

Orientation Guide: Small-Group Coach



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How to Use This Resource

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

By Sam O'Neal

Coaches are an important part of the small-groups ministry for any church, regardless of whether that church uses coaches. That's right. Whether or not your church has an established role or position called "coach," there needs to be someone (or a group of someones) responsible for training, equipping, supporting, encouraging, and correcting your group leaders.

That person is what we are defining in this download as a "coach." And if that person does not exist at your church, you need to find someone who can step in. Or you need to step in. Fortunately, the resources contained in this download will help any church train and equip new coaches, potential coaches, and veteran coaches.

Prepare for Your Role

The four articles in this section are a great primer for new or potential coaches. The "Job Description" provides a great overview of what a coach can expect to do throughout his or her ministry, and the "Interview with an Experienced Coach" has some great input and tips from someone who has done coaching well for a long time. The same is true for "Confessions of a Small-Group Coach."

I also really like the information provided in "Common Obstacles of Small-Group Coaches," because it gives new coaches an idea of what they need to watch out for. Plus, the article has several helpful ideas on how to scale the obstacles when they do come.

Perform Your Role

The first two articles in this section—"Five Habits of Effective Coaches" and "The Proper Care and Feeding for Group Leaders"—give a broad overview of a coach's ministry. They provide several specific skills to help that ministry get carried out. And "Asking Good Coaching Questions" is a specific look at how questions can improve the efficacy of coach/leader conversations.

"Effective Methods for Training Group Leaders" is a must read for any coach—old or new. It's a look at several different methods that can be used to train small-group leaders, which is important because many coaches just have one method and ignore other opportunities (which makes things a little stale over time). And "When It's Time to Discipline a Group Leader" covers an important topic—one that you want to have studied before you need to use the information.

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Job Description: Small-Group Coach

Here are the basic ministry areas and expectations of a small-group coach.

By Sam O'Neal

Personal Ministry

Objective: To maintain a strong personal walk with the Lord by continuing in the spiritual disciplines that are necessary for spiritual fitness and growth in the grace and knowledge of God.

Goals:

1. Spend time in the Bible each day, pursuing personal growth and maturity.
2. Have a consistent prayer life that focuses on praise, thanksgiving, personal needs, the needs of believers, and the needs of the lost.
3. Spend time in spiritual fellowship with others for the purposes of mutual love, encouragement, and growth.
4. Be involved in fulfilling the Great Commission by reaching out to the lost, both in word and deed.

Small-Group Ministry

Objective: To shepherd and equip 5–10 small-group leaders within our church body, building relationships with those leaders and offering support and assistance as needed.

Goals:

1. Pray daily for your small-group leaders.
2. Have personal contact with each leader in your area each week (i.e. phone, e-mail, note, lunch meeting, and so on).
3. During each semester, visit your assigned small groups at least once.
4. Be a “life coach”—providing inspirational leadership, continual training, support, and accountability to your small-group leaders.
5. Provide quarterly training sessions for small-group leaders that will help them improve in a specific area.
6. Identify and mentor small-group leaders to be future coaches.
7. Assist your small-group leaders in identifying and mentoring their assistant group leaders.
8. Assist your small-group leaders with curriculum requests and questions as needed.
9. Initiate the flow of important information or requests for volunteers to small-group leaders.

Questions for Group Leaders

These are some sample questions you'll want to ask your group leaders when you contact them.

1. How is the group bonding?
2. What is your group studying right now?
3. What is one thing about the group so far this year that has really encouraged you?
4. Have there been any “challenging group member” situations?
5. Are there other aspects of group leadership that you are finding challenging this year?

6. Are you taking steps to share the load by asking group members to bring refreshments, lead the prayer time, host the group in their home, and so on? (Remind them that this takes weight off the shoulders of the leader and also gives others a chance to minister.)
7. How are you doing personally? How is your family, work, and so on? How are you doing in your relationship with the Lord?
8. Have you identified someone in your group who might be a future co-leader or leader-in-training? If so, do you have a strategy to bring them along?
9. Do you have any scheduling, leadership, or other changes that we should let the office know about?
10. What can I, as your coach, do to help you as a leader?
11. What can I pray with you about?

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Advice from an Experienced Coach

An interview with Tim Cullnan.

Interview conducted by Rachel Gilmore

Tim Cullnan is the small-group coordinator for Parkview Christian Church—a vibrant, growing faith community in Orland Park, Illinois, with a weekend attendance of almost 5,000 people. Tim has been a coach at Parkview for two and a half years, a group leader for more than five years, and a small-group member for more than six years. In this interview, Tim shares his thoughts about the role of a small-group coach in the lives of his or her leaders.

SmallGroups.com: What are the key pieces of a small-group coach's job description?

Tim Cullnan: First and foremost is to be a listener. The basic meeting information that leaders need from their churches is easily done through email. The most important thing for coaches to do is to make that personal connection and listen to the leaders.

After that, be an encourager. The leaders are kind of out there on their own. They need encouragement, so whenever you can, give it to them. Help them find the good that's going on in their small groups and celebrate that. Let the leaders know that if they spend all the time talking in group about the problems a family is having, but they don't get in their 49-minute Bible study, God is okay with that.

Lastly, be a communicator. Coaches need to consistently stay in touch with their leaders, although communication should be at the level your leaders need. Some people are okay with regular email and an occasional phone call. Others you'll check in with when you see them at church. Still others might need a Starbucks meeting each month. Do what works for each leader.

What are three key skills that a coach needs to develop?

You just want to help people, first of all. Coaches need compassion and love. Their main job is being a teacher, a mentor, and caring about their leaders. And just think about the big picture. For every leader's life that you touch, you are also impacting the eight to ten people in their group. Make that contact count!

Second, a coach needs to be able to speak the truth in love. You're kind of a friend. You're kind of a teacher. Usually you're a fellow leader. However, as a coach, you're also the accountability person. You need to be able to go to your leaders in truth when something needs to be fixed and then hold that person accountable.

Third, coaches need to be spiritual partners for their leaders. Leaders are part of the Lord's troops on the front lines. You need to help your leaders remember to always rely on God and make sure he is leading the way in all aspects of their lives.

Talk a little more about that partnership role. How do coaches walk the fine line between teammate and coach?

In dealing with group leaders, you're going to be working with people who are doing more than receiving, but you have to treat that coaching relationship more as a partnership because you've walked in their shoes and know what they're going through. The coach steps up into the mentor role and becomes the person who is giving back to the leader and filling up that spiritual cup through encouragement and support. The coach helps the leader stay balanced.

It's also okay to say, as the coach, "I don't know the answer to that problem/situation/ question. Let me talk to someone who can help you with this." You have to learn how to say that! The coach then becomes the resource person who can put the right information in the leaders' hands.

How do you get your coaching relationships off to a good start?

