

# Practical Ministry Skills:

# Leading 101



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## How to Use This Resource

*Take a quick peek here to maximize the content in this training download.*

When it comes to being a small-group leader, it's easy to feel overwhelmed—with leading meetings, handling difficult group members, and apprenticing new leaders, among other things. That's why we've collected some of our best articles on leading all in one place. Welcome to Leading 101! You'll find these articles practical, doable, and informative. Let them serve as your base for leading well.

### Prepare for the Meeting

These articles will help you prepare for your next meeting. Peri Gilbert gives you the blueprint for all small-group meetings, while Joel Comiskey helps you prepare for it. Then Rick Lowry helps you create questions for excellent discussion. Lastly, Jim Egli explains why planning simply isn't enough—leaders must have an active prayer life if they're going to lead growing groups.

### Lead the Meeting

In this section you'll find articles that help you fulfill your role: facilitating discussion, troubleshooting group dynamics, and apprenticing new leaders. For help welcoming new members into an existing group, don't miss "Come On In!" Plus, Tony Escobar tells you how to take your group members to the next level spiritually.

—AMY JACKSON is Associate Editor of SmallGroups.com.

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## **The Blueprint for Effective Small-Group Meetings**

*Include these elements to lead meaningful meetings.*

By Peri Gilbert

When architects craft their design, they consider their clients, take into account the location of the project, and seek the right result: a positive response from clients and their audience. Isn't the same true for our small groups? In order for us to "design" our small group well, we must implement some basic elements that consider our members, take into account where they are spiritually, and seek out the result of personal and spiritual growth. Only when we consider these things will our meeting time be effective and influential in members' lives. Let's look at the blueprint for good small-group meetings.

### **A Warm Welcome**

We need to remember that some of our members are taking the proverbial "leap of faith" simply by attending the meeting. Our initial response to their arrival is important. Put their fears to rest by answering the door with a smile. Introduce yourself right away and help them feel welcome. Then take the time to introduce them to others in the small group. Even these simple tactics let newcomers know we are engaged with them and want to get to know them.

### **The Munchies**

All small-group meetings should offer a snack and drink. There is natural bonding that occurs over chocolate chip cookies and sweet tea. The casual conversation that occurs breaks down fears for the newcomer. It also enhances relationships that are currently in place, allowing members to talk about general life stuff. Whether or not there are new members, a simple snack and drink can allow for great discussion and opportunities to get to know one another.

### **Start Strong**

Once people have had the opportunity to mingle, mobilize the group and begin the discussion time. Start with something that will connect group members to the main idea of the lesson—like a simple icebreaker question or activity. This component is essential and can be fun.

For instance, you can play [Minute to Win It games](#). One of the games is "Stack the Apples." Divide the group into two teams. Provide each team with five apples. Choose one person from each group to be the "stacker." The goal is to stack the apples (without altering the apples in any way) on top of one another in one minute. Once the apples are stacked, they must remain in place for ten seconds (yes, this can be done). Give the winning team a silly, inexpensive prize if you wish. This type of activity allows members to get to know each other in a fun way and also allows you to relate the importance of team work, relationships, and the power of laughter.

In lieu of a game, throw out a question that will spark discussion related to the lesson. And always strive for icebreaker questions that encourage members to share personal experiences. Here are some prompts I have used:

- Tell the story behind your worst physical scar.
- Give instructions on how to get out of a speeding ticket.
- If you could go back to any age, which would you choose and why?
- If you could be any Disney character, which would you choose and why?

These questions may seem silly, but they connect members to the topic and to one another. These questions can also help you know where your members are spiritually and personally.

### **The Lift**

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While everything has been fun and easygoing during the snacks and icebreakers, remember the necessity of lifting up one another in prayer. Beginning and ending the small-group time with prayer invites God's presence and truth to be evident. David's words in Psalm 5:3 perfectly state what we desire for our small groups: "In the morning, LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait expectantly." When we show the value of prayer within our group, we allow members to know they are valued not only by us but also by God.

### Connect the Dots

You want to know your members have "connected the dots" and are able to apply the lesson. Use application questions to do this. For instance, if your lesson is on forgiveness, ask members questions like:

- When have you struggled with forgiveness?
- How has not forgiving someone affected you?
- How can you apply what you've learned about forgiveness today to a current situation?

You can also use scales to help group members evaluate themselves. Here is an example:

#### It is easy for me to forgive

Never	Sometimes	Most of the Time	Always
0	1	2	3

After group members rate themselves, have them elaborate on why they rated themselves as they did and then talk about any improvements or changes they'd like to make.

Application questions allow members to synthesize the information learned into their current life situation. Hearing their answers allows you to know how to communicate God's truth to them and how to pray for them.

### Hold On Loosely

Another key to the blueprint of your small group is flexibility and vulnerability. To reach and touch others, we must be willing to be flexible and vulnerable.

When I was first introduced to small groups four years ago, I had just cut all ties with my current friends and lifestyle; I had no one. I was dealing with so much guilt and heartache, and I brought that with me everywhere I went—including my small group. I remember an instance where I had a really lonely week. The small-group leaders asked if there was any way they could pray for us, and I shared my heartache. Then two other group members shared that they struggled with the same things. I will never forget that moment because the leaders did not stop us from talking; they encouraged it. We skipped the lesson that night because the leaders knew it was more important to address our needs. The leaders were flexible with the schedule, and they even shared vulnerably about their own struggles with loneliness. I knew they cared about me and really wanted to help me through this season in my life.

As a small-group leader, this blueprint will help you design your group to be the most effective and influential it can be. Then, take into account your group members and their needs as you plan the specifics for your meeting. But don't forget to remain flexible. Prepare ahead of time, *and* remain open for the Spirit's direction.

—PERI GILBERT is the Small-Group Coordinator at The Simple Church in Bossier City, Louisiana; copyright 2012 by Christianity Today.

### Discuss

1. What ideas do you have for a strong start to your next meeting?
2. Think of three ways to pray with your group at your next meeting. Which one fits best with your lesson?
3. Do you consider yourself flexible? Why or why not? How can you work toward being a more flexible small-group leader?

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## How to Prepare for Small-Group Meetings

*Four keys to successful meetings*

By Joel Comiskey

When I led my first small group in 1975, I made sure I didn't prepare for the meeting. Why? I felt it was more spiritual to simply open my mouth and allow God to fill it. Preparation, I thought, was too "human-oriented" and didn't depend on God enough. Graciously, I soon realized that preparation wasn't a bad thing; in fact, plans and preparation are biblical principles. The Bible is filled with verses like Proverbs 21:5: "The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty."

The best small-group leaders prepare and plan for small-group meetings. The prepared leader has more confidence and a better chance of successfully leading the small group. Here are a few planning tips.

