



Coaching Small Group Leaders

Coaching Small-Group Leaders

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How to Use This Resource

The theme of this download is “Coaching Small-Group Leaders.” All of the material has been adapted from the *Coaching Guidebook*, produced by [Community Christian Church](#) and the [NewThing Network](#). Contributing authors for this material include Dave Ferguson, Eric Metcalf, Janet McMahon, and Tammy Melchien. Each handout can be used as part of a training session for large groups of leaders and coaches, or as a way to encourage and educate people individually. Simply print the handouts you need and use them as necessary.

“Practical Ministry Skills” training downloads are completely flexible and designed for easy use. The handouts give a succinct and practical overview of the issues most relevant to your goals. You may use them at the beginning of a meeting to help launch a discussion, or you may hand them out as brief primers for new small-group leaders or coaches.

For example, to cast a biblical and inspiring vision for your current and potential coaches, see “Why Coaching?” on page 3. To help your coaches (and group leaders) do the important job of finding new leaders and apprentices, see “Recruiting New Small-Group Leaders” on page 20. And “Guidelines for Speaking the Truth in Love” (p. 32) will give your coaches the confidence they need to initiate those difficult conversations.

Our prayer is that this material will equip small-group coaches and team leaders to effectively train, support, and guide small-group leaders toward a life-changing ministry.

Need more material or training on another small-group ministry topic?

See our website at www.SmallGroups.com.

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Why Coaching?

Supporting and equipping leaders is part of God's dream and purpose for the church.

Ephesians 4:11–12

Coaching has been around since the early days of the New Testament church. The idea in the mind of God was for a few leaders to equip and empower the people of God to do the work of the church. And as the Holy Spirit empowered their efforts, these early Christians saw amazing results. Ephesians 4:11–12 lays it out for us: “Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ” (NLT).

The Purpose of the Church

God did not design the church to be a one-man show, but a playing field for great teams led by great coaches. At Community Christian Church in Naperville, Illinois—where I serve as lead pastor—the staff recognizes that our role is to equip and empower the people of the church to do the work of ministry. Our staff knows that when the game is on the line and the final point needs to be scored, the ball will be in the hands of our leaders. And those leaders need to be coached in order to make the winning shot. Behind the scenes, our staff works to prepare coaches to train and empower leaders who do the work of helping people find their way back to God.

Great coaching is not just about the ministry task. We have seen over the life of this church that God often uses the relationship between coach and leader to disciple and grow us beyond our expectations. When that relationship is at its best, both leader and coach benefit by becoming more and more like Jesus.

So if you are considering serving as a coach for small-group leaders within your local church, let me say congratulations. It’s my hope that your leadership as a coach will be one of the most fulfilling roles you play in your lifetime. I have seen God use this role to make an eternal difference in the lives of thousands of people.

The Dream of God for Your Church

God has a dream. It is a dream that he has had for all of eternity. It is the dream of a people whose hearts beat with a passion for helping others find their way back to God. People like that enter a community bringing freshness, like the first fragrance of spring at the close of winter. They bring a message of hope through Jesus Christ, and the very building representing these Christ followers is a place of truth and joy. It’s there they gather weekly to experience and celebrate the mystery of their oneness in Jesus Christ. Together they are his body—the physical presence of Christ on earth. They celebrate and embrace God’s eternal plan for the church to be the hope of the world.

God dreams of a people whose heartbeat reverberates through neighborhoods, stirring an awakening in hearts and souls. Christ followers connect emerging seekers together in groups where the language of “we” replaces “me.” Inside these groups it’s safe to risk, be vulnerable, and share life deeply. They are marked by a radical kind of love and acceptance—the touchstone of Jesus Christ and his followers. Transformation takes place as groups empower us to more fully obey Christ together than alone. Neighborhoods become places where the word *lonely* doesn’t exist, where a smile replaces suspicion, security replaces fear, and Jesus is a holy name on lips. Community becomes a life-changing experience, not simply a location.

God dreams of a people whose hearts beat with such compassion that no need goes unmet. The One who has freely given his life calls his own to give freely in return. These Christ followers hold all things loosely, and love opens their hands. With a contagious and passionate desire they contribute to the dream of God to meet the needs of those he loves.

God’s dream will one day come true. But it will take people like you and I who are willing to invest our lives in equipping leaders and volunteer servants through great coaching.

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Introduction to a Coaching Model

An overview of a coach's four areas of responsibility.

1 Peter 5:1–4

The following is an introduction to the coaching model at [Community Christian Church](#) in Naperville, Illinois. This model has helped CCC become one of the fastest-growing and most influential churches in America, and is the basis for the training resources found in the remainder of this packet.