Ask more questions than you answer and listen more than you talk. Watch your leaders' facial expressions, and put on your compassion hat. You could be the first person in five to eight months that this leader has been able

to talk to about his or her joys and frustrations. Always be positive and always encourage prayer in your leaders' lives.

Also, as I mentioned before, be consistent with ongoing contact. A couple of times a year, you should meet with all of your leaders in one place. However, most important is the one-on-one time with your individual leaders. You shouldn't go more than a month or two without touching base, depending on your leaders' personal needs.

What has surprised you most in your work as a small group coach?

Probably that there are some very deeply committed leaders that take very seriously the job that they're doing. I don't mean to say that I thought that leaders wouldn't be responsible or care for their small groups. It's just that the level of compassion that I've seen demonstrated for the members—it never clicked with me that the leaders I coached would be so devoted to their people.

I was also pleasantly surprised to discover that the leaders are looking for help. They're usually open to suggestions. They have so much passion for their groups. You just get the sense that they're crying out, "I want to make this work!" It's been a joy working with people who feel that way about small groups.

Yet that brings up an interesting point. As a coach, what do you do with leaders who don't want to be coached?

If you, as the coach, are going in and replacing another coach, recognize that the previous coaching relationship existed and don't try to build on it—develop your own. Talk to the old coach, if possible, just to get a feel for dynamics and what people have asked for/needed in terms of support, but think outside the box. Be your own person. Find new common ground.

However, when you're faced with a challenging situation in a group where you're meeting resistance from a leader, you want to look for different methods of delivering the message. Get others involved with you in talking to the person, possibly your small-group director or pastor. The responsibility of the coach is to stop a behavior that is hurtful or harmful, and that will be very situational.

I think the coach's relationship with an individual leader is what will give the coach some credibility. If you've taken the time to develop the relationship, you should be able to work through the difficulties.

Speaking of difficulties, what might be some obstacles that a new coach will face?

First of all, don't get frustrated when it's hard to connect with people. Accept it. Use your creative juices to figure out a way to establish and maintain contact with your leaders. I'm not a big email fan, but there are email people out there who will only be accessible that way; same thing for text messagers or Facebook fans. Use technology in a way that works to meet your leaders' needs—or don't if it doesn't. Some folks will need the good, old-fashioned personal meeting. Just be available.

Second, know that it's okay to fail. You have to get over the fact that you don't know it all and you haven't seen it all. You're not going to be as biblically sound as your pastor is. You need to have a kind of servant mindset. The question you want to be asking your leaders is, "How can I serve you?" If you feel like you're not qualified to handle a situation or need advice, there are going to be a lot of people over and around you who can help you with that. Seek that help if you start feeling ill-equipped.

Third, once you're into it, you never know what's going to show up at your door. Expect the unexpected! But if you're listening and compassionate, those are the key coaching skills. You can do it!

What are some of the joys of being a small group coach?

Hearing the stories from group leaders when they say, "This amazing thing happened in our group last night..." Those are the kind of conversations that make you leave coaching meetings with a big smile on your face. So much of what goes on in small-group life, you just don't see or know about as a coach—like the whole group taking meals to a new mom or making weekly visits to a member with cancer. As a coach, when you start seeing the kind of Christian love you want to see developing in groups, that's powerful.

And I've been at some baptisms where I'll know the person getting baptized and I'll be there to support that person. I'll see that individual sitting there, maybe with his or her family, and then I look in the row behind and that person's whole small group is there witnessing the event. Wow!

—TIM CULLNAN; copyright 2009 by the author and Christianity Today International.



Confessions of a Small-Group Coach

I thought I knew everything about coaching, but I had some misconceptions.

By Eric Wishman

Over the past few years, I have enjoyed serving as a coach of small-group leaders. Recently, I was hired as the point leader for small groups at a new church focused on reaching younger people. When I accepted this position, I thought I had coaching all figured out. No problem! All I had to do was tell my leaders everything I knew about small groups. Boy, was I wrong!

Here are some misunderstandings that I have recognized over the past few months. Getting these straightened out has helped me transform my own small-groups coaching ministry.

Leadership Development

The first misunderstanding I had about coaching was that coaching is primarily about leadership skill development. I thought that all I needed to do was pass along everything I knew about leading a small group—like how to facilitate a discussion, or how to have prayer time, or how to birth a new group. But, although leadership skill development is an important part of coaching, it's not the only thing.

What I learned was that coaching is also about personal development. As a coach, I can't just worry about a person's leadership skills. I need to also make sure the leader's personal and spiritual lives are being developed at the same time as their leadership skills. As I was focusing on their skill development, I was neglecting their spiritual and personal development. Consequently, leaders were starting to feel used and devalued. I have found that having a plan to develop all areas of the leader's life helped me make sure one area wasn't over-emphasized (or over-drained).

Time Investment

The second misunderstanding I had about coaching was that coaching would not take much time. I used to think 15 minutes every so often with a leader would be enough time to do the job. I would get an update on what material they were going through, how their apprentice leader was doing, and if they needed me to help in anyway. What else was there to do?

The truth is that coaching takes a lot of time. Time is a valued and often scarce commodity in today's society. When I spend time with a leader, they know that they are important and what they are doing is important. When I sit down with a leader and listen (instead of me doing all the talking) to what's going on in their lives and in their groups, I'm making deposits into their emotional bank accounts. I'm filling them up so they have something to give back to their group members. I've learned it's best to schedule these times weeks and months in advance so they don't get crowded out by other activities.

Leader Commitment

A third misunderstanding I had about coaching was that coaching is easy. I thought my leaders would have the same level of passion for small groups that I had. Why weren't they filling up my inbox with requests for more information and responsibilities? Looking back, I would say that most small-group leaders do want to become more effective in their ministry. However, I've learned that it is my responsibility as their coach to create a hunger and thirst in the leaders I serve.

A coach can create this appetite by casting a compelling vision. Now, every time I meet with a small-group leader, I recast the vision of small groups. Actually, I try to recast the vision every 14 to 21 days. I never want them to forget what God has called us to accomplish. When a leader understands and owns the vision, they will devote their lives to establishing biblical community in their small groups. The best way I have found to cast vision is through testimonies. I get group members to tell how being in a small group has changed them,

and I get leaders to tell how they have been changed through leading a group. I don't know of anyone who gets tired of hearing how God is working in peoples' lives.

Individual Effort

The fourth misunderstanding I had was that coaching is an individual effort. I love football! My favorite coaches in football are the guys who are natural leaders with strong personalities. Everyone knows they are the true leaders of their teams. Unfortunately, this attitude has carried over into my coaching of small-group leaders. I want to be the coach that everyone looks to. I have a desire to be known as the leader.

The truth is, coaching should be done in community. I need to set aside the urge to do everything on my own. Instead, I need to include others, just as I ask my group leaders to have someone they are preparing for future leadership. I also need to have someone I'm mentoring that will be a coach one day. The trap I fell into was believing that my apprentice coach had to be someone who could take over my role tomorrow. I now plan to spend six months to a year with my apprentice, so I know they will be fully equipped when they are on their own.