### Form a Team

Consider having a leadership team: a core group of people in your small group willing to help out with meeting responsibilities. This may include the host, the person who leads worship, or the person who creates the snack schedule. Jesus had a core team of three from among the Twelve, and he often assigned responsibilities to them and shared more intimate details about his ministry with them. Michael Mack talks a lot about Christ's team of three in his book, [The Pocket Guide to Burn-Out Free Small Group Leadership](#)—a book I highly recommend. Like Mack, I believe each small group should develop a team to share the load.

I studied one church who asks all small groups to form a planning team that meets three or four days before the actual small-group meeting. At the planning meeting, the team prays and analyzes the previous meeting. Then the leader gives specific assignments. One is asked to call an absentee member, another is assigned to lead worship, another commits to invite a non-Christian, and another offers to bring refreshments.

I don't recommend a weekly small-group planning meeting in the Western world because of time constraints. I do, however, encourage groups to form a planning team that regularly communicates and shares the load. I even encourage leaders to sometimes delegate the actual lesson to members of the planning team. After all, a key small-group purpose is involvement. If it goes well, you can apprentice this budding leader and eventually leave the leadership to him or her. Then you'll be free to start another group or coach the new leader.

### Prepare the Lesson

My general rule is that leaders should talk no more than 30 percent of the time. This means that 70 percent of the time is left open for other small-group members to speak. Your main role is facilitating discussion, not teaching. Great leaders excel at facilitation. To get others to talk, however, requires preparation and planning.

Although the lesson will mostly revolve around good discussion questions, the members must understand the general context of the Bible passage in order to answer the questions. I recommend initiating the lesson by explaining the general context and meaning of the Bible passage. You can also use closed observation questions.

If you lead a sermon-based group, you'll need to diligently go over the verses, remembering the key points from the message. I find it helpful to not mention the sermon, though. Rather, dig into the passage and remind others that the Bible is the foundation for all we say and do.

If you are following other lesson material, you'll need to dig deep into the Scripture or topics you're discussing prior to your meeting. Have an idea of what you want to cover, what questions may arise, and where your church or denomination stands on the key topics.

Whether you create your own questions, receive questions from your church, or use questions from the study you're using, you will need to contextualize and personalize the questions to meet the needs of your group. Be ruthless in adapting the questions to the needs of those present. You probably won't have to change the

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observation questions much because they simply draw out what God's Word says. The application questions, however, are supposed to help people apply God's Word to their own lives. Application questions prepared by others should be tweaked to meet the needs of your own group members.

As you review the questions, ask yourself whether they are open-ended enough. Will they get the group members talking? A good test is to consider how you would respond to the questions. Would you feel stimulated to talk? If not, change the question so it fits your group. For example, if you are covering John 3:16 and one of the questions says, "Why do people need to know God's love?" perhaps you could tweak it to say, "Share a time recently when you experienced God's love." Or if you know non-Christians will be present, you could say, "Share the first time you experienced God's love in your life" (this question might allow a non-Christian to reveal that he or she has not yet experienced God's love).

Another common problem with prepared curriculum is too many questions. I think five to seven questions are sufficient. Even then, if the group starts going deeper into one or two, don't feel like you have to finish all the questions. Leave group members with a hunger for more. I also think it's important to set aside time for prayer after the lesson, so it's best to reach a crescendo of sharing that naturally leads to deep praying.

### Set the Atmosphere

Many small groups meet in the home of the leader. Others designate a host who is not the small-group leader. Still others choose to rotate among group members, so that more people can serve as hosts. Regardless of where you're meeting, it's important to prepare the atmosphere. If the meeting is in someone else's home, this might mean that you will need to talk with the host in advance.

### Seating

Arrange the seating so each person can see every other person in the group. A circle is the best choice. As the leader, place your chair on the same level as the rest of those in the group—neither as the focal point nor in the background. If your home is spacious, move the chairs into a close circle, thus occupying only a portion of the room. When people are spread far apart, it's harder to openly share thoughts and feelings.

Some people feel intimidated about opening their homes because they're not as large or luxurious as those of other church members. Don't listen to this argument. Actually, a small apartment or home generates warmth and closeness and reminds the group that they eventually will need to multiply.

### Refreshments

Refreshment time isn't something simply tacked onto small-group ministry; it's a vital part. The refreshment time is often the best moment to ask personal questions, get to know one another on a deeper level, or set a fun and relaxed mood.

If the host home is always providing the refreshments, ask the host if it's becoming a burden and whether it would be good to find someone else to provide refreshments. Or, you could assign someone on your planning team to take care of the refreshment schedule. This gets other group members involved, and they begin to feel more ownership for the group.

### Distractions

Turn off telephone ringers and mute the volume on your answering machine. Put pets in another room or outside. Turn off TV sets, radios, and computers during a meeting. Don't let distraction get in the way of community. Make sure each member can concentrate on the other people present.

### Time

If someone other than yourself is hosting the group, arrive 10 minutes early to make sure everything is ready to start. If you begin on time regardless of latecomers, you're sending the signal that every part of the meeting is important.

Additionally, make sure you close on time. I like small-group meetings to last about an hour and a half. Members have a lot of responsibilities, and they might think twice about attending the next week if the meeting goes too long.

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### Other Details

- Make sure the guest bathroom is clean before the group begins. Is there toilet paper, soap, a towel?
- The temperature in the home increases as more people pack into a room. Members can become agitated and uncomfortable if there is a lack of fresh, cool air. Be sensitive to the needs of those in the room.
- The lighting should be bright enough for everyone to read, but low enough to feel cozy. If it's too dark, people will have a harder time following along in their Bibles or on handouts.

### Connect with God

Take the time to prepare your heart before God, asking him to fill you with the Spirit. Many unexpected things can happen in the course of a normal small group. You will need to hear God's voice and follow his direction. In order to hear his voice, you'll need to spend regular time with him. We read in Luke 5:16 that Jesus made it a priority to spend time alone with his Father: "Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed." If Jesus prioritized time with the Father, shouldn't we?

As you are filled with the Spirit and guided by him, you will increase your effectiveness as a small-group leader, and others will be impacted by Christ's life in you. They will leave the group transformed, ready to practice what they've learned during the week and excited about coming back next week.

—JOEL COMISKEY is founder of the [Joel Comiskey Group](#) and author of numerous books, including [The Relational Disciple](#); copyright 2012 by Christianity Today.

### Discuss

1. Do you have a team of people that help you lead your group? How can you empower some of your group members to take a more active role in leading the meeting?
2. How much time do you spend preparing the atmosphere for a meeting? Why is this so important?
3. One of the most important things you can do for your group is to cultivate a thriving relationship with God. How would you rate your current relationship with God? What steps can you take this week to grow that relationship?

