning team members to experience disillusionment. They left a perfectly satisfactory world only to return seeing it through different eyes. Being immersed in a culture and setting much different from one's own can be a life-altering experience. It is not unusual for team members to begin questioning the values of their previous lifestyles. Things that once were important now have little value. **Solution:** A starting point for eliminating the disillusion is to prepare a list of what is important in one's life. The writer must be realistic and consider those things that are basic necessities and how one would live without them. The team leader, a teammate or someone who has experienced re-entry can be of great help when struggling with the disillusionment associated with returning home.

Emotion: Guilt- Upon returning home, GV team members are quick to recognize that they are living in a much better environment than the people in the country they have visited. Some withdraw, others rebel or are disillusioned, and a few experience the feeling of guilt— guilty that they have so much and so many have so little. **Solution:** The team leader should counsel those team members who return home feeling guilty. Discussing the feelings with other team members can also be helpful. It is the team leader's responsibility to advise team members of the common feelings they may experience upon returning home, and then be available to discuss those feelings with individual team members when they need an empathetic ear. Team members eventually recognize the similarities and appreciate the differences between the host country and their own culture and place in life.

Addressing Re-entry in the Field

Talking about what team members are feeling is the first step toward dealing with re-entry. Toward the end of the trip re-entry, the feelings associated with re-entry will likely become a topic at reflection gatherings and other team meetings. The subject definitely should be on the agenda for the final team meeting.

Topics to address

- Ask team members to think about their expectations for returning home.
- Share Lysgaard's graph and ideas about the stages of transition; some may recognize the stages in themselves over the course of the trip.
- Encourage team members to keep in touch with one another.
- Let them know they can call the team leader to talk.

Re-entry suggestions

The GV trip itself can alter perspective, but how the team member responds to the trip upon returning home can be life-changing. Suggest that team members try these helpful hints:

- Identify a person or group who will listen to their story.
- Build plenty of rest into their re-entry schedule.
- Expect to go through a "ow" period or a "grief" period.

Re-entry fantasies

Typically there are a number of fantasies associated with re-entry. If team members understand these fantasies, they can identify them.

- 1) I will write about everyone I meet!
 - Be realistic—If you tell someone you will write, write.
 - If you give your address to someone, expect them to write.
 - You may receive family updates, but also solicitations.
 - Be prepared for the possibility that someone may write to ask for something.
- 2) People are dying to see and hear about my trip.
 - They are—for the first five minutes.
 - Typically friends' or family members' eyes begin to glaze over when you start to ramble on about the great people you met, the work you did, the touching closing ceremony and those funny inside jokes that left you aching from laughter.
 - Prepare a specific story about a lesson learned or someone you met, and stick to it.
 - Put together the best of your favourite pictures that accurately represent your experience.
- 3) I will be glad to be home.
 - Yes, you will. But be prepared for feelings of reverse culture shock.
 - Call or e-mail team members for empathy.
 - Think about how you would like this trip to affect your daily life.
- 4) I am going to give away everything I own!
 - We have heard this before; some have done it but most only fantasize.
 - Others have made smaller positive modifications in their lives.
 - Thoughtfully consider how you would like your trip experiences to affect your life.

Many people may find it difficult to understand a team member's re-entry emotions. They have not experienced the emotion of seeing, feeling and living, however briefly, the poverty that engulfs so many and saying goodbye to new friends. However, the emotions are real and something for which returning team members must be prepared to manage. The astute team leader can help prepare his/her team members for a gentle transition back into their daily routines.

Stages of Re-entry

One helpful tool to understand people's responses to the new environment and culture is the U-curve developed by Lysgaard in 1955. It defines the four emotional stages team members may go through following a GV trip.

Fun

Immediately following the trip team members are on an emotional high. Visions of home, hot showers, and hamburgers may be unrealistically glorified, but it's HOME!

- Fascination, appreciation and excitement over home, people and their environment.
- Feelings of rejuvenation and being fulfilled by their work.
- They are in the limelight, reliving the experience through videos, slides and non-stop stories.

Flight

- Before long the high begins to wane and team members:
- Begin experiencing reverse culture shock.
- Realize that life is relatively unchanged.
- Notice that people ask sincere questions, but don't linger long enough to hear the whole story.
- Begin to distance themselves emotionally/physically.
- Become frustrated, confused or irritated.
- Daydream of host country, team and host community.
- Have trouble readjusting to the fast pace, individualism and affluence of home.
- Begin to feel disappointment.

Fight

The flight stage often is followed by the desire to lash out. Team members:

- Feel undefined anger at affluence and apathy toward the people around them.
- Return with more compassion, a more tender conscience and bigger world view.
- Feel spiritually superior.

Fit

The final stage is returning to reality, but not quite the way things were before the GV experience. Team members:

- Begin to return to tolerance, understanding and creativity.
- Realize that they have choices once the emotional high has waned.
- Determine changes they want to make and acknowledge the things they cannot change.
- Accept affluence but commit to a simpler lifestyle.
- Accept indifference but keep the fire burning by seeking ways to serve.