I know I've made my share of mistakes. Probably in another year, I could write another four misunderstandings I've had about coaching. But once I got over these hurdles, I started to see growth in our leaders and in our small groups. Hopefully, you can learn from my mistakes so you will be that much farther ahead of the game.

— ERIC WISHMAN; copyright 2002 by the author and www.SmallGroups.com.

Discuss:

1. What have you learned from leading other people that you wish you knew a year ago?
2. Which of the misconceptions listed above have you experienced?
3. Which of the misconceptions listed above have you avoided? How did you maneuver around them?



Common Obstacles of Small-Group Coaches

And practical ways to overcome them.

By Linda McCullough Moore

While small-group leaders are often alone when leading a group meeting or ministering to group members, they should never be alone in their ministries. Every small-group leader needs a coach. We may call this person a mentor, a trainer, a shepherd, or something else, but the function and the necessity are the same. Coaches should instruct, equip, encourage, and pray for the group leaders under their care.

This is an important and enriching ministry, but carrying it out may present the coach with a number of obstacles that can interfere not only with the coaching relationship, but also with the group leaders' interaction with their groups. What follows are several common obstacles for small-group coaches and how to overcome them in the service of fruitful and dynamic small-group ministries.

A Lack of Leaders

A coach must understand that potential small-group leaders will rarely self-select and volunteer to lead. For that reason, part of the coach's job is to identify and encourage individuals who might be good leaders to consider taking on the ministry—just like in athletics, small-group coaches are responsible for both on-field coaching and recruiting.

One of the main reasons potential group leaders don't volunteer is that they aren't familiar with what is involved and they aren't aware that training and mentoring is available. Therefore, the most helpful guideline for coaches in this regard is to meet with potential leaders and explain the benefits of small-group life, of leadership, and of the coaching process.

Telling Instead of Showing

Writers are familiar with this basic instruction: Show, don't tell. The idea is to help the reader experience the emotion of a scene through powerful imagery and dialogue, rather than spoon-feeding descriptions about what is going on. In education, too, teachers are understanding more and more that people almost always learn better by demonstration than by lecture.

And yet, too often coaches imagine they can train a group leader through one-on-one instruction—or worse, by lecturing to a group of leaders—when in fact the best way to learn how to be an effective small-group leader is to participate in a real and active group. Theory is fine, but the true formation of the leader takes places when he or she is able to experience and observe the work first hand.

For that reason, a coach does well to train new leaders by gathering a group of them together and conducting that training in a group setting. And coaches can best use their one-on-one training time with veteran leaders by discussing what is actually happening in their groups.

Misunderstanding Modeling

Coaches will get into trouble very quickly if they view their function as conveying information, rather than modeling what it means to be a leader. It is always more tempting to teach than to exhibit, but group leaders will learn more by watching how you guide and inspire others than by listening to lectures on how to *do* groups.

This is another reason why gathering a group of potential leaders together for training is so important. In scenario, the coach can serve as the group leader, modeling what to do (and what not to do). Role-playing is a powerful tool here. Ask your potential leaders to play out different situations that might arise in the groups they are hoping to lead, or in groups currently underway.

Confusing Style and Substance

It is a given that every small-group leader will have different approaches to guiding and shepherding their groups—different from each other, but also different from what their coaches might think is best. But “different” is not always bad, and in many cases is actively good.

A coach must never imagine that his or her way is *the* way of doing things. Coaches must be open and willing for group leaders to develop their own style, which means they must give those leaders time and space to grow. Of course, it is still the coach’s job to make sure the group leader does not wander off course in that growing process, so coaches must also possess a keen eye for discerning whether a group leader is making bad decisions, or is just doing something “different.”

When you find yourself in such a situation, ask the following questions to gain some extra clarity:

- Is God being glorified in the small group?
- What is the general climate of the group? Is it wholesome and constructive?
- Are members attending and growing?
- Is the leader open to coaching and willing to consider others’ ideas?

Discipline

When small-group leaders do begin making bad decisions, coaches are often hesitant to do anything about it—few people enjoy interpersonal conflict, after all, and it’s usually uncomfortable to try correcting others. Fortunately, the Bible offers clear and practical guidelines for small-group coaches to follow (see Matthew 18).

When a group leader goes off course, his or her coach must overcome any personal hesitation and speak directly to the leader in question. During this meeting, the coach can also ask the leader if she would like to make this a matter for discussion with the rest of the group. In the event that this does not resolve the problem, the coach needs to have a resource person in place—be it a pastor or another helper—who is willing to sit down with the coach and the small-group leader to address the problem.

It is very rare that a leader will need to be relieved of his or her responsibilities within a small group, but such situations do occur. This should not be done in the leaders’ group, but rather one-to-one, and in some cases with the assistance of a pastor or other member of the church staff.

Theological Differences

It is important to remember that there are no two people on the planet who understand the Christian faith and doctrine in precisely the same way. There will always be differences in understanding and insight, and on matters that are not of great importance, these must be accepted and used as inspiration for debate and conversation.

However, coaches will sometimes encounter a group leader whose teaching is at variance with basic Christian doctrine. It is the responsibility of the coach to prayerfully discern the core issues of faith in the community of the church and to both teach and shepherd the group leader. It is a good idea to consult the church’s doctrinal statement when these kinds of situations pop up.

Neglecting the Source

Coaching small-group leaders can become a mechanical process if you’re not careful. There are routine issues and problems, routine solutions, routine periods of inactivity, and routine periods of busyness. With all of that going on, it’s possible to lose sight of the fact that small groups are a spiritual endeavor ordained and empowered by the Holy Spirit. This is work which must be originated and sustained by prayer, and one of the primary tasks of small-group coaches is to pray daily for their group leaders.

—LINDA MCCULLOUGH-MOORE; copyright 2009 by the author and Christianity Today International.

Discuss:

1. Which of the situations described above do you feel most prepared to handle? Why?
2. Which do you feel least prepared to handle? Why?
3. What other obstacles are you worried about as you consider becoming a small-group coach? Who can you talk with to find solutions?



Five Habits of Effective Coaches

Coaching can be boiled down to the word itself.

By Dave Earley

There are five essential habits practiced by effective coaches of small-group leaders. In order to remember them, I use an acronym: C.O.A.C.H.

C—Care

Care about your group leaders—their families, jobs, health, group, and their future. We've all heard it before: "People do not care how much you know until they know how much you care." The reason we have all heard it with such frequency is because it is true. Effective coaches care about the leaders they oversee. Humanly speaking, I am in ministry today because a youth pastor took the time and trouble to build a relationship with me. He cared. He filled my tanks. He listened. Because he cared for me, I learned to care for others and about ministry.