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## Questions that Spark Discussion

*Eight helpful tips for those who write their own questions*

By Rick Lowry

Knowing how to ask good questions is one of the key elements of a successful small group. Questions are what transform a small-group lesson from a lecture into an interactive experience—which should be our goal as group leaders.

I began to give serious thought to this subject a number of years ago after reading Karen Lee-Thorp's [How to Ask Great Questions](#). The book inspired me to follow these eight guidelines when writing and asking good questions, and they have served me well.

### 1. Good Questions Create a Conversation

And they create those conversations without putting anyone on the spot. You don't want your small-group members to feel like they are in school, taking a test. You also don't want a scenario where you are the learned teacher asking all the questions, and your group members are under pressure to know the "right" answers. There's nothing healthy about either learning situation.

In contrast, some of the best discussion questions solicit input from everyone present. The best example of this is to ask people what they think. There is no wrong answer to the question, "What do you think?" For example, "What do you think Jesus means when he says, 'Sell your possessions'? Was he talking to you and me? What's your opinion?"

Of course, as a leader you will sometimes know what the Bible actually teaches about this—you're not supposed to be void of knowledge or opinions. But you want to gently steer the group toward to answer Jesus gives. Allowing people to discuss questions and process the answers themselves improves their rate of retention. It's also a good idea to remember that your knowledge or opinion may not represent the full scope of a passage or verse.

### 2. Good Questions Focus on One Thing

Make sure your questions are focused and clear. Here's a poor example of how to address a topic: "What did Jesus mean by 'You are the Light of the world,' how did his disciples respond, and how should we respond today to this statement?" Instead, break those questions down to make them more clear and focused:

- What did Jesus mean by "You are the light of the world"?
- How did Jesus' disciples respond to his announcement about being the light of the world?
- How should we respond today to Jesus' statement?

Rather than asking a multi-layered question, it's best to ask just one simple question and wait for responses before asking the next thing. Well-focused questions also serve as a tool to keep bringing the group back around to the subject at hand. Small groups are notorious for getting off the subject, and clearly worded, pin-pointed questions help you avoid this problem.

### 3. Good Questions Can Be Understood By Everyone

Keep the questions simple enough so that everyone has a reasonable chance of knowing what you mean the first time you ask it. So the following won't work very well: "In light of the current theological debate about millennial views, which is prevalent in many seminaries and other places—many books having been written about this from the premillennial, postmillennial and amillennial positions—how do you think we should respond to this debate in the church, in our homes, in schools, and in our government?"

It would be much better to ask, "How much should we care about the end times?"

### 4. Good Questions Say What They Mean

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Let's say you're studying 1 Corinthians 11—specifically, the passage about women wearing head coverings. It's not a good idea to ask, "Is Paul saying something true here?" This is the Bible, after all—of course he's saying something true! It's better to ask, "Is Paul saying something here that applies to women today?" That may seem like a subtle difference, and it is. But it shows how important it is to be intentional when writing discussion questions.

### 5. Good Questions Are Open-Ended

A person can answer "yes" or "no" without engaging his or her brain. On the other hand, an open-ended question compels people to think about the facts of a text or the situation. We utilize this principle in everyday life. Over dinner, if I say to my children, "How was school today?" they will respond "Fine." And we're done. But if I say to them, "Tell me something interesting that happened today at school," they have to focus on a specific incident, and I can get them talking. The same applies in group discussions.

### 6. Good Questions Involve Emotions

There is more to studying the Bible than intelligence, and there is more to discussing the Bible than intellect. Group leaders need to involve people's emotions, and questions are a great way to do that.

Some good examples are:

- How do you respond inwardly to these claims Jesus makes?
- How do you feel about these teachings on love?
- How do you react to that truth?

### 7. Good Questions Deal with People's Interests

Sometimes it's good to connect a Bible study question with the current interests and passions of your group members. Not every time, of course, but sometimes. Here are some possible examples: "Dave, you've been a college athlete. How do you react to Paul saying, 'I buffet my body daily'?" "Several of you have read the *Left Behind* series. How do you think it lines up with what John is saying here in Revelation?"

### 8. Good Questions Are Sometimes Answers to Other Questions

In any small-group setting, people usually direct questions to the group leader. Even if you've done a good job of establishing that you are a co-learner and don't have all the answers, people will still direct their questions to you most of the time. So in response, it is often a good idea to answer their questions with a question of your own. Like: "What do you think about that?" or "Does anyone here tonight have ideas about that?"

—RICK LOWRY is the Small Groups Pastor at Crossroads Christian Church in Newburgh, Indiana; copyright 2010 by Christianity Today.

### Discuss

1. Do you create questions with the goal of conversation or knowledge? Which one is better? Why?
2. How often do you use "Christianese" in your questions? How can you create questions that are easier for group members to understand?
3. How often do you ask questions that involve emotions? What are the benefits of including more questions about group members' emotional responses?

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## Connect with the Vine

*Why your prayer life matters more than your notes*

By Jim Egli

Several years ago I started a huge research project with my friend Dwight Marable to figure out what makes small groups grow. To date, we have surveyed over 3,000 small-group leaders in more than 200 churches. The most surprising thing we've discovered is that most small-group leaders prepare for their group meetings in the wrong way. To put it succinctly: To lead a great small-group meeting, you need to spend more time praying than preparing your notes.

### Three Profound Discoveries

We uncovered three significant truths about how leaders prepare for meetings and how their preparation impacts their small group's numerical growth:

- 1) *There is zero correlation between how much time leaders spend preparing their lesson and whether the group is growing.* This is amazing, but true. I don't know if this surprises you; it surprised us. When we compared hundreds of leaders—some who spend minutes preparing, some who spend hours preparing—there was absolutely no correlation between the growth rates of their groups.
- 2) *There is a big correlation between whether the leader is praying for their members and their meeting and whether their group is growing.* What fascinates me most about this discovery is that the thing that makes the most difference in whether your group is growing is something that no one in your group actually sees—your personal time with God and your prayer for your group members and your group meeting.
- 3) *The majority of leaders spend more time preparing their lesson than they do praying for their meeting.* Apparently very few leaders realize that it's more important to prepare their heart than to prepare their notes—that having a great small group depends more on God than it does on the leader's skills and abilities.

### Why Does Prayer Make Such a Difference?

You might be wondering why prayer makes such a difference in the health and growth of a small group. The research tells us it makes a huge difference, but it actually doesn't tell us why.

I don't think the "why" is hard to figure out, however. Jesus says in John 15:5: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." The leaders who take time with Christ and bring their group members and meeting to God are going to be a channel of Jesus' life, compassion, and power. These leaders will also hear the Holy Spirit's direction for their meetings as they listen to him. In Luke 11:9–10, Jesus promises: "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened." As you invite God to do miracles in and through your group members, you will see him work in new and deeper ways.

