

ANCIENT FUTURE
Group Life Conference
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COMMUNITY

Coaching Life-Changing Small Group Leaders

Greg Bowman

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Greg has been involved in small group ministry for over 20 years as a small group member, leader, coach, staff member, and consultant. As executive director for adult ministries at the Willow Creek Association, Greg provides strategic leadership for the development of resources and training tools that impact ministries around the world. He also speaks on the topic of small group ministry at national and international WCA conferences and training events. Prior to working at the WCA, Greg served for seven years as a small group pastor for Willow Creek Community Church. Before coming to Willow, Greg built and led small group ministries at churches in Cincinnati, Ohio, and Bloomington, Ind. Greg is co-author of *Coaching Life-Changing Small Group Leaders* with Bill Donahue. He has a bachelor's degree in Christian ministries from Cincinnati Christian University. Greg and his wife, Connie, have a daughter, Courtney, a son-in-law, Ed, and a son, Chris. They recently became grandparents. They live in Elgin, Ill.

Session Description

What does it look like to intentionally invest in the life of a small group leader? Identify four key practices at the core of successful coaching and walk away with simple tools that you can use to nurture the soul and improve the skill of each of your leaders.

Goal

To equip attendees to utilize the four key practices of coaching to intentionally invest in the lives of small group leaders through a relational coaching ministry.

Introduction

Exercise: Your Role as a Coach

What do you feel is expected of you?	What do you feel is needed?

The Two Purposes of Coaching:

- Nurture

- Develop

Key Practices: An Overview

<p>Equipping: Develop Skills Provide training in key skills so that leaders become more effective in meeting the real needs of group members. <i>Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ.</i> Ephesians 4:12 (NLT)</p>	Develop
<p>Envisioning: Dream Together Imagine with your leaders how their group could impact group members, the church, and the community. <i>When dreams come true there is life and joy.</i> Proverbs 13:12 (NLT)</p>	
<p>Guiding: Shepherd Intentionally Help your leaders identify and take their next step of spiritual growth. <i>Patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage your people.</i> 2 Timothy 4:2 (NLT)</p>	Nurture
<p>Modeling: Pursue Christlikeness Grow in the life of full devotion you're inviting others to lead. <i>Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.</i> 1 Corinthians 11:1 (NIV)</p>	

Notes:

Skill #1 — Modeling: Pursue Christlikeness

“Leaders lead not by merit of temperament or gifts, but by living a life that is so compellingly like Christ that others naturally want to follow them. To follow them to Christ.”

Joseph Stowell, *Shepherding the Church into the 21st Century*

“Therefore I urge you to imitate me. ... Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.”

1 Corinthians 4:16; 11:1 (NIV)

“Join together in following my example.”

Philippians 3:17 (TNIV)

“For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example.”

2 Thessalonians 3:7 (NIV)

What Do I Model?

- Spiritual Fitness

“The great apostle Paul lived with the constant awareness that his failure to manage his inner life well could actually result in his own personal stumbling, thus negatively affecting all he had worked so hard to accomplish as an apostle.”

Samuel Rima, *Leading from the Inside Out*

- Spirit-filled Leadership

“‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the LORD Almighty.”

Zechariah 4:6 (NIV)

- Life in Community

Where can I find community as a coach?

1. Some coaches are able to navigate the transition from being the leader to simply being a member in their current group.
2. Seek out a small group where you are given the gift of being yourself, where you are viewed as a group member and not a “small group expert.”
3. Huddle times with your leaders. If you desire your huddles to function as community, lead them accordingly.
4. Coach huddle with point leaders. In order to meet the need for community, these leadership gatherings need to be more than business meetings.
5. Spiritual mentor or spiritual friend.

Exercise: A Personal Checkup

Of the following three items, which one is most in need of attention in your life right now: spiritual fitness, Spirit-led leadership, or life in community? In the space below, write one action step you will take to grow in this area in the next 30 days.

Skill #2 — Guiding: Shepherd Intentionally

Relationships First

Ask questions that will help you:

- Understand their spiritual journey.
- Understand their life history.
- Understand their heart.

“Nothing can substitute for personal time with each member of your flock! It will be in such private times that you will discern their value systems and deepest needs ... there will be times when more private sessions will help you gain special insights into each person.”

Ralph Neighbour, *The Shepherd's Guidebook*

Listen Deeply

“Being heard is so close to being loved that for the average person they are almost indistinguishable.”

