

# Faithful Calling: Stay-Go Decisions and the Challenge of Duty of Care

The challenges and opportunities of personal calling in stay-go decision making and duty of care decisions for Great Commission organizations.



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I had an excellent question concerning duty of care and stay-go decision making from a missionary organization recently. This was a timely question with all that is going on around the world today. Most of all, the answer to this question influences more than just the organization's security and crisis management programming; it also influences the organization's legal and ethical duty of care.

### Duty of Care Definition

Duty of care is a legal obligation to take reasonable steps to prevent foreseeable harm to another person. With mission

agencies, it can include fiduciary duties that include responsibilities to make sound safety and security decisions on behalf of field personnel. At minimum, a duty of care for an organization includes a "duty to warn" their personnel of the realistic consequences surrounding their actions. A duty of care also warns personnel of new threats and/or changing threats to which that an individual might be exposed and vulnerable.

### The Role of Security Risk Management in Duty of Care

The intent of both security risk

and crisis management programming within an organization's duty of care is to limit either the likelihood of an incident happening or mitigate the impact an incident can have on the organization and its people.

Security risk management is the management of both security and risk. On the risk side, Great Commission organizations understand that risk is inseparable from spiritual obedience and mission fulfillment. Understanding risk in its various forms can help leaders understand the opportunities as well as the consequences involved with fulfilling the mission of the organization.

The process of risk management requires identifying and analyzing risk and deciding what steps to take to mitigate or eliminate those risks in organization programming. This can include addressing the **likelihood** of risks impacting the organization and taking steps to mitigate the **impact** of risks upon the organization.

The security side of security risk management typically involves programs intended to **decrease the likelihood** of an incident, which typically means decreasing the vulnerability of the organization and its personnel to threats on the field. Reducing vulnerability to threats on the field is often accomplished through security training, risk assessments, etc.

But some risks are inherent and



cannot be avoided if the organization is going to operate in a certain area. These can include (but are not limited to): car accidents, illness, and natural events (for example, floods, fires, etc.) to name a few. In these cases organizations seek to **decrease the impact** a risk has on the organization. One way this is accomplished is by externally transferring risks from one party to another. This includes transferring financial risks via health insurance, medical and evacuation insurance, ransom insurance, etc. Internally, organizations mitigate the impact of risk on the organization through contingency planning, crisis management planning, and other critical management planning.

### Calling and Its Impact on Duty of Care

Organizational leaders must take into consideration how the calling of their personnel impacts the organization's duty of care in risk decisions. Calling can have a substantially different influence on risk decisions made by faith-based organizations whose field personnel raise their financial support versus being paid a salary by the organization. In organizations where staff raise their financial support, the spiritual calling of field personnel often has significant impact on risk decision making. Some of the hardest conversations between organizational leaders and field

personnel requires reconciling risk and the call to stay or go. These intricacies can make duty of care decisions even more complex for organizational leaders and the field staff who fulfill the organization's mission on the ground. I have personally consulted with faith-based

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organizations where risk decision making in stay-go decisions varied broadly between organizations facing the same threats in the same country. For one organization, the headquarters may give a direct order to depart and compliance is mandatory. In other organizations, that same stay-go decision making process is more akin to a negotiation between leaders and field staff instead of giving direct orders and expecting

compliance.

### Highlighting the Process

It is crucial to highlight how the stay-go decision making process **generally** works for Great Commission organizations. I say generally because there is no singular decision making process used by all organizations.

What typically happens when an assessed negative consequence of a potential incident exceeds the risk capacity of an organization? In stay-go decision making, if leaders determine that the consequences of succumbing to a risk create a greater burden on the organization than failure to complete the organization's mission, then issuing a departure order is a prudent decision. However, if individual field personnel feel "called" to stay in spite of the leadership's desire for field team members to depart, then organization leaders have two basic options: "evacuate or terminate," or "re-negotiate."

#### Evacuate or Terminate

This requires field personnel compliance. They must agree to evacuate or face termination.







