

4 SURMOUNTABLE CHALLENGES FACING MANY SMALL GROUP MINISTRIES

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About 3000 years ago King Solomon pointed out "there is nothing new under the sun." The wisest man in the world was correct then and it turns out he is still right.

The problems, issues, and challenges faced by small group pastors and directors everywhere turn out to be ubiquitous.

Instead of the individual quirks and nuances of local churches (or the communities in which they are located) shaping unique problems, it turns out the problems, issues and challenges are virtually identical everywhere.

And it turns out they are not *insurmountable*. In fact, they are quite surmountable.

One of my go-to quotes for many years has been something [Alan Kay](#), the noted computer scientist said:

"Perspective is worth 80 IQ points."

Why do I say that so often? Easy. All of us have experienced the aha moment of finally looking at a problem from another angle.

The aha moment is the sudden burst of an additional 80 IQ points.

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1. I can't find enough leaders.

A daunting challenge. Until you look at it from a new perspective.

My friend Brett Eastman was right when he observed that there is a "relative shepherd" in every circle of 10 people. When we stop looking for Jesus Jr. and simply begin identifying the person who is a step or two ahead of the others in the group or at the table, suddenly the leader is not hard to spot.

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I also regularly point out that once a church grows beyond about 200 adults in regular attendance it becomes more and more likely that there are lots of people attending that no one really knows. When that happens, it becomes quite likely there are many unidentified leader candidates who are simply slipping in and out of the auditorium unobserved.

If you can't find enough leaders it is almost certainly that you're not using a leader identification method appropriate for your situation.

Solution:

The introduction of the small group connection strategy and the HOST strategy changed the game. Both strategies flip the dilemma on its head and allow potential leaders to be easily identified (either by group members or self-identified).

See also, [How to Launch New Groups with a Small Group Connection and Saddleback Changed the Church-Wide Campaign Game...Again.](#)

2. I can't find enough coaches.

Could it be you're looking for the wrong thing? The ideal coach is really someone who simply able to effectively do TO and FOR (and WITH) the small group leader whatever you want the leader to do TO and FOR (and WITH) their members.

Now, granted, the most common scenario is for small group pastors to report multiple failed tries at building a coaching structure. There are very predictable reasons for that.

Solution:

When the challenge is the inability to find enough coaches, it is almost always a result of looking for the wrong people, in the wrong places and for the wrong reason.

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The right people are simply those who can do TO and FOR (and WITH) your leaders whatever you want your leaders to do TO and FOR (and WITH) their members.

The right place to look for them is almost always among your current crop of group leaders (but in some circumstances might actually be members of healthy groups).

The right reason, the right role of a coach is about care and about spiritual mentoring. After a very brief season (perhaps 3 or 4 months) where the role of a coach is about coaching better technique, the role shifts to investing in the spiritual growth of the leader (so they can eventually do the same for their members).

Can't find enough coaches? Change who, where and what you're looking for.

See also, [How to Identify a Potential Coach](#).

3. My pastor won't be the small group champion.

First, this is not unique to your situation. Many senior pastors are reluctant to take on the role of small group champion. Some merely misunderstand the significance. Others believe you were hired to be the champion. And a few just see themselves as teachers or preachers (and doing anything else is compromising the teaching or shepherding role).

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Solution:

Sometimes it is enough to begin to educate them in terms of what it means to be the champion. After all, it is really nothing more than being the chief spokesperson and leveraging the most influential person in the congregation makes the most sense. Helping them to see it from that angle is often what is lacking.

Other times, focusing on being an excellent behind-the-scenes leader/manager, orchestrating the details in advance, setting the table with excellence, allows you to simply ask your senior pastor to tip the first domino. When they see the role of champion from the angle of influence, they will almost always come around.

The most difficult to persuade are those who see themselves as teachers/preachers only and view serving as champion as somehow cheapening their commitment. Still, this is a rare situation and even it can be helped by regularly passing on stories of transformation that can be used in

sermon preparation and delivery.

See also, [Your Senior Pastor as Small Group Champion Leads to a Church OF Groups and Top 5 Things Every Senior Pastors Needs to Know](#) (about small group ministry).

4. The unconnected people at our church won't join a group.

When you're stuck at 25 to 35% of your adults connected in groups, and the barrier seems insurmountable, it's easy to believe there is something unique about your congregation causing it. It's easy to believe...but it's just not true.

The truth is, all churches have a group of people who are more inclined to connect in community and they will form groups organically with or without (and sometimes contrary to) your help. It may be that the ordinary percentage who are wired that way is 25 to 35%.

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Solution:

A number of factors play important roles in connecting the less inclined 65 to 75%.

First, this is where leveraging your senior pastors influence is so important. The right language with the right placement can persuade less inclined and unconnected attenders to put a toe in the water.

Second, the topic selected for your campaign or connection must appeal to the less inclined 65 to 75%. Can you see some topics matter almost universally and others appeal only to the already convinced?

Third, offering a short-term commitment (6 weeks is ideal) helps less inclined and unconnected people say yes to joining in. "We can do this for six weeks. Right?"

Finally, offering an on-campus study on a topic that interests or meets a critical felt need experienced by unconnected people (i.e., marriage, margin, parenting, relationships, etc.) always results in first steps in the direction of connection.

See also, [Does Your Topic Connect with Your True Customer?](#), [5 Things You Need to Know about Unconnected People](#), and [How to Launch a Short-Term On-Campus Strategy](#) (that leads to off-campus groups).