

Training for Small Group Leaders

Releasing the potential in your small group discussions

Make it a discussion, not a lecture: The first thing to remember when leading a small group discussion is that your role is different to that of a group member. While it may be helpful at times to share your views and give insight into particular aspects of a discussion, remember that your role is more that of a facilitator than a participant. This means that the idea is not to give everyone the answers or spend a great deal of time sharing your thoughts. It's more about creating an environment where everyone in the group feels comfortable, included, valued and able to share their opinions. To do this you will need to pay careful attention to what each person has to say, perhaps affirming them with words like "That's a great insight" or "I hadn't thought of that before". Sometimes it's good to repeat something someone has shared or even clarify a point made for the benefit of the group. You can use phrases like, "What I hear you saying is Is that what you meant? Have I understood you correctly? What does everyone else think?". It can also be helpful to make notes of people's responses so that you can refer back to them if you need to.

Be prepared: You will need to read through the notes for each study in advance, especially the Bible study. Take some time to pray through the materials, seeking God's guidance and direction and make notes of your responses to the questions. If there are any areas where you are unsure, consider contacting a church leader or borrowing a copy of the course study guide. It is not necessary that your group completes all the questions included in the studies. Set the appropriate time limit for your group and stick to it. Depending on the dynamic of your group, you may find that you can only complete a few of the questions in the time allocated. If this is the case, review the questions beforehand and choose the ones that will be of most value.

Listen!!!: Listening is one of the most important skills to learn as a small group leader. While this comes more naturally to some than others, you will find that being well prepared will enable you to relax enough to observe the dynamic in your group, listen to the responses being made and gently lead everyone through the questions. You will struggle to do this if you are not familiar with the materials and the direction in which the questions are designed to lead the group.

Group participation: You will find that some members of your group will have more to say than others. Where necessary, sensitively interrupt those who may be dominating the conversation or going off topic and use this as an opportunity to draw in others who may be less outspoken. It's important that you try to give every member of the group an opportunity to participate and respect those who choose not to. You may also find that the quieter members of your group have excellent responses, but will only share their thoughts if you personally invite them into the conversation. Do your best to include each member of the group in a way that works for them.

Be sensitive: Some members of your group will be very passionate about their responses, others quite shy and insecure. You will need to treat both with sensitivity, especially if their answers are completely off track. In these instances, it often helps to use questions rather than statements. For example, rather than saying, "No, that's definitely not it, you're completely wrong! Clearly you weren't listening!", you could rather say something like, "Well that's a different way of seeing it, what part of the text brought you to that conclusion?" or "That's a very interesting perspective/way of looking at it, does anyone else see it the same way?"

Welcome silence: Don't be afraid of silence, it will usually feel much longer to you than to others. Allow space in the conversation for everyone to reflect on what's being said and when necessary, stimulate the conversation again by summarising what has been said with phrases like, "Okay, what have we said so far?" or "This is the point we've reached" and either continue with the current question or move onto the next.

Keep an eye on the time: Being a good time-keeper is more difficult than it sounds. Think of it as taking people on a walk through a forest. Sometimes everyone will be quite happy to walk straight along the path to their destination, while at other times they will want to stop at particular landmarks and after a while you will need to move them on again. There may be times when you will find the group walking off the trail and you will need to gently bring them back on. Something you will need to keep a careful eye out for though are the times when the group, or someone in the group, walks off the trail and it's necessary to allow this to happen. In these instances, pay very careful attention to the dynamic in the group and listen for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. While it's good to stick to the agenda and time constraints, there will be times when it's necessary to throw it out of the window and let the discussion take a new direction. If you feel you need to do this, remember that you can always sound it out with your group first. You can use phrases like, "Guys, I know we're going off track here, but I think it's important that we ... Does anyone mind or have any objections?" or "I'm conscious that we're going over time a little here, but I think it's important that we keep going. If I make sure that we don't go more than 15 minutes over time, is it alright with everyone if we spend more time on this question/issue?"

Things I can do:

1.
2.
3.