Thus, the termination event would legally and ethically end the organization's duty of care toward the individual who chooses to stay.

### **Re-Negotiate**

In light of potential consequences that extend beyond the organization's risk capacity, leaders must come to a new agreement for duty of care with the individual(s) choosing to stay. That new duty of care must outline what the organization is willing (or not willing) to do in the event the individual(s) is impacted by, or succumbs to, the new risks ("If you stay, we can neither take responsibility for your safety nor assume responsibility for your evacuation, etc."). In these cases, it is highly recommended that field personnel remaining on location be required to sign some sort of indemnification or hold harmless agreement (HHA) releasing the organization from responsibility for damages, injuries, or financial losses.

### **Calling, Duty of Care, and Avoiding Negligence**

When it comes to duty of care, what organizational leaders are trying to demonstrate is twofold. First, as followers of Jesus, organizational leaders are demonstrating the second greatest commandment, "love your neighbor as yourself"

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(Mark 12:31). Secondly, as part of that act of love, leaders are seeking to demonstrate competence in risk decisions while avoiding negligence. Leaders should endeavor to establish a competency in decision making that a

reasonable person such as a judge, jury, or key stakeholders would say constituted responsible decision making on behalf of the organization. This is especially true when making decisions that allow field personnel to remain in locations or circumstances with quickly increasing risk factors. The goal then is to demonstrate that the duty of care decision in choosing to stay did not constitute negligence on the part of the organization.

This kind of decision making happens more often than one might believe. Recent examples where I have consulted organizations wanting their personnel to depart but individuals on the field strongly desired to stay include Afghanistan in 2021, Ukraine and Guatemala in 2022, Sudan, Israel, and Lebanon in 2023, and Ecuador, Haiti, and Lebanon (again) in 2024.

In the cases where field personnel chose to stay and were not terminated, organization leaders, in most cases, agreed to adjust the organization's duty of care toward the individuals in question, or created a solution where their termination would be conducted over a longer period of time with no additional support provided outside of collecting donated funds for the worker. I can say that in many of these cases the calling of the individual was cited as a justification to stay. But this would also include cases where individual missionaries

disagreed with the security assessment of the organization as to the level of risk and offered an alternative assessment of the risks in order to justify staying.

## The Importance of the Theologies of Risk and Suffering In Duty of Care

The theologies of risk and suffering can play a vital role in a Great Commission organization's risk decision making. A mature theology of risk/suffering should encourage the assessment of risk on the mission field. Optimally, this practice would require both leaders and field personnel to not only be able to articulate, but also document their theologies of risk and suffering.

To over-simplify definitions for the purposes of this document, a theology of risk answers the question, "What am I willing to risk (or how will I act/react) in order to accomplish the mission?" A theology of suffering differs from a theology of risk by answering the question: "What am I willing to endure in fulfillment of the mission?"

On the field, I have found that individuals who can articulate their personal theology of risk (good), or have written out their theology of risk (better) often process stay-go decisions more effectively because they have processed ahead of time what they are, and are not, willing to risk. That said, organizations with a theology of risk **document** that considers the mission and vision of the

organization in risk decisions have a valuable tool to help both leaders and field personnel reconcile their calling and risk taking to the expectations of the organization. That kind of organizational document can

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reduce stress and minimize damaging conflict, so that risk decisions are more effectively and efficiently discussed with a common framework for decision making. This is paramount because both personal and corporate theology of risk documents are tangible tools

that can help reconcile a person's calling to their desire for risk taking, as well as measure the potential consequences. I also find that having a documented theology of risk/suffering helps with rational decision making. A documented theology of risk makes risk decisions, including stay-go decisions, easier for all involved as leadership and field staff answer the question together: "What's worth risking and why?"

## The Importance of Policy to Guide Risk Decision Making

When it comes to risk decisions in incident response (including stay-go decisions), having policies in place to both educate and guide decision making **before** a critical incident happens is beneficial. Having policies in place that organization leaders can use to inform and guide their decisions helps streamline the decision making process. Likewise, field personnel can





use those same policies to reflect on the calling the Lord has given them, resting their expectations and willingness to risk on the policy guidance and resulting expectations of organization leaders.

