

Small Group Training #2

By Del Dunavant

1. This is the second (advanced) presentation on small groups. Please make sure you have carefully studied the first presentation, so you will better understand this presentation.
2. Successful small groups almost always starts **after** the senior (lead) pastor does a sermon series on the importance genuinely caring for others – creating community. Unless the members know how important this is, they won't experiment with small groups.
3. At the end of this sermon series, some churches have a number of tables set up with the following; (A) Group leader – to answer questions, (B) a sign-up sheet with contact information, and (C) a sign stating the day and time for this group.
4. Some churches just announce the starting of a small group for 2 to 3 weeks in the bulletin. Small group leaders could divide the church membership list according to (A) age by decade, (B) gender, and (C) family. Next, each leader calls to invite members matching the decade, gender, and families with which they are most comfortable.
5. To encourage more people to join your group, smile wherever you go. If people smile back, talk about anything appropriate. If they talk back, drop a “God hint” (bring God into this conversation). For example one could say, “Hasn't God given us a beautiful day?” If they talk about God, or something spiritual, invite them to your small group.
6. Another way to increase attendance, is to go to your neighbors (fellow works, friends, relatives) and give them something personal (e.g. baked goods) and after talking with them say, “If you are ever overwhelmed and you want someone to pray for you, would you please ask me.” Once they ask you, not only pray for them, but invite them to your small group where people will pray for them weekly.
7. Some churches, or small groups, hold block parties and invite the police (or other community service group) to come and share with your gathering. Be sure to invite all attendees to come to your small group(s). One could use a business card for each small group, handing them out as people show interest.
8. Each leader must select an assistant leader. The assistant leader is a leader in-training – getting experience leading out occasionally. When your group

becomes too large, the assistant leader leads out in the new group with both leaders securing new assistant leaders.

9. The leader's role is to facilitate a smooth flow through the meeting – making sure everyone has time to talk yet being concerned about the time. Leaders encourage sharing, affirm what people say, and gently hold people accountable. Leaders don't teach as much as they lead the group through well thought out questions.
10. What are the characteristics of a good small group leader? They need to be a person who (A) is willing to pray much for each attendees. (B) is empathic, compassionate, (C) ensures the small group is a safe place for people to share, and (D) is willing to train an assistant leader.
11. What is the ideal size of a small group? Your group should not be less than three and not more than twelve. The ideal size is five to seven.
12. Once a group gets too large, assuming that group is a long term group, attendees will not have time to share or to genuinely care for each other. Yet many groups don't want to divide. Promise social gatherings monthly or quarterly to let them re-connect. This will help them to join a new group.
13. How long should a small group continue? Each group will be different. But, because of our busy schedules, I recommend going somewhere between six and twelve weeks. If your group wants to go another cycle, you can. However, it is important to have an "end day" or people fear committing to something going on forever. Most groups do not function during the summer months – but your group could be different.
14. If one's attendees are younger, child care might need to be provided. Some small groups have, rotating on a weekly basis, a person step out of the group for one night and provide child care. Others, donate a small amount to pay another person (e.g. teenager, senior citizen) to provide child care. Some small groups have a host/hostess to help attendees with personal needs or provide refreshments.
15. On opening night explain the four essential activities of your small group. Cover basic rules, such as (A) no interrupting while another shares, (B) no attempts to fix another's concern or sharing of a comparable personal story, (C) no dominating the conversation, and (D) no gossiping.

16. A possible nightly schedule: 10-15 minutes for sharing, 5-10 minutes intercessory prayer, 20-25 minutes for relational Bible study, and 5-10 minutes for service/outreach. If your group meets twice a month, go about 90 minutes and expand accordingly. If your group meets monthly, go up to three hours.
17. Whereas all four essential activities must be done at each meeting, every group will spend different amount of time for each. A predominately extrovert group will spend more time in sharing. Deep students of the Bible will spend more time in Bible study, etc.
18. Many groups use an ice breaker to begin the first few nights. Ask a simple question that reveals something about the attendee and let each share their response. For example, one could ask, "What was your favorite Christmas and why?" Or, "What animal best represents your character?" etc., etc.
19. During the sharing time, one could ask, "What happened in your life this week?" Or, "What would you like us to pray about for you?" The leader might want to take brief notes to guide his/her praying during the week. Inform your group that each person will have two to three minutes to share. (If you are meeting monthly, or have a very small group, you will have more time for each person to share). At first, some people might be too shy to share – don't make them feel uncomfortable.
20. After the sharing time, encourage your group to pray. Some will feel uncomfortable praying out loud. Therefore, before prayer, announce if anyone wants to only pray silently, just say "amen" out loud when it is your turn, or after they had time for silent prayer. I strongly recommend keeping a prayer journal listing prayer requests, the date of that request, and the answer to that request. This prayer journal will dramatically increase the faith of your attendees. If you have a Pentecostal within your group, request that person to pray in the Spirit only when they have a translator present (see 1 Cor. 14).
21. Many small groups work through one Bible story in the Gospels each week. Next week's lesson is simply the next story. Once you have covered all four Gospels you can use another Bible book (or maybe use "Steps to Christ," "Desire of Ages," or "Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing.")
22. Remember to use Ellen White's quote of using one's imagination (see prior presentation). Encourage the attendees to relive that story, being either a participant or a nearby observer. Finish by asking those two questions; (A) What

does this story tell us about God's character, and (B) How could this story apply to my life?

23. When someone says something outlandish, try to affirm something about their interest in this story, but gently guide them back to the Bible. Remember there are no "right answers" when using one's imagination.

24. A small group doesn't have to study SDA doctrines to be evangelistic. Instead, observe those struggling with the Bible story (maybe having a hard time finding the Bible passage, or know so little about that story) and privately state that you noticed they were having a challenging time. Next, offer to share with them "the major themes of the Bible (you are offering Bible studies) so they would feel more comfortable within this group." I have never been turned down and have baptized most attendees by using this simple offer.

25. There are endless ways to do service/outreach events. See books on servant evangelism. Ask within your group, "What needs to be done with our community?" Or, "How can we improve the quality of life within our community?" After suggesting different projects, determine which one(s) are possible for your group. Once one project is complete, your group will be excited to do many more.

26. "You can't give what you don't have!" Small group leaders need to gather regularly to be ministered to. A pastor's small group could consist of the leaders of small groups. This provides an ideal time to inform the pastor of significant issues and to receive ongoing training for your small group. Read Ex. 18 to discover the "Jethro principle" and use it here.

27. My favorite books for small groups are as follows;
 - A. "Successful Small Groups" by Kurt Johnson
 - B. "Small Groups, Big Impact" by Jim Engli & Dwight Marble
 - C. "Nine Keys to Effective Small Group Leadership" by Carl George
 - D. "How to Build a Small Group Ministry" by Neal McBride
 - E. "Real Small Groups Don't Just Happen" by Neal McBride