Learn to give your potential leaders appropriate affection and care. It fills their tanks and enhances your relationship. Tell them. Show them. A timely phone call, a card with words of encouragement, an appropriate handshake, a pat on the back, or a hug will go a long way in letting the important people you minister to know that you love them.

O—Observe

Visit your leaders' groups and observe their health, growth, life, and multiplication. When my boys were little, they said three particular words more than any others. Can you what they were? (If you said "He did it," you win. But there were three other words they said almost as often). They would climb up the slide and yell, "Look at me!" They would hang upside down from the monkey bars and shout, "Daddy, look at me!" Or they would come out of my room wearing my "big man" clothes and scream in delight, "Daddy, look at me!" People have a natural need to be recognized, noticed, observed.

Mike, one of our most effective coaches, has made a huge difference for his group leaders simply by visiting their groups. He has seen that when a leader knows he is coming to visit, he or she feels encouraged, validated, and motivated. The group is energized, as well. Too often group leaders feel like they are out there on the front lines all alone. The visit of a coach quickly changes that perception.

There is another old saying, "You get what you inspect, and not what you expect." Observation helps ensure quality control in the groups the coach oversees.

A—Appreciate

Recognize the efforts of your small-group leaders. There are two words every leader yearns to hear from their coach: "Good job." Verbally and publicly appreciate their progress. Praise the way they minister to their members, and they will continue to do it.

In the 1930's, a young YMCA teacher taught a popular class on getting along with people. He taught what he called, "The big secret in dealing with people." It was, "Be hearty in appreciation and lavish in your praise." Dale Carnegie later wrote his ideas in what became one of the best selling books in history: *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. It still sells well today. That's because people will go to great efforts when they feel appreciated. People are appreciating assets when they are appreciated assets. As William James noted, "The deepest principle in human nature is the desire to be appreciated."

C—Challenge

Help your group leaders see the vision your church has for small groups, and help them desire to lead their groups toward health, growth, and multiplication. The Second Law of Thermodynamics states that all living things constantly move from a state of organization and energy to a state of disorganization and lethargy. This is true of everything, including your group leaders. One way to combat the Second Law of Thermodynamics is

to describe the dream. Remind them of the big picture and the great purpose of discipleship. Let them know that you believe in them.

When I was getting ready to go to college, I was struggling to understand my future. My youth pastor allowed me to get close enough to him to catch his heart to make a difference in people's lives. Because he had made the effort to deepen his relationship with me, I was able to hear his prayers for people, see him minister to people, and watch him agonize over people. He had something I wanted, yet I did not think I had what it would take to succeed in ministry. When I sensed God speaking to me about going into ministry, he was the first person I sought out for confirmation. I will never forget when he said, "Dave, I believe that God will use you to make a difference for him." I wonder if I would have become a pastor if it had not been for his encouragement. Everyone needs someone to believe in them.

Challenging coaches say things like:

- I believe you can become a great leader.
- I believe you can multiply this group.
- I believe you can become a great coach.

H—Help

Teach, train, instruct, counsel, guide, aid, resource and supply what your group leaders need, when they need it, in order to help them succeed and become a better leader and coach than you. Let me be very clear on this point: the goal of developing a disciple is to develop them to do something. The product of good coaching, the product of Caring, Observing, Appreciating, Challenging and Helping, is the development of leaders able to spearhead a growing, healthy group that is able to multiply. In other words, the goal is to develop effective leaders who will develop effective group leaders. Simply put, the goal is not to merely build a group—it is to build multiplying small-group leaders.

Take advantage of all the weapons in your arsenal as a coach to help your leaders. Some of these weapons include on the job training, one-on-one mentoring, classes offered by your church, seminars, books, tapes, magazines, and timely tips. As you do so, be wise. Always remember "the advisory sandwich": for every one negative you share with them, put it between a few positives.

—DAVE EARLEY; copyright 2004 by the author and SmallGroups.com.

Discuss:

1. Which of the tips above are you most excited about?
2. Which of the tips above are you most nervous about? Why?
3. How have you been encouraged and equipped on your journey toward becoming a small-group coach?



The Proper Care and Feeding of Group Leaders

Be proactive, make them a priority, and stress the importance of confidentiality.

By Steve Grusendorf

It's easy for small-group leaders to feel overwhelmed. And if we stop to consider all of their responsibilities, it's even easier to see why: prepare the lesson, teach the lesson, lead the prayer time, coordinate the location, make sure there are plenty of snacks, and follow up with individuals outside of the normal group meeting. Top all of this off with work, family, and other duties and it's clear why many small-group leaders are excellent candidates for spiritual burnout.

To make matters worse, small-group members often expect their group leader to have everything together. Group leaders can feel pressured to demonstrate a model marriage, a model devotional life, a model work ethic—the list goes on. It often gets to the point that small-group leaders feel unable to share their struggles and issues in the very groups they lead. How can they when the one causing many of their spiritual struggles may be sitting on the couch on the other side of the living room?

As leaders of small-group leaders, it is essential that coaches actively connect with those we lead, giving them ample opportunity to be refreshed and renewed. Here are some ways to do just that.

Create a Culture of Proactive Care

Tom had led a small group for years. So when he showed up in my office one day and told me that he couldn't handle leading his group any longer, I was astonished. He told me that the office he worked for had been keeping him on the road far longer than he was used to, and his family life was struggling because of it. He just did not have the time to lead his group. We worked it out so that one of the other couples in the group would lead the small group for the next few months while Tom and his wife could take a break.

Sometime our leaders are so busy with life and ministry that they don't even think to bring up the fact that they are running on empty. As coaches, we have to engage them through a variety of vehicles in order to give them ample opportunity to stay healthy. Of course, meeting over coffee or lunch is a great way to stay connected. Our church has multiple services on Sunday morning, and since my small-group leaders are already at the church, I will often meet them during a service or between a Christian education class and the worship service they attend. I also utilize a web-based survey that my leaders routinely fill out.

There is no right or wrong way to connect with your leaders, just make sure you are proactive. Don't wait until they breakdown in your office before stepping in to offer help.

Commit to Priority Follow Up

Dennis had been struggling for some time with a difficult member in his small group. He wanted this individual to stay with the group, but the person just seemed to command all the attention at every meeting. Dennis and I connected for coffee and discussed how he might go about handling the situation. Several weeks went by before I remembered to follow up with Dennis to see how things went. When I finally got a hold of him, I found out that the situation had taken a turn for the worse. His group was really struggling and did not seem to be having any success in dealing with the individual in question. Dennis asked if I could help, and I was glad to—but I apologized for not checking in sooner.

After you create a culture of proactive care, you need to place a high priority on your leaders' needs. Some people ask me at times why I don't lead a small group myself. The truth is, I do—sort of. My small group consists of the small-group leaders under my care. While we may not get together weekly, we are certainly a community. They get my first and my best when it comes to ministry time.