David Augsburger, *Caring Enough to Hear and Be Heard*

Guidelines for Listening Deeply

- Listen more than you speak. Don't interrupt or look for openings in the conversation to get your point across. “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.” James 1:19 (NIV)
- Actively engage in their story. As leaders share their story, don't become preoccupied with pondering your next question or response.
- Ask for clarification. When what they are communicating is not clear to you, don't presume to know what they are trying to say.
- Keep the focus on them. Resist the urge to use their story as a springboard to tell your experiences. Use your stories and experiences sparingly and only when doing so would be helpful to the leader's growth.
- Fight the temptation to move too quickly to solutions. Seek to listen and fully understand. “Answering before listening is both stupid and rude.” Proverbs 18:13 (The Message)
- Listen beyond their words. Watch their body language, facial expressions, tone of voice, and choice of words. These nonverbal cues can help you discern unexpressed thoughts, feelings, and struggles.
- Ask permission to move deeper. Ask questions that get beyond surface conversation, and offer the opportunity to share feelings, opinions, and values. Try to move from self-description to self-disclosure.
- When your mind wanders, confess it. Everyone has those moments when their mind drifts. Generally people can tell if you are not really listening. When it happens to you, honestly tell the leader, ask them to forgive you, and encourage them to repeat what they shared.

Be an Encourager

“A coach who encourages can make the difference between success and failure, between the leader continuing and giving up.”

Joel Comiskey, *How to be a Great Cell Group Coach*

Examples of Encouragement in Scripture

- At God’s command, Moses encourages his apprentice, Joshua (Deuteronomy 1:38; 3:28).
- King Hezekiah encouraged those who were giving their lives in service to the Lord (2 Chronicles 30:22).
- Josiah encouraged the spiritual leaders of Israel (2 Chronicles 35:2).
- A major portion of Paul’s writing and ministry to churches was encouragement (Acts 14:22; 16:40; 20:1-2; 27:36).
- One leader, Joseph, did this so well that the Apostles gave him a new name: Barnabas (Acts 4:36). Literally translated it means “son of encouragement.” Later we find him living up to the new name as he encouraged the churches (Acts 11:23).

Tips for Encouraging Leaders

- Offer encouragement for things they have done well — even little things.
- Praise them when they tackle difficult issues and challenges. Even though they may not complete every detail perfectly, find the things leaders do well and offer genuine praise.
- Encourage them to persevere in the tough times. Don’t get tired of doing the right things. You’ll see the benefits in time if you don’t get discouraged and give up (Galatians 6:9).
- Use a variety of encouragement styles. Personally-written letters, cards, and even email notes are a great source of encouragement to leaders. Recognition in front of their peers can also be important.
- Discover their unique leadership gifts and potential.
- When appropriate, offer public praise or even awards. A great time for this is in your huddles. Sharing the struggles and the successes your leaders experience can deepen community and will cast vision for the kind of groups and leaders you hope to build.

A Caring Shepherd

“Pain is the gift nobody wants.”

Phillip Yancey

Compassion Tips

- Hurting people value your presence over your words or skills. A call or visit can be very encouraging.
- Pray for and with people, asking God to restore their physical and spiritual health.
- Look for any ways that you might serve them. Do they need help with household chores, the family, or food? Do they need help with transportation?
- Remember that shared pain is often the gateway to growth. This is often true not only for the individual, but for the group as well.
- Know when to ask for help. Sometimes a particular need will be so large that it is beyond the ability of the group to meet it. Know where you or your leaders can turn for assistance in your church.

Exercise: The Next Level

How will you determine when a group leader feels you have established a shepherding relationship so that you can begin to incorporate the next key practice — envisioning — into your conversations?

Skill #3 — Envisioning: Dream Together

Exercise: Your Vision for Life-Changing Small Groups

- How do the people interact with each other?

- How do they care for one another? Serve one another? Encourage one another?

- In what ways are they meeting needs in the church and in the community at large?

- What would your church be like if every group functioned this way?

Vision Has the Ability to:

- Give meaning.
- Create hunger.
- Change focus.
- Give hope.

The Power of Vision

“Good groups think they are on a mission from God ... They know going in that they will be expected to make sacrifices, but they know they are doing something worthy of their best selves.”

Warren Bennis, *Organizing Genius*

Crafting the Vision

Vision Needs of Leaders:

- The leader’s personal spiritual growth.
- How has God gifted them and how might that be used to its fullest potential in group life?
- The purpose and power of biblical community.
- The leader’s role.
- Ministry multiplication.
- Inclusivity.

Clarifying the Vision

Keeping the Vision Alive

“Vision doesn't stick; it doesn't have natural adhesive. Instead, vision leaks.”