When it comes to a small-group ministry in a local church, there will be as many different coaching styles as there are coaches. And that's okay. If the old cliché "There is more than one way to skin a cat" has any truth, it has truth in coaching. Coaches will lead others according to their personality, life experience, and unique relationship with God. Keeping those unique styles in mind, the following model articulates the aspects of coaching that can work effectively through many different coaching styles.

But first, what is a coach and what does a coach do? In short, a coach is a leader whose intentional investment in the lives of other leaders encourages them to do better—not just in their leadership role, but better period. A coach calls out the best in a leader. The relationship between coach and leader is the engine that God uses to drive the leader to reach their God given purposes.

The coach's role can basically be divided into four main areas: relational development, equipping, serving, and recruiting. Among these four, a special emphasis is placed on relational development. In fact, all the other aspects of coaching flow out of this core component of relationship. The other three dimensions—equipping, serving, and recruiting—vary according to the ministry area and the ministry season.

A coaching relationship is successful when the coach invests in the leader in such a way that the leader feels cared for and able to accomplish the task.

Relational Development

Your first and foremost role as a coach is to invest your heart and time in building relationships with your leaders. As these relationships grow and deepen, you will have opportunities to encourage and challenge your leaders to grow—not only in their skills as leaders, but on their journeys as Christ followers, too. It's essential to understand that the heart of the coaching role is relational.

Building a relationship is not a mechanical process, but the following guidelines will help ensure that the frequency of coach/leader contact and the content of those conversations promote a successful coaching relationship. A successful coach:

- Connects with leaders at least bi-weekly outside of the time the leader is serving. This can be accomplished through a phone call, e-mail, or one-on-one meeting.

- Gathers leaders monthly.
- Prays consistently for all leaders under their care.
- Regularly checks on the leader's RPMS (relational, physical, mental, and spiritual health) and provides challenge, encouragement, and accountability.
- Observes leaders while they are serving to provide regular affirmation.
- Has an understanding of each leader's personality, passion, and giftedness.
- Addresses and works through conflict whenever necessary.

Equipping—Empowering the Leader for the Task

Leaders need to be equipped with knowledge and skills that will help them succeed in their ministry task. Part of the coaching role is to ensure that this equipping happens. The coach plays a key role in communicating information to the leaders, training the leaders, and helping the leaders tackle the challenges of ministry. Does this mean that the coach has to be an absolute expert on the ministry task? No. But it does mean that the coach needs to search out avenues and means to help equip their leaders when the coach's own knowledge or skills aren't sufficient. For example, a Support and Recovery coach might solicit the help of a professional counselor to help a leader handle a difficult small-group issue.

But more often than not, the coach can help the leader succeed simply by guiding the leader to apply the leader's own experience and God-given wisdom to the challenges that lie before them. The important thing is that the coach is constantly making sure their leaders have been given the tools they need to succeed in their roles.

Here are some guidelines for successfully equipping your leaders:

- Regularly communicate with the leader about ministry challenges, and help the leader devise a plan to tackle those challenges.
- Serve as the key communication piece between the ministry director and leader (i.e. vision, events, new initiatives, etc.)
- Provide instruction, training, and resources to the leaders in order to make them more successful.
- Observe leader in their ministry role to provide feedback and encouragement.

Serving—Helping the Leader Accomplish a Task

Sometimes a coach comes alongside a leader to help that leader accomplish a ministry task. A coach might serve with a leader in this way because of a need (i.e. the leader needs help with the task) or simply to provide encouragement to the leader by joining them in the task. Serving could be as simple as helping a leader set up for an event or as involved as helping a leader navigate a difficult interpersonal situation. In short, it's important to recognize that part of the coaching role is looking for ways to come alongside your leader as a helper.

In order to serve, a successful coach:

- Periodically joins the leader in their ministry task, providing assistance as needed.
- Assists the leader in their task by obtaining supplies or resources.
- Offers prayer support to the leader.

Recruiting—Identifying Potential Leaders

As God continues to bless your church by adding more and more people to your community, you will continually need more missional Christ followers to join your leadership ranks. That's why the fourth component of the coaching role is to help recruit new leaders to the team. [*Learn more about recruiting by reading "Recruiting New Small-Group Leaders" on pages 20-21 if this resource.*]

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Discuss:

1. As a coach, am I addressing all four of the areas mentioned above? If not, which are missing?
2. Is it true that a coach's main goal is relational development? Why or why not?
3. How does our church ensure that leaders are given the tools they need to succeed? How can I improve at identifying what my leaders need and helping them find it?