When a group leader raises a flag, we coaches need to respond quickly and appropriately. This has a twofold benefit. First, it allows you to help them overcome the challenge, and it helps them stay spiritually healthy.

Second, it encourages them for the next time they face a challenge. Consistent priority follow up creates a consistently healthy ministry.

Consistently Strive for Confidentiality

I have always told my group leaders that I have an open door for them, so I was glad when Susan and Anthony came to talk with me. They were small-group leaders and their group had just finished going through a six-week study on godly marriages. The problem was that they were struggling with their own marriage. They picked that particular curriculum because they felt they needed it as much as their group did. We talked for a while about their marriage and decided that they should see a counselor, but that the situation was not bad enough to take a break from leading their group. We committed the issue to prayer and promised to keep the matter between ourselves. I was glad they trusted me.

Without confidentiality, you will not get to the heart of the matter when group leaders do interact with you. Your small-group leaders need to know, without a doubt, that you will hold their confidence. This doesn't mean we gloss over sin when it's present, but it does mean we help them overcome the challenges they face in a God-honoring way. If your leaders cannot trust you, they will not come to you. Let them know in no uncertain terms that connecting with you is safe and healthy. This will help you meet their needs and keep them going strong in ministry.

It's sad to think that many small-group leaders feel overwhelmed and under-fed, especially when they consistently care for their group members week after week. It's time they had someone to lead them well, so let's make sure we coaches are there when they need us.

Stephen is a pastor and blogger who lives in Wisconsin. His blog, www.martyrpriest.com uses a mix of spiritual contemplations and social commentary to help readers lose their life and find their purpose.

— STEPHEN GRUSENDORF; copyright 2009 by the author and Christianity Today International.

Discuss:

1. What other unique pressures do small-group leaders face?
2. What systems can our coaches use to help make follow-up a consistent priority?
3. What situations usually cause a breach in confidentiality, and how can they be avoided?



Asking Good Coaching Questions

It's a valuable skill for group leaders, but vital for coaches.

By Dan Lentz

Questions are powerful. Beyond storytelling, asking questions was one of Jesus' main communication and outreach strategies. We know from the history of Christian Education that true change doesn't happen unless someone owns the message of change. And getting people to own that message requires them to seek the solution for themselves rather than just telling them the solution. Questions, then, are a great way to help people own that message (rather than just telling them what to do).

We know all of this when it comes to spiritual growth and small groups, but what about our coaching relationships? Do these principles ring true for leadership development as well as spiritual growth? The answer is yes, and that makes sense when you think about it. But let's be honest—many times, it's just easier for coaches to tell people a message rather than going to the effort of asking questions that help them think about the issue for themselves. For that reason, learning to ask questions that help group leaders own the change they need is one of the best leadership tools we have in our toolbox.

Important Principles for Good Questions

Using an icebreaker or an opening question is a great practice for a small group, but it also works effectively in one-on-one conversations. Icebreakers in coaching conversations should be both open and safe. For instance, if you want to talk to a group leader about their personal devotional life, you might start by asking questions like: What's been some of your most memorable times with God in the past? What frustrates you the most when trying to spend quality time with the Lord?

After listening to the leader's responses, it's time for some follow-up questions. For example, if you sense that time pressure and a hectic lifestyle are limiting factors to this individual's devotional life, avoid coming right out and telling them to change their lifestyle. Instead, some strategic follow-up questions are likely to be more effective.

Of course, thinking of those follow-ups can be easier said than done. One great resource for knowing how to ask these type of questions is *Coaching Questions* by Tony Stoltzfus. Here are a couple of the many principles discussed in that guide:

- Follow up with another open question, rather than closed questions or leading questions. Avoid questions like: "I know you have a lunch break, is there a way you could carve out some devotional time around lunch?" That is a closed question that tends to corner people and make them more defensive or protective.

An alternative question that would motivate someone to change more would be: "What time of day do you find yourself thinking about God the most?" or "You mentioned that your time is really used up right now. Can you tell me more about that?" or "What part of your day would you like to spend with God that is being taken from you by other obligations?"

- Ask follow-up questions that begin with "what" or "how." They usually help people become motivated to discover solutions to an issue.
- Questions that start with "should you," "could you," "will you," "can you," "are you," and so on tend to put people in a defensive posture. Basically, if you ask a question where the second word is "you," you're probably in trouble.
- Questions that begin with "why" also tend to put people on the defensive. For instance, which of these questions would leave you more open to change: "Why did you say that?" or "What was

your thought process that led you to say that?” It might seem subtle, but I would be more open to the second, and I believe most people would, as well.

Good Coaching Questions Start with Good Conversations

In the book *Missional Renaissance*, Reggie McNeal suggests churches would do well to conduct a communication audit and look at the content and type of questions being asked in relationships around the church. Shaping our conversations is vital to helping people change and moving in new ministry directions. One church cited in the book built these five questions into their normal conversational dynamics, and they made a significant difference in the life-change and leadership development of the congregation. Those questions were:

1. What do you enjoy doing?
2. Where do you see God at work right now?
3. What would you like to see God do in your life over the next 6–12 months? How can we help?
4. How would you like to serve other people? How can we help?
5. How can we pray for you?

Having some predetermined questions and question-asking principles in mind when initiating a deeper conversation is vital within the church—and vital within coaching relationships.

Practice, Practice, Practice

To avoid falling back into the pattern of just telling someone what they should do, it’s important to train leaders how to listen well and ask follow-up questions based on specific situations. One of the best ways to do this is through role play. For a training exercise, assume the following situations have happened in your small group and then have leaders role play asking follow-up questions to one another.

- **Situation 1:** An individual in your group has shared that they are going through a tough financial time right now. What follow-up questions might you ask them?
- **Situation 2:** You know someone who is really discouraged by their current family situation (either parenting or dealing with other family members). You see them prior to a worship service. What icebreaker question might you ask them to get the conversation started?
- **Situation 3:** Someone in your group shares they are having a really tough time at work and may be fired. What follow-up questions might you ask them?
- **Situation 4:** You know someone who has major issues with past failures, and you know they still struggle with it. What icebreaker question might you ask them the next time you see them?

When practicing having these conversations, focus on listening before formulating your follow-up questions. Use the ideas mentioned above to help formulate the wording of questions. Remember, how we handle coaching questions and conversations will have a big impact on our ministry. So listen well, know what questions to ask, how to ask them, and practice asking them as much as possible.

—DAN LENTZ; copyright 2009 by the author and Christianity Today International

Discuss:

1. When was the last time someone gave you advice on changing a behavior or lifestyle? How did you respond?
2. How can your church help other coaches and leaders become aware of these questions and principles?
3. What other ways can coaches practice these kinds of questions?



Effective Methods for Training Group Leaders

Just like with group members, it's important to spice things up when teaching leaders.