Andy Stanley, *Leadership Journal*, Winter 2004

Ideas to Keep the Vision Alive

- Speak with clarity. If you can't speak the vision clearly, then odds are you don't understand and own it completely yourself.
- Speak with conviction. When you talk about the vision, make sure your language is compelling, focused, and balanced.
- Utilize every opportunity to clarify, cast, and recast vision. Huddles, training events, group visits, conversations, emails, phone calls — all are prime opportunities to share key vision components or unpack an element of the vision.
- Use Scripture. The Bible is filled with passages on community and metaphors about doing life together in community. As you share with leaders use these passages to support and explain the vision for small groups.

Genesis 1:24-2:25	Proverbs 18:24	Acts 4:32-37
Genesis 6, 17	Ecclesiastes 4:9-10	Romans 12
Exodus 18	Mark 3:14	1 Corinthians 12
Psalms 133	John 17	Ephesians 2 & 4
Proverbs 15:22	Acts 2: 41-47	1 Peter 5:1-4
- Help leaders understand and own the church's vision.
- Dream about their group and the possibilities for growth and outreach.
- Help leaders break the larger vision into smaller, more manageable steps.
- Use stories that work. Watch for stories from leaders or groups that capture the heart of the vision in action in your church.
- Celebrate when leaders achieve parts of the vision. Celebration communicates clearly that what they are doing matters.

Exercise: Vision Gap

Often there is a gap between a coach's vision for community — how groups ought to function and how leaders ought to lead — and the reality of group life as they know it. What is the gap between vision and reality for you?

What is one step you could take to clarify or recast vision for community to your leaders?

Skill #4 — Equipping: Develop Skills

Equipping Made Practical

Tools You Can Use

- Your past experience with the issue, either in group leadership or in coaching other leaders.
- Wisdom from other group leaders in your church who have dealt with the issue effectively.
- Upcoming classroom training at your church or other seminars and conferences.
- Books or articles that have helped you deal with the issue. These can include trusted sources like Web sites for small group ministries.
- Tapes or CD's of training on the topic. Many churches have developed a lending library for this purpose.

Guidelines for Ongoing Equipping

- Affirm their gifts and abilities.
- Teach from their experiences. Every experience — good and bad — provides an opportunity to learn. Listen for common themes to emerge from the groups you coach.
- Discern their growth edges.
- Solve problems with them.
- Utilize role plays.
- Learn together. Work together with your leader to find the answer through the Bible, another leader, a fellow coach, a staff member or some other resource.

Exercise: Opportunities for Growth

Read through the list below and mark the opportunities for growth that stand out for the leaders you currently coach:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Modeling a surrendered life | <input type="checkbox"/> Shepherding members to growth |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Adding new members | <input type="checkbox"/> Leading your group to serve together |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Listening skills | <input type="checkbox"/> Creating a safe environment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Apprentice selection and development | <input type="checkbox"/> Stages of group life |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Using the Bible in groups | <input type="checkbox"/> Conflict resolution |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dealing with difficult people | <input type="checkbox"/> Planning life-changing meetings |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Choosing good curriculum | <input type="checkbox"/> Worship in groups |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asking good questions | <input type="checkbox"/> Group multiplication |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Group outreach and evangelism | <input type="checkbox"/> How to create a covenant |
| <input type="checkbox"/> How to establish core values | <input type="checkbox"/> Fostering intimacy and transparency |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Caring for people in crisis | <input type="checkbox"/> Prayer in small groups |

(Helpful information on these topics can be found in *Leading Life-Changing Small Groups* by Bill Donahue)

A Case Study: Meet Your Leaders

Chip is a single man, in his early fifties. He is divorced and his children, all grown, live out of town. He has been a part of the church and a Christ-follower most of his life. His faith is solid and his love for God is deep. Chip leads a group of six men who have been together for three years. You have been his coach for two years. Because Chip is involved in a number of ministries at the church, times to connect with him have been difficult to find. You have met a couple of times a year and that's about it. Also, because Chip is overcommitted, he has lost some of the passion he once had for leading a group.

Eric and Sue are a young couple — in their mid-30's — and have been your friends for several years. They have been married for a little over a year and have no children. Shortly after getting married, they formed a small group with some of their friends who are newlyweds also, and they asked you to be their coach. So far the group has done fairly well, though, to be honest, it lacks a strong spiritual formation component.