### What's a Small Group Leader to Do?

Perhaps you are like the typical small-group leader surveyed and you have been spending more time preparing your lesson than you have been praying for your members and your meeting. What should you do? Here are some simple steps that I have found helpful in my own life as a small-group leader.

#### Rethink your prep time.

The simplest thing for you to do is to take the amount of time you currently spend preparing for your group meetings and reallocate it. In effect, this costs you no more time. For example, if you have been taking 30 minutes to prepare for your small-group meeting and 25 of those minutes have typically been spent studying and preparing a lesson and 5 minutes have been spent praying, try reversing that so that you spend a few minutes preparing the lesson and the rest of the time praying for your members and your meeting. You will immediately see a surprising difference in how your small-group meetings go. My own preparation for small

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group has changed radically. People have been telling me that I lead and speak better than I used to. Interestingly, I don't spend more time preparing; I just spend more time in prayer.

### Use the Lord's Prayer to guide you.

There are lots of different ways to pray for your members and your meetings, but I like to pray through the five demarcations of the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9–13), asking God:

1. To give people a realization of his character and his closeness as a loving Father (v. 9).
2. To bring his kingdom into their lives so that they experience his goodness, power, and love as wonderfully as it is experienced in heaven (v. 10).
3. To meet their daily needs (v. 11).
4. To help them bring their sin and unforgiveness to him (v. 12).
5. To keep them from temptation and protect them from the attacks of the Evil One (v. 13).

### Ask God for big things.

I often feel overwhelmed as a small-group leader. I tend to get people in my group with big problems, problems that I have no idea how to solve, issues that require real miracles. But I have learned that God specializes in miracles and the best thing I can do is bring these problems to him. Jesus said, "I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it" (John 14:13–14). Invite him to do big, God-sized things, amazing things that bring him glory.

### Use index cards.

I like to give a 3x5 index card to each small-group member and ask them to write their name on it and several things that they want my wife, Vicki, and me to pray for. Then we use these cards to pray for our members for the months ahead. We usually spend time praying through the requests after breakfast. Another way I've found to remind myself to pray is an iPhone app called [Prayer Partner](#). It keeps track of prayer requests and when they're answered. Plus, I can schedule reminders to pray.

### Get members to pray for one another.

I have found that group members like to be challenged to pray for one another. As I am writing this, I think of a young mother of three small children in my small group. A few years ago her husband disappeared and she had no idea where he was or how to get a hold of him. Unfortunately, this wasn't the first time he had disappeared. She agonized about her situation for a few weeks; then we told her, "You can quit praying about this. We are going to carry this for you. Someone in this group will pray and fast for each of the next 30 days." We passed around a calendar, and people signed up to fast and pray different days so that we had the next 30 days covered. Our goal was to support her and to help carry her load, but we were amazed at how our prayers were answered. On the 30th day of our fast her husband came home.

While many other things can help make your group a safe, transformative gathering, you can't replace prayer. We need God to show up and work in mighty ways. As leaders, let's commit to tap into the power God offers us by praying for our group members and meetings.

—JIM EGLI is the Leadership Pastor of the Vineyard Church in Urbana, Illinois, and is the co-author of [Small Groups, Big Impact](#). Follow Jim's blog at [www.smallgroupsbigimpact.wordpress.com](http://www.smallgroupsbigimpact.wordpress.com); copyright 2012 by Christianity Today.

### Discuss

1. Are you surprised by Jim's findings? Why or why not?
2. How much time do you normally spend in prayer during your preparation? How do you feel about spending more time in prayer and less time preparing the lesson?
3. Where in your schedule can you find more time to pray for group members? When will you spend time in prayer for your meeting and members this week?

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## Tips for Facilitating Group Discussion

*Practical advice for meetings that produce life-change*

By Carter Moss

For many small-group leaders, one of the more intimidating things we do is facilitating a group discussion. Very few of us feel like we'll have all the right answers, or that we can handle every curveball thrown our way. To make matters worse, it's challenging to gauge whether we're doing a good job.

But here's the good news: that's not what facilitating a group discussion is really about. We don't have to have all of the right answers. We don't have to lead the perfect discussion every time. We don't even have to get through all of the material in each meeting.

When we're facilitating in our small group, our main goal is to create discussion. We want to challenge people to think about the topic at hand, and to create a safe environment for people to share their thoughts—to help everyone feel valued about the input they've offered.

That's all we've got to do. Thankfully, there are some established practices and principles that can help us accomplish those goals.

### Asking Good Questions

One of the most important skills in small-group facilitation is asking the right questions, not having all of the right answers. Here are a few secrets to asking good questions:

**Ask open-ended questions.** Avoid the yes/no, true/false, multiple-choice questions—"Is Jesus the sheep or the shepherd in this parable?" Similarly, avoid questions that let people off the hook with a simple Sunday-school answer—"Why did Jesus die on the cross?" You want to ask questions that require people to share some actual thoughts and feelings. A good example is asking about experiences: "When have you experienced mercy?" You might also ask, "What does it look like to care for orphans in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?" Open-ended questions invite group members to think critically, consider their feelings, and answer in multiple ways.

**Ask follow-up questions.** Many people default to staying pretty surface-level with their answers, so get in the habit of not letting them off the hook. Ask more questions that follow up on their response. Here are some examples of good follow-up questions for the short/simple answers that people often give:

- What makes you say that?
- How do you feel about that?
- How do you think that would've affected you if you had been living in the time of Jesus?
- How would you explain your answer to a non-Christian friend or neighbor?

**Start an argument.** I like to tell my groups that if we always agree with each other and with the author of our study, it makes for a pretty boring group and a somewhat pointless discussion. The point of actually discussing things is to get different perspectives and wrestle with the issues.

Here are some examples of questions that can help create discussion by playing "devil's advocate":

- Do you agree with what the author is saying in that chapter? Why or why not?
- Why did God design it to work that way? Why not just do [whatever else] instead?
- What would you say to someone who disagrees with that?
- Why do we really have to do it like that? Why can't we just go [some other route] instead?

**Make sure the rubber hits the road.** I tell my small group that by the end of the night, we need to make sure we apply what we're discussing to our lives. Otherwise we just leave group a little smarter, rather than with changed lives. So whatever it is you're discussing, make sure to end with some application questions.

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Here are some examples:

- So what in the world does that have to do with our lives today?
- How has our discussion changed your perspective regarding this issue?
- What one thing can you do differently in this next week to start living this out? (Some groups will add accountability to this question—recording what members share and asking them to report back the next week.)