By Steve Grusendorf

If variety is the spice of life, why not get creative in training your small-group leaders? No one would deny that many different types of individuals are called to serve as group leaders. Some love structure. Some are free radicals. Some are young, while others are veterans. But no matter what type of person, they all need to be trained. This in itself can be challenging because of the wide variety of needs that are likely to be present among your leaders.

By varying your method of teaching, you can maximize interest, create active-learning environments, and engage many different personalities in a fresh and relevant way. To help kick-start your creative juices, consider using one of the following options for your next training session:

Labs

Remember your high school science class? It was the class room that was always filled with strange beakers and Bunsen burners. It was where experimentation happened—where hands-on learning took place. In the same way, hands-on experiences can greatly enhance a small-group leader's confidence. And there is no better place to get hands-on experience than in a laboratory.

By definition, a lab is a place for a student to learn in a controlled environment. This means that when you employ this type of training session, you need to put your leaders in an environment that you control. For example, perhaps you want to give your leaders experience in dealing with difficult personalities. Rather than just giving them a sheet of paper with personality profiles, introduce them to several players who will act out these personalities in a mock group during the training session. By allowing your leaders to experience a difficult personality in real time with immediate coaching and feedback, you help them gain confidence that a book could never provide.

What to do: Simulate a small-group setting. Perhaps this training session will take place in a home setting, for example. Then create a controlled learning environment for your leaders to experience. It might be that you have a mock participant who incessantly interrupts, or a couple who brings a sick child to the group baby-sitter. Put your leaders in a situation that mirrors something they could realistically experience in their groups, and then ask them to respond. Take time to stop during the lab in order to discuss challenges and successes. Draw out questions from those participating in the exercise. Limit your group size accordingly.

Who to target: Newer small-group leaders.

Things to avoid: Complex topics that require a lot of explanation.

The coach's role: As the leader of the exercise, a coach should observe and offer constructive comments to the group leaders as they interact with the lab. Feel free to hit the “pause” button as you see a teachable moment.

One last tip: The key to labs is making sure that you can control the environment, so make sure you plan out the exercises as much as possible. Also, ask yourself “What could go wrong?”

Round-Table Discussion

Want to discuss effective childcare methods? Bring together several small-group leaders who have effectively navigated the childcare waters and have them dialogue with those leaders facing the dilemma for the first time. Another way to have a round table is to find several group leaders who are flourishing in a particular area and have them serve as table facilitators. By putting one or two of these leaders at a table with five or six other leaders, you can create organic conversations that will offer hope and fresh perspective on the common challenges facing many groups.

What to do: Set a room up with several round tables, or rectangular tables with no more than eight seats. Choose one or several topics to be covered for the training session, but limit each table to one topic only. Then recruit leaders who are strong in each subject to act as table facilitators. Encourage your small-group leaders to attend and discuss the problems they are facing with others facing similar challenges—and with those who have experienced success with those issues.

Who to target: New and potential small-group leaders, paired with experienced small-group leaders.

Things to avoid: Tables with more than eight chairs.

The coach's role: Select the right table facilitators.

One last tip: Meet with your table facilitators prior to the training session and work out a list of conversation starters. When a facilitator finds conversation slowing, he or she can use the list to re-energize the group and stay on topic.

Lectures

For many ministry leaders, lectures are the main staple of training sessions. This makes sense because many ministry leaders are familiar with getting up in front of people and just talking. Lectures are also an efficient and effective way to communicate new ideas and fresh perspectives. So be sure to include some lectures in your efforts to train group leaders. Plan a training session that allows them to sit, listen, and learn about the topic in a classroom setting.

What to do: Bring together your small-group leaders in a home or classroom and present your material in a comfortable and relaxed setting. Use an effective media presentation to supplement your lecture, such as a PowerPoint presentation. Provide handouts with limited writing required to reinforce what you are teaching.

Who to target: All types of group leaders.

Things to avoid: Handouts with lots of blanks.

The coach's role: You are the primary communicator of this new information.

One last tip: Just because you are lecturing does not mean the training session cannot be interactive. Plan on asking your group several thought-provoking questions based on the material you present.

Case Studies

Sometimes small-group leaders can find it difficult to talk about issues their group is facing because they feel as though they are breaking a sacred trust. “What is said in group stays in group,” they say. So, instead of trying to pry into their group life, why not offer a training session where group leaders assess and role play using several mock case studies?

Creating a fictional case study will help your leaders open up to dialoguing about the real-life challenges they face. Because the case study is fictional, leaders won't struggle with really opening up and sharing how they might overcome the issues being addressed. The reality is many of these fictional settings readily apply to real life, too.

What to do: Break out your leaders into groups of five. Give each group the same case study and time to come up with a solution they can share with the other groups. Or, give each group a different case study and time to come up with a solution before presenting the problem and solution to the other groups for discussion.

Who to target: Experienced small-group leaders

Things to avoid: Real-life stories, no matter how long ago they happened.

The coach's role: Make the case study come alive and get the group excited. Make them feel as though this was a real issue facing a fellow small-group leader.

One last tip: Perhaps creative writing is not your area of expertise. If so, enlist a particularly creative small-group leader to write one or two case studies for you.

Guest Speakers

While your small-group leaders might consider you the expert on all things small groups, you will probably come across some issues with which you have little or no experience. Inviting an expert to come in and discuss

things like counseling, abuse, learning styles, and so on can be a very effective method of training. This option also relieves you of the stress of feeling you need to know everything about every subject.

What to do: Identify a particular area in which you would like to invite a professional to teach. Look inside your church for potential candidates, but make sure you are truly getting a professional. Kindly ask your guest speaker to speak in layman's terms so that their content is easy to understand.

Who to target: All types of leaders.

Things to avoid: Experts who don't relate well to people.

The coach's role: Learn along with your leaders. Introduce your guest and act as group facilitator, if necessary.

One last tip: Make sure that your expert is really an expert. If you are going to bring in someone to discuss counseling, make sure the individual is a credentialed counselor. Are you going to bring in someone to discuss theological questions? Make sure your speaker has had the proper training to offer educated answers to tough questions.

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When It's Time to Discipline a Group Leader

Here are three important steps that can make a tough task more effective.

By Danny R. Von Kanel

Standing in front of a room full of senior staffers, I asked, “How many of you like to correct your small-group leaders?” Silence; no hands raised. Standing in front of a group of small-group leaders, I asked, “How many of you enjoy being disciplined?” Silence; no hands raised. And that’s no surprise. None of us likes correction. But coaching small-group leaders does require that corrective action be taken in certain situations. The key is knowing how to give corrective discipline that remedies the problem and salvages the leader.

As coaches, we correct best when we follow these three principles: accept and implement the biblical model, approach the group leader with “I feel” statements instead of “You” accusations, and apply mistakes made and solutions gathered using “could it be” questions.