Bonnie is 30 years old, married, and has two children under the age of seven. Her husband is not a believer and attends church and small group infrequently — more to pacify Bonnie than because of any interest in either. Bonnie was a part of a mixed group (marrieds and singles, all ages) that has now multiplied. Bonnie volunteered to lead the new group. They have been meeting for about six weeks, and you became Bonnie's coach about the same time the group started. You've had coffee with Bonnie once and had a couple of phone conversations.

Exercise: Utilizing the Four Key Practices

Relative to the four key practices of coaching, where would you place your relationship with each of these leaders?

What does each leader need at this point?

The Coach's Toolbox

One-On-Ones

“With each of you we were like a father with his child, holding your hand, whispering encouragement, showing you step by step how to live well before God, who called us into his own kingdom, into his delightful life.”

1 Thessalonians 2:11-12 (The Message)

Simple Steps to Effective One-on-Ones

- Pray

- Prepare

Think through the following questions as you prepare:

- What is your sense of how this leader is doing spiritually?
- What are the one or two main issues you would like to discuss when you meet?
- What issues need follow-up from previous one-on-one meetings?
- Is there any item — a reason to offer praise or a concern — which you need to discuss from on your last group visit or huddle?

- Personalize

- Perspective

After each meeting (or series of meetings) gain insight and perspective by evaluating the time spent with your leaders.

- Did my leader feel heard?
- Did my leader feel cared for and supported?
- Did I serve them in a tangible way?
- Was the balance between nurture and development appropriate?
- What issues need follow-up before our next meeting?
- Did I capitalize on teachable moments in their life?
- What was one thing they felt challenged by or wanted to know more about?

Helpful Questions

Think through your next one-on-one meeting. Choose or adapt questions from the list below that will help start the conversation with your leader. Three or four questions are often enough to fill an hour of conversation.

Nurture the Soul

Spiritual Life Questions

- When did you become a Christian?
- What person was most influential in your decision?
- How did you come to be a part of this church?
- Do you have any lingering concerns or issues about this church?
- Where have you served in the church? How did those experiences impact you?
- What spiritual disciplines do you practice regularly?
- What spiritual disciplines would you like to add or learn?
- In what areas of your life do you struggle with the temptation to sin?

Relationship-Building Questions

- What people have been influential in your life? How?
- What books have impacted your life? How?
- What have been the major turning points in your life?
- What communicates love to you?
- What is your personality or temperament?
- What makes you sad? Brings you joy?
- What do you dream about?
- What are your fears?
- What personal issues do you need assistance with?

Develop Skills

Although skill development is not the primary focus of one-on-one meetings, they can offer the leader some freedom to admit struggles that he/she might not in a more public setting. Try to include at least one question from this area in each one-on-one.

- What two things are going well in your group right now?
- Where are you seeing life-change happen in your group?
- If you had a magic wand, what one issue or concern in your group would you resolve immediately?
- How are you developing your members spiritually?
- What issues or problems are you currently facing in your small group? How can I help you with these?
- What do you consider to be strengths in your leadership?
- Which skills would you most like to grow in?
- As your group increases in size, in what ways are you preparing the group to eventually birth (multiply)?

Huddles

- Planning a Leadership Huddle

Nurture the Soul

- What exercises or activities can I do to build community with my leaders so they can discuss personal needs or struggles?
- How can I utilize this time to encourage them?
- How should worship and/or prayer be included in the huddle?
- What can we celebrate in their group life and in their personal life?

Develop Skills

- With what leadership skill do my leaders need help? (New ideas on relationship building, asking creative questions, listening skills, ways to pray as a group, etc.)
- What insights have I gained from visiting groups and one-on-one conversations that would benefit all my leaders?
- How can I help my leaders learn from each other's experiences?
- What problems are my leaders encountering and how can we work together in the huddle to explore solutions?

- A Quick Test for Value

See the meeting through your leader's eyes and ask these questions about your upcoming huddle:

- Is it worth my time and effort?
- Am I going to feel encouraged?
- Will it meet my needs?
- Will I learn something new?
- Will I have the opportunity to participate?

Leadership Huddle Planning Guide *(Example)*

Huddle date: *July 20* **Time:** *7:00–9:00 p.m.* **Place:** *Andersons' house*

Pray

Spend time in prayer, asking God for insight and guidance as you plan.
I pray that the leaders will continue to have willingness to add new people to their groups.
 Pray for each of your leaders.

Questions to Consider

What are my leaders telling me?
They need ideas for getting members to pray out loud.
 What do I need to ask them?
How is the Anderson group adjusting to the new couple?
 What are my objectives for this meeting?
To build relationships, pray, and encourage spiritual growth.
 Where is the Holy Spirit leading me?
To develop the relationships between the leaders.

