

THE LEADERSHIP OF SMALL GROUPS

The effectiveness of a group rests largely upon its leader. Where there is poor leadership, the group will have difficulty keeping alive. Yet almost anyone who is willing to learn can be a good leader with training and experience. Here are twelve guidelines for leaders:

1. **Set a tone of friendliness.** Learn the names of everyone the group. Greet them as they arrive, and immediately make them feel comfortable. This requires that the leader always be there early.
2. **Be sensitive to individual needs.** Learn where the members of the group are coming from, where they are hurting what problems they are facing in their lives.
3. **Share honestly your own needs.** The leader's transparency will create openness in the group. Refrain from confessing other people's sins, but do not hesitate to confess your own.
4. **Listen with loving concern to what others are saying.** Try to hear not only what they say, but what they feel. Keep eye contact with the group.
5. **Keep the group's purpose in focus.** Meetings can get off on tangents unless called back to their mission. If someone seems to sidetrack the group, you might say, "That's interesting, Bob, but let's look at this subject now." Or you could say, "We seem to be getting off the track," then move on.
6. **Ask questions to direct thoughts.** This is the way to keep the discussion on target without monopolizing the conversation. A good leader will talk no more than 20-30% of the time
7. **Welcome silence.** Let people think. After asking a question, if no one responds in 60 seconds, you can ask, "Did everyone understand the question?", and then rephrase the question.
8. **Encourage participation.** If someone seems to dominate by talking too much, let the person finish, then say, "That's good. What does someone else think about it?" It is the responsibility of the leader to see that everyone takes part.
9. **Get people to make personal applications.** The leader must not let persons talk in generalities. Ask, "How is it at home, school, at work?" You might say, "Give me a specific illustration of this in your own life, Bill." Ask them to use the first person singular - "I am facing... "
10. **Clarify what is happening in the group.** Help people see the issue. "What does this mean to you, Jane?" might be a question. Bring the discussion to a meaningful summary.
11. **Recognize anger, conflict, boredom, and deal with it.** "I see that this bothers you, Jim", you might say. "Would you like to tell us why?" Build bridges where there are barriers.
12. **Let the group minister to each other.** At this point the group really fulfills its purpose.

Types and Techniques

METHODS	HOW TO USE	ADVANTAGES
BRAIN-STORMING	Announce topic or question to be "stormed." Everyone makes as many suggestions a possible in time limit. No criticism allowed. List ideas on chalkboard as given. At end of time, evaluate and discuss.	Produces new ideas Loosens up group Involves non-participants Focuses thinking on specific topic
BUZZ GROUPS	Divide the group into groups of six people each. Each group selects a leader and its member's assigned topic. When whole group reconvenes, leader reports findings to group. Groups may discuss same or different topics.	Many individuals feel freer to express opinions in a small group Maximum participation & interaction in limited time Stimulates discussion
CIRCULAR CONVERSATION OR CIRCULAR RESPONSE	Members are seated ideally (but not necessarily) in a circle. The leader asks a question and the person on leader's right begins the discussion. Everyone speaks only once, in turn.	Allows less aggressive members to participate Provides total class involvement
DEBATE	Negative and affirmative sides present opposing views on an issue. Arguments and rebuttals are given alternately, followed by a time of general group discussion.	Presents controversial topics effectively Necessitates ones defending his position Allow for free expression of controversial opinion Gives keen thinkers an outlet
DISCUSSION	Leader begins with leading question. Comments, answers, and other questions come from members to members. Leader must hold discussion to topic and summarize findings.	Provides for interaction Creates interest and involvement Variety of viewpoints can be offered
GROUP BIBLE STUDY	Ask questions to help the group understand the passage. Encourage members to share insights. Present additional interpretive material and information when necessary. Allow group to discuss and apply Truth to life.	Makes students think rather than just soak up truth Helps train members to study the Word on their own. Increases participation and involvement
INDIVIDUAL STUDY	Have group members read assigned passage silently looking for answers to specific questions. They will need to use pencil/pen and paper to record their findings.	Acquaints members with scripture passage to be studied. Prepares for participation
INTERVIEW	The leader (or group) interviews another person (expert), asking him/her questions or discussing a topic with the guest.	Add variety to the meeting Greater overall value with an "expert"
PANEL	Three or four group members, given advance time to prepare, discuss a subject informally. Remainder of group asks questions and/or the panel discusses any part of the topic.	Provides interchange of well-thought out, well-prepared ideas Presents several viewpoints Increases listener's attention & interest
QUESTION AND ANSWER	Leader asks questions and the group replies. Interaction between leaders and student. Don't call on people who would be embarrassed. Word questions carefully.	Provides involvement Guides group thinking Keeps group on topic
RESEARCH AND REPORT	Assign topics for research about a week in advance. Give clear direction and instruction. Help suggest resources. Hold reports to a set time limit.	Involves deep thinkers Gives background , provocative information Leader doesn't monopolize discussion
ROLE PLAY	Have members "act out" different scenarios, or practice a skill that has been taught. Follow with analysis and evaluation of the experience.	Give members a chance to practice a skill or different solutions to a problem Makes lessons more experiential or "feel" situations
SKIT	Have "actors" read the part of a brief "play" that illustrates points that provoke discussion, a point of the lesson, or presents information.	Provides variety and can use humor to break the ice or drama to emphasize a point. Encourages participation
SYMPOSIUM	Like a panel, but with no interchange. Each person reports or lectures in turn, on one topic or issue.	Presents several reports at once Good way to provide information
TESTIMONY	Members share with one another their experiences and lessons they have learned from God.	Demonstrated biblical application Promotes honesty & trust in group Strengthens those who share