### Creating a Safe Environment

Trust makes your small group a place where genuine community can form. Group members need to be able to trust that the group is a safe place—a place where they can get real and know that they will not be judged, gossiped about, and so on.

So how do you create this safe environment? There are several important factors. Make sure to cover the privacy and safety issue in your group guidelines or covenant. Put it on paper that "what is said and happens here stays here." Review these same group guidelines every single time a new person shows up to group. And as the leader, model this safety and confidentiality yourself.

When people share in the group—no matter how much you may disagree, or how theologically incorrect they may be—make sure they feel affirmed about their answer in the moment. Thank them for sharing. Later, and outside the group meeting, you can (and often should) talk to them about their comments, but it should be done one-on-one. Let them know you appreciate that they share in the group, and that you want to talk further about a particular comment they made. It can be helpful to ask for clarification on what they said and to ask why they believe it. This can both clear up any occurrences of simply misspeaking and also allow for an opportunity for them to realize their fault on their own. If they still hold on to the incorrect belief, you can lovingly point out the truth to them.

Also, avoid giving unrequested advice within the group—"Well if I were you, I'd just do this." That is one of the quickest ways to shut someone down from sharing. When you hear other group members start to do this, gently remind them by saying, "This is a safe group, and we're here to listen, not to give advice."

### Handling the Challenging People

The hard part of small groups is that they involve people, and dealing with people is always messy. One of my favorite book titles has always been the one I find most true: *Everybody's Normal Until You Get to Know Them*. That includes me!

Here are some of the common "challenging people" that you may encounter, and some tips on approaching them with grace.

**The over-talker.** These people always have plenty to say, and love to be the first person to say it. Remind everyone in the group guidelines that this is an equal participation group. So if you have 10 people in the group, you want each person to contribute to 10 percent to the discussion.

If the problem continues, talk them outside of group. Affirm their contribution to the conversation, and enlist their help in getting some of the other people in the group to open up and share. Sometimes you may want to ask them to commit to not being the first person to answer a question—or to even work out a subtle signal you can give when they are talking too much.

**The non-talker.** These people are quiet and never want to share. If you think that doing so won't scare them off even more—that a little prompting is needed—try calling on them periodically to share an answer. Also, be sure to affirm big time when they do respond.

If that doesn't work, talk to non-talkers outside of group. Again, affirm them in what they do contribute, and let them know that you want more people to get to hear their perspective. Remind them how valuable all of the different perspectives are to the entire group.

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**The tangent-starter.** These people love to get the group way off track by starting random tangents and rabbit trails. First of all, don't get upset at the tangents, and feel free to go off on them once in a while. When the time comes, firmly bring the group back on track.

If the problem becomes excessive, talk to tangent-starters outside of group. Affirm them in what they do contribute, and convey the challenge the tangents create as you are trying to facilitate a good group and focus on certain points each week. Ask the person how they can help you keep the group on track.

**The insensitive person.** These individuals give advice, make fun of answers and people, cut people off, or do other things to offend members within the group. These people are dangerous to the health of your group! They can keep it from being a safe group more quickly than anything else. So remind everyone of the group guidelines again, and definitely have the one-on-one conversation outside of group to let insensitive people know how important a safe group is, and what they can do to help make that happen.

Remember: the end goal of a group discussion is life change, not perfect discussions or getting through all the material. So stay open to the Holy Spirit during each group meeting and follow where he leads. Some of the most memorable group meetings occur when the leader is willing to scrap the plan for the night and address a specific need or do something fun and spontaneous.

It's also important to spend some time in prayer before each group meeting. Ask that God would lead the discussion where he wants it to go. And get an apprentice who can help you facilitate, so that you don't have to go it alone.

Remember that God is the one who does the work in people's hearts—we are not responsible for it. We are simply creating an environment for community and life change to happen.

—CARTER MOSS is the Small Group Champion for Community Christian Church and the Campus Pastor at their Montgomery campus. Used with permission from [Community Christian Church](#).

### Discuss

1. How often do you use follow-up questions to dig deeper or clarify a member's answer? What are two follow-up questions you can have at the ready for your next meeting?
2. Group members take cues from you. For instance, if you allow someone to give unrequested advice, group members believe this is acceptable behavior. How can you lovingly let group members know their sharing is inappropriate—whether it's giving advice, cutting others down, or otherwise harming the safety of the group?
3. The remedy for many of the challenging scenarios presented in this article is meeting with the group member one-on-one. How comfortable are you meeting with people for a hard conversation? If you're not comfortable, who can you go to for advice and support?

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## Encouraging Next Steps for Your Group Members

*Setting goals for spiritual growth*

By Tony Escobar

Small groups seek to develop mature people who follow Christ more obediently. But in churches, and especially in small groups, different people may view spiritual maturity in different ways. Some may think of it as having lots of Bible knowledge, for example, or having a great quiet time every day, or being perfect.

At Community Christian Church, we believe that spiritual maturity is really about speedy obedience. No one says it better than our lead pastor, Dave Ferguson, in *The Big Idea*: "For a Christ follower, the measure of maturity is determined by the speed of obedience. The most mature Christ-follower is not the person who has attended the most church events or accumulated the most information about Jesus, but rather the person whose heart is most transformed. And transformation is seen when a person hears God and responds with swift obedience."

In addition to setting a specific goal for spiritual maturity, small groups also have the incredible privilege and responsibility to set the pace for spiritual growth in the church. But that highlights another misconception that often develops in groups. We think it's our responsibility as group leaders to take our members from being atheists to missionaries in one year or less. In reality, that's not the case at all. Maturity is about speedy obedience, and the pace for spiritual growth is about moving ahead one obedient baby step at a time.

That's why small-group leaders need to learn the skill of helping their people identify "next steps." Below, I've identified a practical, three-step game plan for encouraging your group members to move forward in spiritual maturity. I recommend writing out and modifying this plan to fit your specific group. Having a written plan will allow you to do four things: assess the need for growth, ensure clarity and direction, create accountability, and measure progress.

*Note: The following steps should be applied at both the individual and group levels.*

### Step 1: Clarify Winning

The first step is to think about where we ultimately want our people to be spiritually. We must lead with the end in mind. So what would it look like for our members to win in terms of spiritual growth?

For example, at COMMUNITY, we want to develop 3-C followers of Christ:

- Celebrate God regularly in a corporate setting
- Connect with others in a small group more genuinely through support, confession, and accountability
- Contribute their resources, gifts, and talents regularly and generously

Whichever goal you have in mind, it's important to remember that your members may not arrive at their destination within your group. In fact, we will never fully "arrive" as Christ-followers on Earth. So as a leader, think of yourself more like a contributing author who writes a chapter or two in God's story for each member. Others have "written" before you; others will likely "write" after you. You don't have to write their whole book.