<u>Categories</u>		<u>Need/Issue</u>	<u>Time</u>
<u>Nurture</u>	Community	<i>Do a relationship-building exercise to encourage authenticity.</i>	<i>45 min</i>
	Encouragement		
	Worship/Prayer	<i>Prayer and worship to begin the huddle.</i>	<i>15 min</i>
	Celebration	<i>Andersons added a new couple, Smith's new apprentice</i>	<i>10 min</i>
<u>Develop</u>	Skill Training	<i>Introduce creative ideas for group prayer.</i>	<i>30 min</i>
	Insights		
	Idea Exchange	<i>Invite leaders to share best/worst prayer ideas</i>	<i>10 min</i>
	Problem Solving		
	Communication	<i>New curriculum ideas, next 3 huddle dates</i>	<i>10 min</i>

Group Visits

- Arrive Early

Plan to meet with the leader and apprentice before the meeting.

- Ask them how they are doing personally.
- Ask them again about the group. Are there any concerns for the meeting?
- Confirm the role that they would like you to play in the group meeting.
- Discuss the agenda and the leader's plan for the group meeting.
- Pray together for them, for the people in the group, and for the meeting.
- Assure them you are there to support them.
- Greet the group members as they arrive.

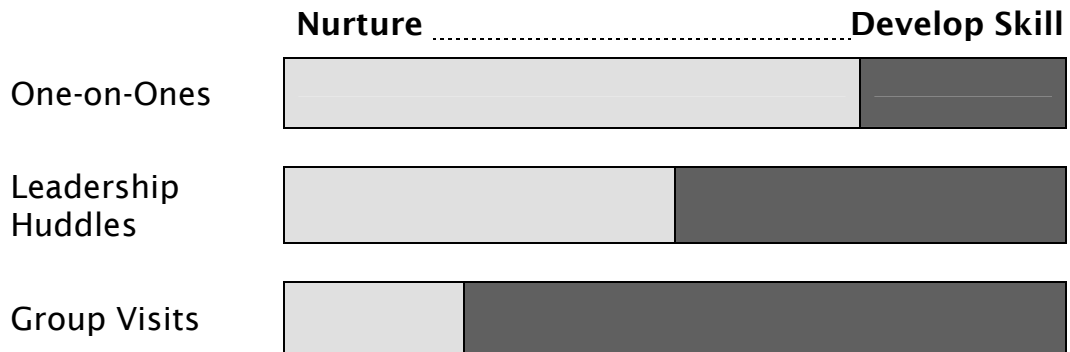
- Observe the Meeting

Questions to consider when making your observations:

- Was the setting conducive to a good meeting?
- Did the meeting start and end on time?
- Did the leader stay on the subject?
- Was the leader in control but not overbearing?
- Were the questions effective?
- Did the leader listen to the responses?
- How well did the group members relate to each other?
- What is the relationship between the leader and group members?
- Did any group members seem to dominate the discussion?
- Is multiplication (birthing) a part of the group's strategy?
- Is the group open to new people? When was the newest group member added?
- Was the prayer time meaningful? Who participated?
- How was God at work in this meeting?

- After the Group Visit

Putting the Tools to Work



Exercise: Case Study Part Two

Return to the case studies of Chip, Eric and Sue, and Bonnie. Based on their needs and your relationship with each leader, which tool will you use to nurture and/or develop each of them? How will you begin?

Chip:

Sue and Eric:

Bonnie:

2007 Group Life Conference Breakout CDs:

B25. *Promoting Growth in Your Leaders*, Mike Hurt

C48/D68. *Responding to People in Crisis*, Joe Besenjak and Kyndra Singer

A05. *Extraordinary Coaching Relationships*, Tony Stoltzfus

2006 Small Groups Conference Breakout CD:

A06. *Asking Great Questions and Listening Intently*, Sheryl Fleisher

Books

Coaching Life-Changing Small Group Leaders, Bill Donahue & Greg Bowman

Developing the Leaders Around You, John Maxwell

Leading Life-Changing Small Groups, Bill Donahue & Team

Making Small Groups Work, Henry Cloud & John Townsend

Nine Keys to Effective Small Group Leadership, Carl George

Sacred Companions, David G. Benner

Small Group Leadership as Spiritual Direction, Heather Webb

Spiritual Leadership, J. Oswald Sanders

Walking the Small Group Tightrope, Bill Donahue & Russ Robinson