

# CHICKS AND TRANSCULTURAL MINISTRY TRAINING

A True Story

Dan Woodard



## What were we thinking?

Well, we just wanted to farm!

It all started when our family moved out of town to the country. On our one-acre of property was a farmhouse and two-story barn, both built in 1812. Though I was only ten years old I sensed the more we kids looked over what our parents had just bought, the future of farming belonged to us!

We decided to start small. We placed an order for fifty Rhode Island Red baby chicks from the Sears catalog. The day soon arrived when Mr. Rogers, our faithful postman, drove up to the mailbox at the end of our long driveway, got out of his car and carefully laid the package of chirping chicks at the base of the pole holding up the mailbox.

We kids raced out to the end of the driveway to find a large flat box with numerous breathing holes. The chirping we heard coming from inside sounded like an urgent chorus, "Let us out! Let us out!"

Carefully we carried the bulky box to the freshly prepared chicken coop in the upper part of the barn. In the previous days we kids had done everything necessary to ensure these chicks would love their new home . . . plenty of chicken feed in the homemade trough, a sophisticated water system, a couple of heat bulbs, and ample straw to help them feel just comfy. And not a cobweb in sight.

We opened the box to find this family of baby chicks so glad to meet us! The feeling was mutual! They were helping us launch our "Family Farm." We began naming them; the biggest one we named Peeper.

After a few weeks of the best of care, to our utter dismay, one of our growing chicks died. Well that was strange! The next morning another one was lifeless. Then another one the next morning. Must be something in the air, we first thought. Or perhaps something in the feed. Maybe it was Sears . . . they sent a batch of chicks with a short lifespan. Why didn't Sears send us an instruction manual on how to raise chicks? Well, they knew it wasn't that difficult. At supper time I started the traditional daily chicken report: "We have 32 chicks left."

“Only 11 chicks left.” To our astonishment, forty-eight of these birds died in a few weeks. We felt helpless to halt whatever was taking their lives, but, hey, maybe we’d do better next year.



Spring came, leaving us only two chicks which were now maturing red-feathered hens. On a whim one day after school we thought we would let these hens out of the coop and take them for a stroll down our driveway. It didn’t take long for something very strange to happen. These two hens started pecking at the driveway gravel. Hey, wait! They were actually eating stones! Oh, no! Now our two surviving hens were going to die too. From eating stones! Why on earth would they do such a thing as eat rock???

A week later, I stood with Dad and my brother while Dad told this puzzling story to our neighbor Tom. After listening intently to Dad explain this riveting story of chicks dying and hens eating stones, Tom asked the most obvious question. “Did you give your chicks any crushed grit?” “What’s that?” “Well, chickens’ stomachs work different than humans. They have no way of digesting their food without grit.”

Years later my reflections on this event gripped me in a new way . . .

*If God had providentially placed us on a farm and wired us with a passion to farm, why didn’t farming simply come to us naturally?*

*Why didn’t we ask ourselves more questions when these chicks kept dying off?*

*Surrounded by experienced farmers as friendly neighbors, why didn’t we think of asking them for their perspective or advice earlier in the journey?*

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## UNCONSCIOUS INCOMPETENCE



When we read this story of these chicks, we immediately think of our years of serving in a First Nations community in central Canada. Having graduated from Bible college and joined a reputable mission agency, we believed we were well prepared to have a fruitful ministry.

We drove up to the reserve once a week for eight years, spending quality time with the children, youth and adults. In time we organized a nice program and Bible study. The people loved us, and we loved them. We did the very best we could, following ministry principles we’d grown up with and learned from college.



With much of our focus on the people we were getting to know, we were out of touch with . . . *corrosion*. Like rust eats away at a car, we began to notice something wasn’t working right with our mission team. *What are we missing?* Ministry was fulfilling in many ways, but if we were going to stay in ministry we needed to figure out why our peer relationships were dying! Surely this wasn’t normal!

In our desperation, we listened to friends describe a training program called MDP. Well, we’d been in cross-cultural ministry for years; surely MDP couldn’t teach us that much. To make a long story short, we signed up for MDP. It only took a few days before we realized we had invested eight years of our lives in unconscious incompetence. Wow! Did the lights start coming on, not just with cross-cultural principles but about healthy team relationships! We had had all the symbols of being productive in ministry while using the wrong measuring stick. We had been an island to ourselves, heading up everything. We had never considered what it would take to keep things going if we were to ever leave. We needed major growth if we were to continue in ministry. MDP called us to “do a 180” and pointed the direction!

God used our earlier experiences to give us a big hook to hang this new training on. We gained team relational skills we didn’t know we’d needed earlier, plus a whole lot more! MDP set us on a learning-curve journey that continues to this day!

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