

Helping Without Hurting in Short-Term Missions: Leader's Guide

by Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert

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Five years after publishing their watershed book, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor . . . and Yourself*, which has become a must-read for those who serve among the impoverished, co-authors Corbett and Fikkert have now applied these principles directly to the field of short-term missions in *Helping Without Hurting in Short-Term Missions: Leader's Guide*. At the outset, the authors make it clear that this is “not an all-encompassing toolbox for running an STM program.” Rather, it is intended as a resource for short-term missionaries who will be engaged specifically with people in low-income communities, domestic or foreign.

While anyone planning to do mission work among the poor could benefit from reading this book, it is aimed at STM leaders preparing a team for such a trip. (A companion book, a “Participant’s Guide,” the text of which is included at the back of the Leader’s Guide, can also be purchased separately.) The first eight chapters of the Leader’s Guide present training material, while the final chapter offers suggestions for post-trip reflection on the experience. The book provides access to a number of excellent 20-minute online videos that include instruction by Corbett and Fikkert, vignettes, and interviews with organizations that have successfully applied the *When Helping Hurts* principles, all designed to visually demonstrate the concepts taught in each chapter.

Corbett and Fikkert do not pull any punches in the early chapters, pointing out the glaring woes of the multi-billion dollar STM industry, and describing how it often undercuts the work of the local church and local laborers, treats poor people as projects and not as fellow image-bearers of God, and can lead to a “God-complex” in those who go and dependency in those they seek to serve. The authors state that their goal is “to illustrate that the fundamental assumptions, goals, structure and methods of STMs as they exist today are setting us up to unintentionally harm materially poor communities and the ministries that work in them.”

That said, they emphasize that “trips need to be reformed, not destroyed.” They acknowledge that a short-term mission trip that has been properly constructed and oriented around the goals of learning, encouragement, and fellowship can result in healthy engagement between the team and the field.

The chapter most helpful for OPC STM teams to consider might be Chapter 4, entitled “Preparing for Complexity: Culture at Work,” in which the authors explore the different ways in which Westerners and those in other cultures approach such matters as the

concept of time, the degree of directness in interactions, and the role of self within communities.

I commend this book as a useful resource to help train STM teams and individuals, particularly those planning to work in lower-income communities and aspire to, as the book's title states, help without hurting in short-term missions.