
Adjusting to Ministry Work

These notes are written especially for those commencing MTS Training.

Ministry work is open-ended and tends to be unstructured

In ministry there is no 'clocking on and off'. When are we at work and when are we not at work? Some events are clearly work, others are not. There are work patterns but also many irregular 'divine interruptions'.

Ministry is like no other job. The closest parallel is running a family business or a farm.

- We work at home
- It involves our whole life including our family
- Our friends are our customers
- The pattern is irregular

This can lead to laziness and disorganisation or workaholism and guilt or a combination of all of these. There is no partition in life between work and ministry; hence we live an integrated lifestyle, which is a good thing. On the other hand it is oppressive because we are never free.

Some people find it very difficult while others love it. It is like moving from an urban lifestyle to a small country town, almost a fish-bowl existence.

Ministry work has less concrete achievements

This can mean low work satisfaction and motivation. We never know what (if anything) we have achieved. We are not even always sure what we are trying to achieve. There are very few concrete achievements (even leading someone to Christ is God's work, and they may fall away). We may have been more faithful in a situation where someone rejected the gospel.

Perfectionists and highly-structured people find it difficult and tend to worry about: How do I use my time? Am I doing the right thing?

There is no job description for MTS. This is partly because we are deliberately trying to train entrepreneurs. We don't want to limit trainees in what they expect to have to do, but to create an environment of trying new ideas to minister the gospel. The downside is this sense of not knowing whether we have done the job.

In ministry we have a high degree of discretionary time

All of this means we need to be self-managers and learn to use time to create ministries. For many this is a completely new way of working and takes some time to adjust.

In ministry we work when others are not

We do more work in the evenings and weekends than most people. We need to accept this lifestyle and enjoy the compensations. For example, we can take the kids to school and be home when they come home.

Working from home

There are positives – low commuting time, and negatives – a sense of isolation, distractions at home in a non-work environment, etc. We need to make rules for ourselves (e.g. TV not on while the sun is up) and exercise some discipline. Work out when it is appropriate for the kids to come into the study. It helps to talk through with our spouse patterns of being 'at work' and 'at home'. Then flexibility is needed to avoid resentment.

Working in the market place

Rather than working at home and only going out for specific appointments, we need to spend a lot of time out and about in the community we are trying to reach. This is especially true while doing MTS. Hidden away in our homes means we spend most of our time at the desk rather than with people. So for campus Trainees, spend most of the day at Uni, parked in a cafeteria, alternating between preparation, appointments and unplanned time with people as they come by. For church-based Trainees, maybe try shopping centres or the city, where our church members pass by or at least are accessible.

Work and Rest

We need to learn how to work faithfully and honestly without going on a guilt trip when we need to take time off for normal living. The problem is that we could become very lazy or too busy. Most MTS Trainees are not lazy so rest needs to be stressed generally. Hence:

- Work six days, and rest one.
- You need 36 contiguous hours (i.e. two nights and a complete dawn-to-dusk day) as your day off. This means not 24 separate hours scattered through the week.
- If we don't have a rest day, we will burn out in a few years because it is affecting us now.
- Part time staff need more flexibility. The stress of work combined with ministry creates more pressure.
- Make sure that you are not seen as a workaholic. Do not be guilty about relaxing and enjoying life and let others know you rest and recreate.
- If possible keep one day a week (besides your day off) without regular commitments, as an alternative day off after weekend house parties etc. Your spouse won't have the same flexibility, so you can't do it regularly.
- There can be conflict between spouses as to how to spend your rest days. If the husband is in ministry and his wife at work, usually the wife wants to socialise, and the husband wants to avoid people. Therefore you need to compromise. Think about who you can see – some people will be 'work' and some will not.

Holidays

- Plan 4 weeks for full-time and 5 weeks for part time because of the flexibility needed to fit ministry holidays around their paid work.
- Female Trainees also need 5 weeks because of the stress levels they experience in ministry.
- There are key times in the ministry year to avoid holidays.

Relating to others about our work patterns

When talking to congregation members, we need to be careful about the impression we give about how hard we work. We could give the impression that we work too hard or that we are lazy. We need to be careful about talking about how we spend our time because it is hard for others to relate to our work-lifestyle. Much of what we do doesn't sound like work. Also, we should be careful not to be insensitive about how hard other people are working.

Diary

We cannot do any kind of Christian ministry without a diary. Buy one, write in it and read it! We need to be organised, so we need a system that works for us.

Ministry as a Christian and work as a staff member

We need to remember the distinction between our ministry as a Christian and our work – as a Christian. Some ministries are just because we are Christian, not because we are employed in ministry. Hence there will always be more ministry to do than we can get to.

Rhythm of Life

You need to get a feel for the rhythm of life on MTS. This example is from the UNSW Team.

January	slower prepare studies and training courses and organise the year
Feb - Easter	flat out set up and start running lots of groups in that time many newcomers to campus and church don't pack Easter full of activities but take time to relax
Easter-June	hard work meeting with individuals and groups inviting to midyear conference (MYC)

June- MYC	a bit slower preparation for MYC phone calls to financial partners and other follow up plan a short holiday MYC is exhausting and then session 2 starts
MYC- September	long grind up to midsession break at the end of September Invites to Club 5
October-early November	need to keep chasing people many become Christians during this time
Nov-Dec	there is still almost two months left in the year– make the most of the time

Part-Time MTS

Most part-time trainees do paid work for 2-3 days to fund the training. It is always more demanding doing two part-time jobs and especially when one of them is open-ended, like ministry. Watch the stress levels. Try and avoid other stresses in life if you can – MTS is stressful enough.

- Choose paid work that is not too stressful, given the demands of people ministry
- Part timers can only do about 1/3 of the work load of full-timers. Hence, you must be realistic about how much you can do
- Part timers have problems because their other job means they don't have the same flexibility as full-timers. If a house party takes up your day off, you can't have another day off. This may mean that there are some house parties you just have to miss or cancel some regular appointments so you can go to the house party.
- Full-time trainees need to protect the part-timers and not have unrealistic expectations. Part-timers are working harder and are usually under more financial stress
- Holidays are tricky. Take 5 weeks annually off ministry and get as much leave from the paid job as possible. If you're doing ministry during your paid work annual leave you can't have a proper holiday.
- Be diligent in taking one day off each week.
- Flat mates and home structures can be stressful. Don't choose flat mates who rely and depend on you. You need to have a home life where you can relax and recover.
- Live as close as possible to work and your ministry centre so you aren't travelling far.