It cannot be understated how important pre-processing of decision making **before** a critical incident can be. This includes implementing thresholds for departure and benchmarks for return as well as being able to processes one's own theologies of risk and suffering against their calling as well as the organization's documented theology of risk that undergirds policy decisions.

When these steps are taken (policy implementation supported by a documented theology of risk), both leadership and field personnel can avoid confrontation and

other friction often associated with risk decisions. Instead, when a critical event begins requiring critical risk decision making, the values of risk are already agreed to and the debate settled as to the discussion of choosing to stay or leave. This, in turn, allow the organization to avoid a secondary crisis leading to dysfunction in the organization including broken relationships and lack of trust between the organization headquarters and field personnel.

It is good to remember that part of the risk management process is finding opportunities in risk. Sometimes those opportunities can include strengthening relationships and trust in the midst of crisis by managing well risk decisions and expectation management.

## Conclusion

The reality is that the world is a complex and often uncertain and dangerous place. This makes risk decisions for organizations challenging, especially when the threat landscape is quickly shifting and the consequences for mistakes become costly on many levels. Making these decisions is not easy and the stress involved with stay-go decision making can be overwhelming.

When leaders factor a field worker's calling into the stay-go decision making process, it is wise to consider how to integrate both a theology of risk and a theology of suffering into the synthesization process for risk decision making. In so doing, risk decisions can be better framed as an act of worship when engaging in rational decision making,



especially during highly emotional times of challenge and stress.

To help streamline risk decisions, having policies in place to both educate and guide decision making before a critical incident happens is beneficial. Likewise, field personnel can use those same policies to reflect on the calling the Lord has given them, resting their expectations and willingness to risk on the policy guidance and resulting expectations of organization leaders.

As I have said in other articles I have penned I would encourage each of us to draw comfort from the fact that the Lord is SOVEREIGN in our decisions and despite our decisions and He LOVES us unconditionally. While this does not absolve us of responsibility in decision making, we must remember who we are and why we are doing what we are doing in the nations in the first place. Therefore, allow the same values that led to your calling to go to the nations reinforce your priorities and steps with risk decisions along the path.

## **Resources:**

Concilium offers a considerable number of helpful free resources on our website:

<https://concilium.us/resources/>

### ***Love, Joy, Fulfillment, and the Mandate of Gospel Security Management***

<https://concilium.us/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Love-Joy-Fulfillment-and-the-Mandate-of-Gospel-Security-Management.pdf>

### ***Personal Stay-Go Assessment***

<https://concilium.us/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Individual-Stay-Go-Assessment-07-2021.pdf>

### ***Choosing to Stay***

<https://concilium.us/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Choosing-To-Stay-01-2022.pdf>

### ***Thresholds for Departure; Benchmarks for Return***

<https://concilium.us/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Thresholds-for-Departure-Benchmarks-for-Return-12-2021.pdf>

### ***Risk Tolerance, Risk Capacity, and the Sacred Work of the Kingdom Security Professional***

<https://concilium.us/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Risk-Tolerance-Risk-Capacity-and-the-Sacred-Work-of-the-Kingdom-Security-Professional-1.pdf>

## **Resources Recommended from Anna Hampton for Developing Theologies of Risk and Suffering:**

### ***Facing Danger: A Guide Through Risk***

<https://a.co/d/041lGkZC>

### ***Facing Fear: The Journey to Mature Courage in Risk and Persecution***

<https://www.amazon.com/Facing-Fear-Journey-Courage-Persecution-ebook/dp/B0C22WR3LV>

### **TOR**

<https://www.theologyofrisk.com>

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“The objective of security risk management is not to remove risk from the equation of Great Commission obedience. Instead, the objective of security risk management is to remove uncertainty from the decision making process toward Kingdom advance.”

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