

# TOP 5 THINGS EVERY SENIOR PASTOR NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT SMALL GROUP MINISTRY

By Mark Howell

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There are 5 things every senior pastor needs to know about small group ministry:

**First, senior pastors need to know that *they* are the most important champion of small group ministry**

If they want grouplife to happen, if they want to be a church OF groups, they must accept this role. They might hope to delegate the role or feel obligated to delegate the role...but they can't. It's not

about humility. It's all about influence.

99% of the time the senior pastor is the most influential person in the church. There are a few instances where the senior pastor is new to the church and another staff member or the chairman of the elders or deacons has more influence, but that is a very rare situation. Most of the time, the most influential person in the church is the senior pastor and if you want to build a thriving small group ministry they are required to be the champion.

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As I've said before, [your senior pastor as champion leads to a church OF groups](#). There is no better example of this principle than Rick Warren and Saddleback Church. It is [the real reason Saddleback connects so many in groups](#).

**Second, senior pastors need to know that the value of small group involvement is caught... not taught.**

If they truly believe that the optimal environment for life-change is in a circle not a row, then they will want every member to be involved in a group. And senior pastors must know that their example is more convincing than their verbal endorsement.

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In other words, no one is really too busy to make this commitment. What's vitally important at the member level is equally vital at the senior leadership level. You cannot hope to truly connect beyond the usual suspects without the full engagement and participation of your senior pastor.

At the same time, senior pastors should know that there is great flexibility and freedom on the makeup of the specific group of which they are a member. I've seen numerous instances where senior pastors have been part of long-standing closed groups with members specifically chosen for their trustworthiness and character. I've also seen senior pastors build open groups right in their own neighborhoods. The key is participation.

See also, [Andy Stanley on Creating a Culture that's All About Circles](#).

**Third, senior pastors need to know that commitment to small group ministry is a year-round sport.**

Building a thriving small group ministry that connects a high percentage of your average weekend adult worship attendance can't be done with a three week push in the fall and a mention in January. It is week in, week out, full-on engagement with regular stories of the benefits of small group participation (including stories from the pastor's own group) and regular opportunities to take a first step and make a short-term commitment to test-drive a group.

It is one of the top 10 reasons Saddleback has connected beyond 130% in groups. This is a huge challenge in a church with a cafeteria approach where every ministry expects their 15 minutes. It is much more likely where there is a plated-meal approach.

See also, [Top 10 Reasons North Point Has Connected over 72000 in Groups](#).

**Fourth, senior pastors need to know that small group ministry can be the delivery system** for every other thing that must be done.

Want to build mission into the life of every believer? Who doesn't? Doesn't every church want it's congregation to be involved in mission and ministry? After all, serving is one of the keys to spiritual growth, right?

It turns out the most productive path is to build mission engagement into every small group. Rather than promoting small group involvement and mission engagement (local and global) as stand-alone commitments, why not simply emphasize small group involvement for everyone *and* create ordinary ways groups can be involved in serving?

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## **Fifth, senior pastors need to know that the optimum environment for life-change is a small group.**

If senior pastors truly believe that the optimal environment for life-change is in a small group, in a circle not a row, then they will want every member to be involved in a group.

As important as the weekend service is, with inspirational music and practical and powerful teaching, **it is most like a defibrillator**. Real life-change, life-change that isn't temporary, happens in relationship. Only life-on-life can provide the ingredients of life-change. Without a genuine conviction about the optimum environment, there cannot be the kind of emphasis that builds a church OF groups.