You'll win in your small group if you can get members to successfully take the next steps toward the ultimate goal. They don't have to be perfect, but you want to set goals and do things that will keep them moving forward.

The most effective way for your group to think with an end in mind and clarify wins is to establish a clear group covenant. This allows you to set a reasonable timeline, encourage reasonable steps, and ultimately achieve reasonable goals.

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### Step 2: Where Are We Now?

Next, evaluate the current status of your group, and of each individual in the group. This helps you determine how far you are from where you want to be, and sets you up for the next steps necessary to keep moving toward your goal. In other words, step two helps you assess the growth needs of the group.

Here are the kinds of questions you can ask to determine where your group members are:

- What knowledge do members need?
- What do they need more practice in?
- What does my group care about?
- Who hasn't been baptized?
- What experiences have our members had?
- How new are members to the group, or to following Christ?
- How long has our group been together?
- Who hasn't taken core courses offered by our church?
- What challenges do members have?

### Step 3: What Is Your Next Step?

The final step is to ask your group members, "What steps will we take to get to where we want to be?" In other words, "What's next for you?" This question helps you keep your group on track toward winning.

You want to set basic steps that will point your group members toward achieving their goals. Again, establish these steps with your group and also one-on-one with each member. Here are some of the most basic next steps that a group or an individual can take:

- Start keeping a spiritual-growth journal
- Take a course or Sunday school class through your church (i.e., financial stewardship, Bible study, evangelism training, etc.)
- Get baptized
- Start contributing time, talents, tithe, etc.

### Miscellaneous Tactics

The following tips will make you more successful at the three-step process above.

**Less is more.** You will be more effective as a small-group leader if you narrow your focus in your covenants and steps. Teach and encourage less so that group members can achieve more. Focus only on what specific wins you want your group to achieve in a given time. Teach and encourage only those steps that will help them achieve their goals.

**Offer a menu.** Instead of expecting group members to come up with their own next steps, offer some suggestions for next steps. For example, alert them to upcoming core courses, serving opportunities, baptisms, etc.

**Next Steps 101.** Allow members to develop at the basic levels first, and then guide them toward more advanced steps.

**Peer pressure.** Take steps as a group together. Nothing encourages people to action like peer pressure! Because, hey, if everyone else is doing it—why not?

**Celebrate.** Celebrate your group members when you catch them doing something right. Throw parties, bake a cake, get a gift, or just have fun whenever someone takes a positive step. Doing so encourages those who have taken steps, and it encourages others to start taking steps.

**Share stories.** People are impacted by stories. Real-life examples of life change will inspire members to want to experience the same.

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**Invest in relationships.** People will do anything for a good friend. And people are more likely to take on a challenge from a good friend. Building relationships and trust with your group members will make your challenges to them more effective.

—TONY ESCOBAR is the Director of Volunteer Engagement for Breakthrough Urban Ministries in Chicago and is a former small-group director for Community Christian Church (Naperville, IL). Used with permission of [Community Christian Church](#).

**Discuss**

1. How often do you talk about next steps with your group? How often do you see members take next steps?
2. What next steps do you feel your group members are ready for? What commonalities are there among members? How can you take advantage of these commonalities?
3. What can you do to empower group members to take the appropriate next steps?

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## **Help! My Small Group Has Been Hijacked!**

*Four common hijackers and ways to respond*

By Margaret Feinberg

Have you ever led a small-group meeting that got out of control? Your material was received well, group members were engaged, and then one person started dominating the group. No matter how hard you tried, you couldn't stop this person from controlling the group. Before you knew it, your small group had been hijacked. Small-group hijackers can do a great deal of harm. Here are four different hijacker personalities and how to deal with them:

### **The Talking Hijacker**

This is the person who answers every question before anyone else can respond. While most of the participants are still pondering the question, the talking hijacker is spurting out a response. Though you may be grateful for the liveliness and contributions, the talking hijacker leaves the group with a sense that no one else has a chance to respond. Instead of drawing other people out, the talking hijacker makes people want to withdraw. What needs to be said after it feels like everything has already been said?

### **Taking Control from the Talking Hijacker**

First, try to pull to the person aside one-on-one. Thank the person for their gracious contributions, but be honest about the need for others to contribute. Encourage the person to only to respond to every other or every third question and keep responses short. Or, encourage the person to allow two or three other people to share before sharing. You may even want to solicit the talking hijacker's help in getting other people to talk in the group by asking questions, but be careful because this can backfire.

If the talking hijackers still can't help themselves, you may need to highly structure your discussion time for a while. Set up this ground rule for the next lesson: you'll be calling on specific people to respond to questions. This will encourage the quieter person while deterring the talkative one. If you still can't resolve the issue, another creative idea is to cut out small squares of paper. If you have ten questions you want to discuss and five people in your small group, cut out 15 squares so every group member receives three. Each time a member speaks they are required to turn in one piece of paper. When they are out of squares, they're no longer allowed to speak until everybody else uses up theirs. You might also require people to raise a hand to be called on so it becomes physically apparent to the talking hijacker just how much they're talking.

### **The Emotional Hijacker**

This small-group member shows up every week with an emotional crisis. Before you know it, the majority of the meeting is spent trying to unravel the problem and soothe the person's emotional needs. Instead of focusing on Scripture or prayer, the majority of time and energy is spent on the Emotional Hijacker.

### **Taking Control from the Emotional Hijacker**

One way to deal with an Emotional Hijacker is to take the person out to coffee or lunch. Once this person has space to share everything going on in life, he or she may not need as much of the small group's time to share. Spending more one-on-one time may also allow you to better understand the person's needs. Depending on the situation, you may be able to suggest a spiritual mentor or Christian counselor. At the next gathering, if the person tries to hijack the group with another crisis, inform the small group that the purpose of the meeting needs to focus on the study at hand and prayer requests will be taken at the end of the meeting. This will allow you to get through the material and still allow the person to share within a more limited time constraint.

### **The Leader Hijacker**

This hijacker is like a back-seat driver that gives you constant directions on how to best lead the group. The Leader Hijacker assumes he or she has the best approach to leading and frequently mentions past leadership positions. The other members don't know who to listen to: you or the hijacker.

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### Taking Control from the Leader Hijacker

Talking directly with the Leader Hijacker will take courage, but it's the quickest way to a result. Sift through his or her comments to see if you can glean anything helpful. Sometimes there will be good suggestions that can benefit the group. If so, mention these helpful suggestions in your conversation, which will keep the atmosphere positive. Tell how you appreciate his or her willingness to share leadership skills and then politely ask the Leader Hijacker to stop doing so at the small-group meetings. Let the Leader Hijacker know that sharing these things during the meeting promotes disunity in the group. Affirm the hijacker by asking for input (at a one-on-one meeting) when you feel you need it, and by offering to listen to suggestions outside of meetings. At the same time, confirm that you are leading in a way that suits your personality and leadership style, noting that it may be different from the hijacker's. If the hijacker makes another comment in a group meeting, respond by saying: "Let's talk about that suggestion outside of the group meeting."