HOW TO LEAD A DISCUSSION GROUP

Robert Coleman

I. What is a discussion group?

A discussion group is a number of people (4-12 preferably) gathered together with a leader to talk over a particular subject.

II. Why have a discussion group?

A. Advantages for the student

1. It is the best method for creating leadership abilities.
 - a. It draws out the potentialities of those in the class
 - b. It produces people with well-thought-through personal convictions.
 - c. It builds self-confidence
 - d. It helps students learn to express themselves clearly
2. It greatly enhances the learning process.
 - a. It allows for maximum student participation which results in increased motivation
 - b. It stimulates creative thinking
 - c. Students will be motivated to further thought, investigation, and personal interaction on the issues discussed
 - d. It broadens the students' thinking by exposing them to the various viewpoints of the students
3. It provides an opportunity and atmosphere for meeting the students' personal needs.
 - a. It provides an atmosphere in which the students can discuss and find solutions to their personal needs.
 - b. It gives insight into the corporate thinking of the group.
 - c. The informality allows the teacher and students to know how the other members of the group really think and what they really feel , and thus gives them an opportunity to help others with their personal needs.
 - d. It provides an atmosphere in which wrong attitudes are corrected through the influence of the rest of the group.

B. Advantages for the leader

1. It does not require a leader with great public speaking ability in order to be successful
2. It allows for flexibility
3. Because of the small size of the group and the interaction, it enables the teacher to better determine whether the students are really learning
4. It develops qualities of leadership for the teacher himself.

III. Pitfalls of the guided discussion

A. Preparation

1. There may be a danger that teacher and students may not feel the need for personal preparation because they may feel that they can cover up their lack of preparation in the discussion. However, the success of a good guided discussion depends on thorough preparation of both students and leader.
2. Without proper preparation on the part of the students it will become a pooling of ignorance.
3. It is not the place to present a large volume of content. It is used instead when it is important for the students to think through the issues.

B. procedure Pitfalls

1. Without practice by the leader, it is sometimes difficult to get a good discussion started.
2. Without proper guidance a few people may monopolize the discussion and others may tend not to become involved.
3. It may lead to argument. This is not bad if the proper attitudes are maintained in the disagreement
4. There may be a tendency for the leader to talk too much

5. There may be a tendency for the inexperienced teacher to correct the students and to present his own conclusions rather than let the group come to these conclusions on their own. Such a tendency will inhibit the discussion, and will nullify the advantages of the guided discussion.

C. purpose Pitfalls

1. It is easy to get off on unfruitful tangents
2. There may be a tendency for the inexperienced teacher to let the discussion drift away from the purpose of the particular session.
3. There may be a tendency not to reach concrete conclusions.
4. There may be a tendency for students to reach conclusions without making applications to their personal lives and ministry.

IV. Preparing for the guided discussion

A. A good discussion requires adequate preparation on the part of all students.

B. Preparation of the leader

1. He needs a clear objective (where are you going in this discussion?)
2. He needs a logical outline (do you understand what you want to present?)
3. He needs good questions (write out in advance)

Before the group meets ask yourself the following questions about your launching questions, and after the group meets ask yourself these questions about the guiding questions that you used.

- a. to whom is the question directed?
- b. what is the underlying purpose of the question?
- c. what answer does the question expect or suggest?
- d. how personally are the hearers involved by the question?
- e. what degree of urgency does the question suggest?

1. To Whom Is The Question Directed?

- a. to oneself (RHETORICAL)
- b. to one member of the group (DIRECT)
- c. to the one who asked the previous question (REVERSING)
- d. to the group, other than the previous questioner (RELAY)
- e. to the group as a whole (GENERAL/OPEN) Avoid RHETORICAL questions - they usually kill discussion at once.

Beware of DIRECT questions - the person asked may have nothing relevant to say.

Normally use RELAY and GENERAL/OPEN questions - they stimulate the group most.

2. What Is The Underlying Purpose Of The Question?

Is it to accumulate facts, to define, to clarify, explain, to compare, to contrast, to develop, to relate, to bring the group back to the subject, to change direction, to involve, to arrive at conclusions, to summarize findings, or to stimulate application?

3. How Are The Hearers Involved Personally By The Question?

- a. What should other people do about this?
- b. What should Twentieth Century man do about this?
- c. What should (-unbelievers) (Christians) do about this?
- d. What should you do about this?
- e. What should we do about this?
- f. What will you do about this?
- g. What shall we do about this?