

# Critical Decision: Add Members to Existing Groups vs. Start New Groups?

By Mark Howell | 2

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I had an interesting question last week that prompted this post. Here's the question:

Hey Mark, I am looking for a small group resource that will help a group become more aware of guests - inviting, welcoming, etc. Suggestions?

Thinking I understood the situation, I sent the reader a link to [Skill Training: Top 10 Ways to Find New Group Members](#) (which was written as a resource for group leaders who need to train their members to "fill the empty chair"). Here's the reader's response to my answer:

That is helpful! Here is why I asked. We have an open group that meets on Wednesday nights on our campus. *I refer new people to this group* (emphasis mine).

When I read that last phrase, I knew I needed to respond differently. Here's why:

## The Downside of Existing Groups

Although I believe that there are upsides and downsides for existing groups (which I've listed [right here](#)), my chief concern when I read that last phrase was the knowledge that the longer a group has been meeting the harder it becomes for a new person to break in and really connect. In fact, I often say that a nearly impermeable membrane begins to form in months four to six.

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Can a new person enter an existing group? Yes...but only the *most* extroverted and *least* self conscious will make the effort. And I should add, these very same people will often alter the group's culture and *sometimes* the group's ultimate demise can be traced to their inclusion (By the way, I know that sounds harsh, but then again, sometimes the truth hurts!). What about the whole issue of helping existing groups stay viable once they lost members? Or their leader? I've worked through that important issue [right here](#).

### **The Upside of New Groups**

I have a [bias toward new groups](#) for many reasons (the main reasons are described in [this post](#)). New groups come with lots of advantages (which are listed in [this post](#)). I also believe that new groups lead to a church OF groups (which I explain in [this post](#)).

### **Conclusion**

So...what's the solution? By now, you know I always acknowledge that [there is no problem-free solution](#). Adding new members to existing groups comes with a set of problems. Launching new groups comes with a set of problems as well. I prefer the set of problems that comes with a bias toward new groups and the constant effort to launch. That said, I also believe that the easiest way to help unconnected people take a baby step toward connection is an on-campus connecting event (I describe and explain this fully in [How to Calm an Unconnected Person's Second Greatest Fear](#)). As much as I've found it helpful to provide a 24/7 way that unconnected people can use a small group finder (like [ChurchTeams](#)) to search for an open group that meets their needs, I view this as an always on, fall back measure.

### **My recommendation?**

Build a small group strategy that regularly launches new groups (using a combination of an annual [church-wide campaign](#) and periodic on-campus connecting events (like a [small group connection](#))). As new people arrive, give them an opportunity to sign up for the next connecting opportunity and let them know about the online finder (or list of open groups at the small group booth in the lobby).