### The Late Hijacker

Without fail, this person walks into the small-group meeting late. You've spent 20 minutes building momentum toward a specific point, and right before you ask the most important question the Late Hijacker bursts in. The entrance disrupts the group, and you can't get the group's attention again. The momentum and focus are lost.

### Taking Control from the Late Hijacker

Approach the Late Hijacker privately and encourage this person to make a better effort to be on time. Explain how it's hard to get the group refocused once everybody is distracted. If the person can't get there any earlier, encourage them to enter more quietly and sensitively. If the mood seems somber, wait a few minutes before entering so distraction won't be an issue. If the Late Hijacker doesn't stop, you may want to consider encouraging the person to find another small group that fits in his or her schedule better.

—MARGARET FEINBERG has written several books and accompanying DVD studies including [The Organic God](#), [The Sacred Echo](#), [Scouting the Divine](#), and [Pursuing God's Love](#). For more on Margaret, visit her website: [www.margaretfeinberg.com](http://www.margaretfeinberg.com); copyright 2012 by Christianity Today.

### Discuss

1. When have you encountered these hijackers? What, if anything, did you do?
2. Do you have any of these hijackers in your current group? If so, create a plan for taking control from them.
3. Who can you go to for support in this matter? A coach? A director? Another leader?

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**Come On In!**

*Welcoming new people into existing groups*

By Carolyn Taketa

Have you ever tried to join a club, clique, team, or group where the other members already knew each other well? You probably found it tough to break in. It can be uncomfortable and intimidating. This can be the same experience when someone joins an existing small group.

Whether someone comes into the group through invitation from a friend, by a church referral, or self-selection from the church website, it can be scary to join an existing group. But there are things you can do to help guests feel welcome and to ease their integration into the group. Essentially, you want to create an environment where all group members feel valued as they seek to participate in community together.

**Prepare Your Existing Group**

Before anyone joins your group, discuss it with all members and give people a chance to voice any concerns they might have. Then you can address the discomforts or fears that arise and better prepare them for the changes that will come with new folks. For example, you can take some time to celebrate what God has done in the group, affirm the established relationships, and explain why adding new people is the next step for the group. When new people are added without the group's consent or knowledge, it violates trust with members and creates an awkward transition for guests. So try to get buy-in for the idea of adding new people.

**Be Intentional about Timing**

Figure out the best time for a new person to join your group. For example, a potluck or social event might be a more casual way to introduce a new person to the group. Or you might add people at the start of a new study. If you are in the midst of a book or a study that is deeply personal or requires participation from the beginning, then it may be best to wait for a good breaking point in the curriculum before bringing someone new on board.

**Serve as a Travel Guide**

Ideally, you'll want to briefly meet the potential members in advance and get to know them a little. Perhaps you can connect after a church service. If you're unable to meet in person, at least give them a call. Introduce yourself, give a general description about your group, express excitement about their visit, and offer detailed directions to the location of the gathering.

Remember that newcomers have no clue about your group's culture or customs. Let them know about your meeting structure, snack choices, and childcare. You may also want to let them know about other things, too, like the presence of pets (in case they are allergic) or details about parking if you're gathering at an apartment without a clear place to park. It helps to function as a local tour guide, staying nearby through the process, giving necessary information and facilitating their connection with others in the group.

**Practice Hospitality**

Like any good host, greet the new people warmly by name as soon as they enter and introduce them to others in the group. Hopefully you know something about the newcomers based on your earlier interaction so you can help create connections with existing members. Identify common interests with a few people in the group so they can connect with members on shared topics and interests. Include them in the conversations by asking questions, giving brief background information on members, or explaining inside jokes.

**Act Natural**

When someone new comes to group, it can feel a bit like a first date with everyone putting on their best face. This makes the experience awkward and unnatural. Instead, simply acknowledge newcomers and give them a chance to share a bit about themselves. You may also ask members to briefly introduce themselves. However, don't focus too much attention on the guests, which would likely make them feel uncomfortable. An

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icebreaker creates a safe way to share and to get to know one another.

Run the meeting the way you usually do so that newcomers have a good idea of what to expect if they return. For example, try to share at a level of vulnerability that members would regularly demonstrate. It is tempting to stay superficial because there are new people present, but this isn't beneficial for anyone. It can be helpful to let newcomers know about the expectation of confidentiality. Perhaps say something like, "Our group is committed to keeping our sharing times confidential, so we'd ask you do the same. Of course, anything you share will be held in confidence as well." This sets up clear, appropriate expectations and invites new and old group members to share openly.

### Follow Up

After the meeting, connect with the newcomers, thanking them for coming. Give them an opportunity to share observations and ask questions. The purpose of this follow up is not to do a hard sell of the group; rather, spend time answering their questions and getting their feedback. Let them know that you'd love for them to return, but don't push. People are much more likely to return when they know they are wanted and accepted. You might also consider inviting them for coffee to start forging a friendship outside of the group. When people sense a genuine interest in building relationships, rather than just an invitation to a meeting, they are much more likely to return and relationally invest in the group.

### Suggest Ways to Contribute

After newcomers have participated in a few meetings, find out what their passions and gifts are so that you can suggest ways they can contribute to the group. Getting them engaged and invested early helps them to stick with the group. For example, one woman I know had a negative experience at her first visit to a small group, but when the leader asked her to bring snacks the next time, she was excited to have a way to contribute. At the next meeting she had a much better experience. She eventually became a committed member of the group, and she was glad that she had stuck it out. Making a simple contribution brought about a sense of ownership and belonging.

Adding people into an existing group will always introduce an unknown element to which the whole group will need to adjust. In some ways, integrating new people into an existing group is like crafting a patchwork quilt. Although it can take much effort and time to stitch new pieces into an existing fabric, it can create a beautiful new design, texture, and pattern. It can also help members stretch their spiritual muscles and allow God to grow them into the inclusive, missional communities he has called us to be.

—CAROLYN TAKETA is Small Groups Director at Calvary Community Church in Westlake Village, California; copyright 2012 by Christianity Today.

### Discuss

1. How often do you meet newcomers before they visit your group? What might be the benefits to doing so?
2. What things about your group's culture should you tell newcomers to clue them in to your patterns?
3. What is the value of group members sharing normally when newcomers are present? How can you encourage group members to do so?

