High-Security Communication

1. It's more important to protect people than to publicize what they are doing. If in doubt, err on the side of more security rather than less. Don't publicize news about individuals in risky situations without asking their permission.

2. If a third party tells you about a story, clear everything with the actual people involved in the story.

3. In general, let local people set the security standards. The exception is when the person in the local setting doesn't know the danger that might face him or her. In cases like this, let a person with regional expertise set higher security protections.

4. Even while upholding these principles, there is almost no story we can't tell. We just have to obscure more and more facts depending on the security level. We can even tell a story about church planting in a Middle Eastern country, but we have to be very careful about how we tell it. We can also offer ways for readers to respond to such stories, but again we have to be careful about how we do this (such as using an alias email address).

5. Here are several aspects of a story that can be hidden or changed. I've arranged these in order from less security to most security:

--The name of the city or town where the story takes place

--The name of the YWAMer involved in the story

--The names of local people involved

--Details about the people involved if those details alone could identify the person. For example, I did a story on a Venezuelan man who was working in a North African country in refrigeration technology. I couldn't mention his citizenship or his business because either one of those details could lead authorities to him. There were very few Venezuelans in his country. Even if the fact might not identify a specific YWAMer but could identify the missionaries in the nation in general, avoid that fact. For example, if most of the missionaries teach English, just call the person in the story a "teacher."

--The name of the country involved. In high security countries, we can use the name of the region. Say "a country in the Middle East."

6. Aside from these issues, take care with any political statements in the story. If we mention the country's name, and if we have people working in the country, we want to write about the country in a positive way. We don't want to lie, but we just want to avoid the negative as much as possible. The reason is that the country's political leaders may already know that YWAMers are working in the nation. They tolerate them as long as the YWAMers aren't seen as too much of a threat. They may also monitor YWAM communication regarding their nation. So we don't want to sour the environment for our YWAMers. In general, with any nation, edit out negative comments about countries and avoid getting into negative political statements.

7. Let local people check the story before publishing. Sometimes even when we have the best intentions, we include a fact in the story that could be dangerous. If we make a point of having the local people check the article, it protects us. We can give them a deadline for their approval so we don't have to hold up production too much. As the deadline approaches, remind them repeatedly, because we do not want to publish a story that is potentially risky without express permission. In one article we published, for example, we left in a web address that should never have been published in a Christian magazine. As the editor, I assumed the writer had checked this fact and the writer assumed I would check. By not checking, we endangered a ministry.

Be diplomatic. Local people have a lot to lose if their stories get told in the wrong way. Don't scare them by approaching them carelessly. From the very beginning, stress the steps you can take as a communicator to tell the story safely. Also promise them you'll let them check the story before it gets published (and then make sure you keep your promise!).

9. Use sensitive language when contacting workers in risky situations. Part of being diplomatic means to use careful language. Even if you think the worker's email address might be encrypted, still take these precautions. Don't use "YWAM" (use "Y-Co" or "our company"), "Christian," "Muslim," "evangelize," "church," "conversion," "warfare," etc. See below for a list of possible alternatives. And don't use an email address that says "YWAM" in the address. If your normal email uses "YWAM" or something obviously evangelical in the address or user name, set up a Gmail or Yahoo account that you can use to communicate with people in secure locations. If you take care with your language, you will both protect the worker and you will show that you care about security.

Possible alternative words to use:

YWAM	Y-Co
God	Father
Prayer	Talking to Father
Christian	C'n
Christianity	C'ty
Muslim	M'lm
Missionary	Worker
YWAMer	Worker with our company

If you're going to travel through high-security countries with your laptop, make sure to delete or encrypt sensitive information. If your laptop or phone has names and places that would get workers in serious trouble, think about what would happen if officials from that country confiscated your phone or computer. Then take some precautions.

--Bryan Bishop