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Discipleship, discipleship, discipleship

Matthew 28:18-19

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations ..."

God provides the workers, we put them to work

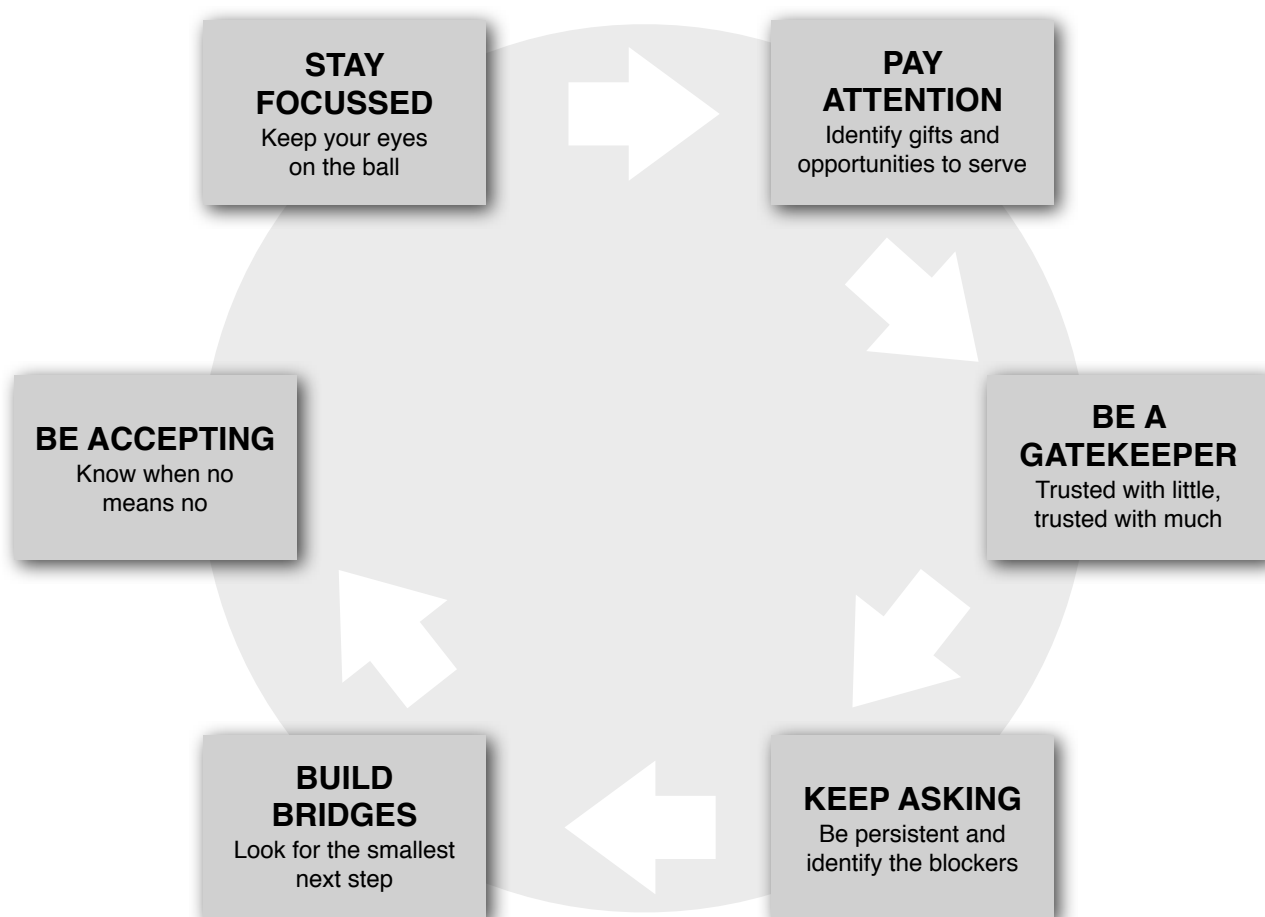
Matthew 9:37-38

Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his field."

Everyone has a role to play

Romans 12:3-5

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.



Things I can do:

1.
2.
3.