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## **The Science of Apprenticeship**

*How leaders can reproduce other leaders*

By Carter Moss

How is it possible for more and more people to get involved in Jesus' mission? By reproducing groups and leaders. By multiplying. And that means we must be leaders who are reproducing our roles and our groups, and that means intentionally apprenticing people into the role of small-group leader. It is only by reproducing that we will be able to reach an exponential number of people.

There is both a science and an art to apprenticing. The art involves investing in apprentices relationally and developing them spiritually—in other words, discipleship. It's an art because it's not formulaic, and it's individualized to each person.

But there is also a science to apprenticing. Most steps or formulas don't apply in a one-size-fits-all kind of way, but this is an exception. There is a proven science to apprentice development that can help you reproduce small-group leadership into others (or any other leadership position, for that matter).

### **Five Steps of Apprenticing**

Carl George, a great church consultant, has influenced a lot of churches in the area of leadership development. In [Nine Keys to Effective Small Group Leadership](#), he describes a simple and memorable process on how to reproduce leaders through apprenticeship. Let's unpack each step.

#### **I Do, You Watch, We Talk**

The first thing to do with apprentices is ask them to watch how you lead the group. Tell them to notice how you ask questions, how you handle the quiet people and the over-talkers, how you structure the gathering, and how you balance relationship-building with learning and mission. Tell them to watch everything you do as a leader so that afterward you can talk it through together. The key to this step is moving the apprentice from merely a participant to a careful observer, willing to learn how to lead. Keep in mind, though, you will need to be humble enough to receive honest feedback about your leadership from your apprentice.

#### **I Do, You Help, We Talk**

After the apprentice has watched you for a few weeks, you'll want to have him or her help you with certain aspects of the meeting. Perhaps you can ask your apprentice to lead the icebreaker or the prayer request time at the next meeting. Or, split up the discussion time into chunks and take turns facilitating. The point here is to allow the apprentice to start practicing the skills of small-group facilitation and to experience what it's like to lead. This will also help the group members begin to see the apprentice as a leader. Don't forget to talk afterward, letting your apprentice know what went well and helping him or her to improve.

#### **You Do, I Help, We Talk**

At this step, you're making the switch to your apprentice leading while you simply help. Have your apprentice lead the majority of the small-group meeting, and offer to help with a smaller part such as the prayer time or icebreaker. Afterward, talk through the experience and continue to give feedback on how the apprentice is doing. Ask your apprentice how he or she feels and how the experience is going so far.

#### **You Do, I Watch, We Talk**

This is nearly the final phase of reproducing the role. The apprentice feels ready and confident to take on full responsibility of the group leadership. Let the apprentice lead the entire meeting and don't help in any way; simply be a participant in the group. Watch carefully what your apprentice is doing, and affirm and guide him or her after the meeting. As your apprentice feels more comfortable in this role, you can begin to talk about a plan for the future. You may leave the current group in the hands of your apprentice, going off to start a new group of your own. You may commission the apprentice to start a new group of his or her own. Or you may

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invite the group members to split between the two new groups: yours and your apprentice's. Decide on your next steps and the timetable together.

### You Do, Someone Else Watches

Once both you and your apprentice feel good about the process and are ready to take the next step, the apprentice is released into leadership. Send the new leader off with the goal of identifying someone to apprentice. This will ensure the process will continue and more and more groups will be created. Likewise, you should begin seeking a new apprentice for yourself.

You'll also want to celebrate this exciting moment. The small group could throw a "graduation party" or a "birthday party" (if the apprentice is leaving to birth a new small group). The group could lay hands and pray to commission the apprentice into leadership. Celebrating new leadership in this way is not only incredibly affirming and memorable for the new leader, but also it communicates to the group what a big deal it is.

### Don't Forget

This plan is simple and practical, and you can decide how much time to take. But there are some critical things you must remember while going through this process.

#### Don't Forget to Talk

Don't forget the "we talk" portion of each step—consistent two-way communication and coaching throughout this process is absolutely critical. By communicating, you'll be able to determine if this person is right for small-group leadership. You may find that he or she is not ready, or the apprentice may feel it's not the right position. If you continue to talk, neither of you will be blind-sided. Talking also helps both of you discern the length of time that should be spent on each step and the best timing for releasing the apprentice into leadership.

#### Don't Forget the Last Step

The last step reminds us to repeat the process, to remember the vision of being a reproducing ministry. Remember Paul's vision for the church that he cast so well in 2 Timothy 2:2: "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others." That's some serious leadership reproduction!

I think of the all the times when I've stopped short of this step and merely released my apprentice into leadership. It's still an exciting thing to celebrate, and it is helping create more leaders for the mission, but it's only leadership *addition*. When we move to reproducing leaders who will reproduce other leaders who will reproduce more leaders, we will begin to see leadership *multiplication*.

—CARTER MOSS is the Small Group Champion for Community Christian Church (Naperville, IL) and the Campus Pastor of their Montgomery Campus; copyright 2012 by Christianity Today.

### Discuss

1. Were you apprenticed? If so, how closely did you follow these steps?
2. Do you currently have an apprentice? If so, where are you at in this process? Are you remembering to talk after each step?
3. If you don't have an apprentice, who in your group might you ask? How and when will you ask him or her?

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## Further Exploration

*Websites and books to help you lead well*

**[SmallGroups.com](#)**. We specialize in equipping churches and small-group leaders to make disciples and strengthen community.

- [Finding, Recruiting, and Training an Apprentice](#) (Practical Ministry Skills)
- [Helping Group Members Become Great Listeners](#) (Practical Ministry Skills)
- [Leading a Life-Changing Bible Study](#) (Practical Ministry Skills)
- [Making Small Groups Fun!](#) (Practical Ministry Skills)
- [Ministering to Difficult Group Members](#) (Practical Ministry Skills)
- [Small-Group Leader Orientation Guide](#) (Orientation Guide)

**[BuildingChurchLeaders.com](#)**. A website with practical training tools for various church leadership roles.

**[Kyria.com](#)**. A website ministering to women leaders within the church.

**[LeadershipJournal.net](#)**. A website offering practical advice and articles for church leaders.

**[Field Guide for Small Group Leaders](#)** by Sam O'Neal. Great, practical advice for leading small-group meetings (IVP Connect, 2012; ISBN 978-0830810918).

**[Leading Life-Changing Small Groups](#)** by Bill Donahue. A comprehensive go-to resource for small-group leaders (Zondervan, 2012; ISBN 978-0310331254).

**[Making Small Groups Work](#)** by Henry Cloud and John Townsend. This is a one-stop small-group leader's guide for gatherings of all sorts (Zondervan, 2003; ISBN 978-0310250289).

**[Why Didn't You Warn Me?](#)** by Pat J. Sikora. This focused guide trains the novice or experienced small-group leader to deal effectively with the obstacles of group life (Standard Publishing, 2007; ISBN 978-0784720752).