Accept and Implement the Biblical Model

Here’s what God’s Word says on the subject of correction: “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector” (Matthew 18:15–17).

That’s pretty clear. Go to him or her—but before you do, call and set up an appointment at a time that is convenient for them. Ask them to come to your office. Never correct in front of a group or within hearing distance of group members. Initially, meet with the person in question by yourself, unless you feel the person is prone to misuse, misunderstand, or distort what you say and how you said it—in that case, have a co-worker meet with you on this first visit. If, over a period of time (usually a month), the issue has not resolved, reschedule another appointment. This time, do include another co-worker. If that doesn’t resolve the concern, bring it to the church’s attention. Such drastic action should only happen with issues of major consequence. Teaching false doctrine or heresy would fall in this category.

These meetings should include the following:

- Prayer, both opening and closing. Open to ask for God’s wisdom, and close to thank God for resolving this issue in accordance to his will.
- Sit directly in front of or to the side of the group leader. Never sit behind your desk.
- Affirm their contribution. Be kind, considerate, and to the point. State the issue as soon as possible in the meeting. Allow them feedback to assess how they perceive the problem. They may have information you don’t.
- Steer them away from peripheral issues unless they directly impact the problem under discussion.
- Emotions may surface throughout the discussion, but shift some of that by sharing how you feel.

There are three problems that should require an automatic suspension of ministry at that first meeting: child abuse allegation (in which case most states require notifying authorities), sexual abuse accusation, and threats to harm another person. In these situations, the group leader needs to be given a leave of absence until the accusations can be investigated.

Use “I feel” Statements Instead of “You” Accusations

Whenever you talk to a group leader in a corrective setting, consciously try to use “I feel” statements—things like, “I feel disappointed that you’ve chosen to ignore our policies in this regard,” or, “I feel angry because you violated confidentiality.” Such declarations help connect the person with your feelings and allow for reflection.

When you use “You” accusations, however, it puts the person on the defensive and almost always causes them to rebel at any correction. For example, compare the statements above with the following: “You chose to ignore our policies.” “You make me angry because you violated confidentiality in your group.” See the difference? Especially avoid statements such as, “You messed up,” “You destroyed unity in the group,” or, “You are to blame for people leaving the group.” These only rev up the rhetoric, and don’t really address the leader’s mistake or failure.

If you’re not familiar with using “I feel” statements in conversation, you may want to practice with a coworker before meeting with the group leader in question—especially if you struggle with sharing emotional feelings about things. Having empathy is important to understanding why a person did what they did.

Consider using the following technique to probe the “why” behind your group leader’s mistake, and to begin identifying solutions going forward:

1. Ask them to share what they want for themselves in regard to the resolution of this given problem, action, mistake, or accusation.
2. Ask, “What emotion were you feeling when the situation occurred?” This helps them sort through the emotions behind their actions.
3. Ask, “What are you presently doing to resolve this problem?”
4. Ask what they are going to do the next time an issue like this arises. [They will most likely know the correct response, but give them some possibilities, if necessary.]

Use “Could It Be” Questions to Work on Application

Questions asked from a “could it be” perspective offer group leaders a way to state their mistake in way that is less dogmatic and involves less of a blow to the leader’s self-esteem. For instance, instead of saying, “You messed up when you spread information that was told you in confidence,” say something like: “Could it be that the information told to you in our training meeting was best kept confidential?”

The first question creates walls of defiance. The second offers a possibility for action without condemning the leader. “Could it be” questions can also be used when developing solutions. For example, “Could it be that checking with me first is the best decision when you have questions about confidentiality?”

When correcting or disciplining small-group leaders, also take into account the following:

- Treat every group leader like you would want to be treated if you had messed up.
- Tame the anger within you. Never address a leader’s failures when you’re mad. Keep in mind these Scriptures: Ephesians 4:26; Proverbs 13:10; 28:25.
- Test the word of testimonies. Eyewitness accounts can be bogus.
- Tackle conflicts when you’re rested. You will be emotionally exhausted after addressing the issue, so make sure your body is ready to take on the stress.
- Tread softly. More damage results from mishandling a leader who is loved by group members than any one minor offense for which the leader is guilty.

Correcting errant small-group leaders begs to be addressed by someone else. Unfortunately, that someone is you. But consider the perk involved: Who else gets to do this in a Christian setting? Just imagine saving a fruitful leader who, by correcting their mistakes, becomes a champion for the gospel for the rest of their lives. What a challenge! What an honor! May God use you to perpetuate positive discipline and correction that results in amazingly restored leaders.

—DANNY R. VON KANEL; copyright 2009 by the author and Christianity Today International.

Discuss:

1. Have you ever been disciplined by a church leader? Have you disciplined someone else?
2. Which of the principles listed above seems easiest to carry out?
3. Which one seems hardest, or most frightening?



The Small-Group Coach as Bridge Builder

Here are four tasks that successful coaches must embrace.

By Carolyn Taketa

If you serve as a coach for small-group leaders in your church, you have a dual role. Your main purpose is to develop, equip, and encourage the leaders in your care. But to do that job well, you frequently function as a bridge between those leaders and the leaders of your church. This is true whether you are a volunteer coach or paid staff.

Coaches are often the relational intermediaries between the leader and “the church”, which in some contexts may refer to the small-group ministry leadership or the senior pastor. As a coach, you assist the leaders and the church to understand, value, and listen to each other while helping to integrate the vision of the church within the individual groups. The following are some key ways that coaches build bridges to serve both the group leader and the church.

Coaches Facilitate Vision Alignment

Your church has a vision and expectations for its small groups, and for how they fit within the context of the greater body. A significant part of a coach’s function is to share this vision and equip leaders toward the church’s goals for its small-group ministry. As a coach, whether you are working with new or existing leaders, you need to be familiar with your church’s vision, understand its value, and be invested in bringing it to fruition.

For example, if your church places a high value on groups serving the poor together, you want to share that vision with the leaders, tell them why the church holds that value, suggest ways their groups might do that, and then hold them accountable for it. But be careful not to micromanage your leaders. You do not want to fall into the trap of “parroting to group leaders the vision of the church rather than helping leaders dream about their unique groups and create their own compelling vision for their group” (quoted from *Coaching Life Changing Small Groups*, by Bill Donahue and Greg Bowman). Coaches need to share the broader vision while also encouraging group leaders to be creative about tailoring that vision to fit their specific, God-given groups.

Coaches Provide Practical Resources

One of the most frequent questions that group leaders ask coaches pertains to curriculum—and that’s a great thing for coaches. That’s because a discussion about curriculum gives you a valuable opportunity to hear what is happening in a group while encouraging the leader, influencing the spiritual direction of the group, and providing course corrections as needed (theological incongruence with the church’s doctrinal statement, for example). So, instead of just pointing group leaders to a website or giving them a list of approved Bible studies, wise coaches spend time asking probing questions about what God is doing in the group, next steps, spiritual maturity, and group dynamics. Then you can brainstorm with the leader and tailor recommendations that would work well in their specific situation.

Coaches are also instrumental in removing institutional barriers for small-group leaders. They know the systems and policies for their churches—or at least they know where to go for answers. So they can assist group leaders with a variety of practical needs: room reservations, audio-visual needs, copy machine usage, coffee set up, promotional needs, bulletin announcements, website content, and so on. The bigger the church, the more difficult it may be to figure out how to get these needs met. That’s why group leaders are almost always thankful to have someone on the “inside” helping them with these details. At the same time, church personnel appreciate having coaches that can streamline the process.

Coaches Communicate and Troubleshoot Issues that Arise

In a smaller church, group leaders may have access to senior church leadership and can give and receive information directly. However, in larger churches, the primary church relational contact for the group leaders is their coach. In fact, the coach may be the only “official” church person they know and rely upon for

information, as well as a barometer of how the church is really doing. For some group leaders, their level of relationship with their coach determines how connected and invested they are to the greater church body.

Since most of a small-group leader's ministry happens off-site and is independent of the church, it is crucial that leaders have regular and consistent communication from their coaches. This is a simple and effective way to value their partnership in ministry with you. Make sure you keep leaders informed about the important happenings of the church, especially decisions that impact their ministry.

When an issue arises that is beyond the capacity of the group leader to manage, it is the coach's role to step in and help facilitate a biblical resolution. Scheduling a group visit once every six months can help coaches see first-hand the group dynamics that the leader is facing, and is also an opportunity to help preempt possible issues. If group leaders have issues with others in the group or the church, coaches can step in to model humility, avoid gossip, and shepherd them through a Matthew 18 healthy conflict resolution process. For example, if a group leader is at odds with church leadership and you are unable to address their concerns, you can facilitate honest, open, respectful dialogue between the leader and the pastor or elder speaking on behalf of the church.

Coaches Speak on Behalf of Their Leaders

As a coach, you are on the front line of hearing what God is doing in the trenches of small groups, which is an important slice of congregational life. The bigger the church, the more its decision-makers will want and need feedback about what is happening in the body life of the church. So share your leaders' stories whenever you can—stories of triumph, need, spiritual movement, life transformation, challenges, concerns, and so on. Remember that you are a voice for the leaders you serve.

Also, you might offer your group leaders and their groups to be interviewed or highlighted in various mediums (during the Sunday service, on the website, in the bulletin). For example, having leaders available to answer questions about group life in the lobby or at a newcomers gathering values the leader's contribution while helping the church. Integrating group leaders into the greater body life of the church serves the church and affirms their ministry.

At the same time though, coaches need to protect their leaders from being over-asked and "volunteered" for every need that arises in the church (e.g., nursery workers, food for shelters, ushers, move furniture, give a ride, host a missionary, clean-up the sanctuary). There are so many good causes, and there may be a temptation for churches to use small groups and coaches as a delivery system for all sorts of needs and announcements. When you are asked to communicate something to leaders, make sure it fits within the vision and purpose of the small-groups ministry. You do not want to dilute your influence by becoming a clearinghouse for every random need. So use your discretion wisely and make sure that whatever "ask" you make to group leaders lines up closely with the vision and purpose for that group and will serve its goals well.

Coaches exist as relational and functional bridges between the church and their small-group leaders. When coaches serve their leaders in spiritual, practical, relational, and organizational ways, they will facilitate unity and purpose between the leaders and church, thereby helping both move forward together.

— CAROLYN TAKETA; copyright 2009 by the author and Christianity Today International.

Discuss:

1. Which of the four tasks listed above seems easiest to do? Why?
2. Which of the four tasks seems most difficult?
3. What obstacles exist that could potential derail your role as a bridge between churches and group leaders? How can they be overcome?



Sample Forms for Coaches

Use this checkup and appointment checklist as you carry out your ministry.

By Len Woods

A Coaching Check-Up

Here are several questions that coaches need to ask themselves at least once every 30 days:

1. How well have I listened to the leaders under my care?

2. Have I done a good job of celebrating victories with my leaders?

3. How (specifically) have I demonstrated personal care and concern?

4. Do I have a strategic plan for where each of my leaders needs to go and grow?

5. What am I doing specifically to help my leaders develop in knowledge, skills and character?

6. Have I helped my leaders develop measurable, achievable goals for their lives, families and groups?

7. Am I living up to the covenant I agreed to with my leaders?

8. What makes my group leaders tick? What do they need from me?

9. Are the groups I'm overseeing growing (qualitatively and quantitatively)?

Coaching Appointment Checklist

Leader/Group: _____ **Date:** _____

Meeting Place: _____ **Time:** _____

Use these questions to prepare for your coaching appointment:

1. Have I prayed for this leader?
2. Have I reviewed my notes (mental and/or written) from our last meeting?
3. What personal/marital/family needs am I aware of?
4. What ministry/group issues do I need to inquire about?
5. What core value (theological truth, ministry skill, or character quality) will I focus on with this leader during our time together? What is the most effective way I can pass on this concept or training?
6. How, practically speaking, can I encourage this leader?
7. What information do I need to convey in the way of church-wide philosophy of ministry, vision, and/or events?

Notes:

Assignment(s) for the leader:

Specific things I need to do as coach as a result of this meeting:

Next Meeting

Date: _____ **Time:** _____ **Place:** _____

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Further Exploration

Websites and books to help small-group coaches grow their group leaders and ministries.

SmallGroups.com. Small-groups training resources from Christianity Today International.

[Small-Group Host](#): Orientation Guide

[Effective Affinity Groups](#): Practical Ministry Skills

[Connecting Newcomers](#): Training Theme

LeadershipJournal.net. This website offers practical advice and articles for church leaders.

Coaching Life-Changing Small-Group Leaders by *Greg Bowman and Bill Donahue*. The must-have resource for coaches who shepherd and care for small group leaders (Zondervan, 2006; ISBN 978-0310251798).

Making Small Groups Work by *Henry Cloud and John Townsend*. This book provides small-group leaders with valuable guidance and information on how they can help their groups to grow spiritually, emotionally, and relationally (Zondervan; ISBN 978-0310255123).

Successful Small Groups: From Concept to Practice by *Teena M. Stewart*. A solid and practical book that covers all the bases (Beacon Hill Press, 2007; ISBN 978-0834122373).

The Connecting Church: Beyond Small Groups to Authentic Community by *Randy Frazee*. This book paints a beautiful portrait of biblical community and talks about the sacrifices we will have to make in order to experience life together (Zondervan, 2000; ISBN 978-0310233084).

The Seven Deadly Sins of Small Group Ministry by *Bill Donahue*. A troubleshooting guide for church leaders. Assessment and solution for seven common obstacles to building small groups (Zondervan, 2005; ISBN 978-0310267119).