Six Coaching Questions

Get to know this practical structure for effective coaching conversations.

1 Timothy 4:15–16

“I am so excited about this!” Dan, a recently appointed small-group coach, looked like he was about to burst with enthusiasm. He had landed on cloud nine during his first six weeks of coaching small-group leaders, and now that he had the opportunity to share his excitement with his ministry director it was all he could do to keep his voice to a reasonable level. “I have such a good feeling about this, Mark,” Dan continued. “I am so confident that God is up to something in the relationships I’m beginning to build with my leaders.”

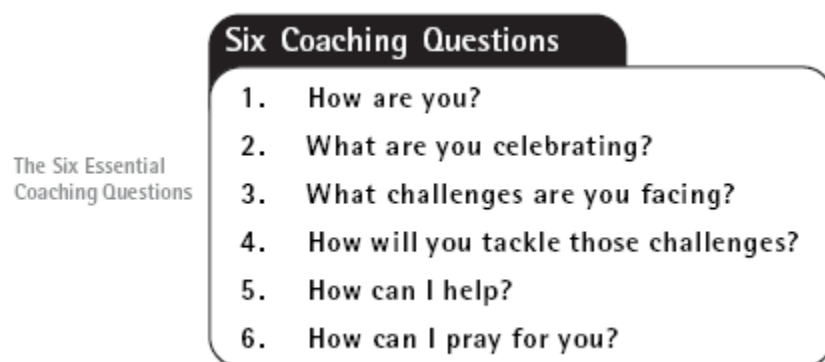
Mark sat back for a moment and smiled. I knew that this coaching role was a perfect fit for Dan, he thought. Dan had spent his first six weeks as a coach simply getting to know his leaders. He had exchanged e-mails with each of them weekly and met with all of them one-on-one at least once.

Two of Dan’s group leaders were hungry for the one-on-one attention he was offering. They had been longing to have someone in their lives who would consistently pray for them, support them, and help them grow. One of his leaders hadn’t been a Christ-follower very long, so the whole idea of meeting with someone for accountability, encouragement, and growth was foreign to him. Dan knew he’d have to be intentional about helping this leader feel comfortable and safe in their one-on-ones, but he saw such potential in this guy and knew their coaching relationship could be an important tool in his growth. The fourth leader was going to be a challenge. He seemed a little disinterested—if not resistant—to going deeper, but Dan wasn’t about to let that discourage him. “I know God has connected us for a reason,” he told Mark.

Dan continued on for a solid half-hour relaying all that he was excited about. As he listened, Mark became more and more encouraged by the vision God was giving Dan. It was clear that Dan's friendship was going to make a huge difference in the lives of his small-group leaders. "But I'll tell you what has been most on my mind the past couple days," Dan continued. "I've spent these first six weeks just getting to know my leaders, but where do I go from here? How can I make sure our meeting times are purposeful and that I'm really playing the role in their lives that I'm supposed to play?"

"Well," Mark replied, "If you continue to pursue your leaders with the kind of intentionality you've shown over these first six weeks, I have no doubt you will be fulfilling the role God intends for you to play in their lives. But I can share with you a simple plan someone once gave me to guide your coaching conversations."

Mark grabbed a pen and jotted these six simple questions down on a napkin:



One of the most important facets of coaching is providing regular, one-on-one attention to small-group leaders by engaging them in conversations about their lives and ministry. These six simple questions can provide a framework for all of your coaching conversations.

Notice that these are questions, not statements. Your role in the coaching conversation is primarily about asking questions and listening. As you gain experience, you will learn to ask these questions and others like them in ways that keep your coaching conversations fresh, purposeful, and beneficial to your leader's growth and role in ministry.

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Discuss:

1. How do these questions compare/contrast with my usual coaching conversations with group leaders?
2. How can I work these questions into a conversation without making them seem forced or mechanical?

3. How can I adapt these questions so that they don't become repetitive over several conversations?

Building Relationships with Group Leaders

Exploring your most important role as a small-groups coach.

Romans 12:9–13

Helen and Joe are not a likely combination—Helen in her 50's and Joe in his late 20's. She could be his mother. How would it work for these two seemingly quite different people to build a coaching relationship that released potential in Joe and helped them both grow closer to God?

Helen had sensed Joe's reservations when she called to set up their first meeting. He was nice enough, but seemed a bit arrogant for such a young kid. She imagined her son at that age and wondered if this 20-something kid could lead a group with any shred of maturity. After a few moments in prayer, she walks into the café for her first meeting with Joe. He smiles and waves to her from the corner, coffee in hand. Here goes, she thinks.

The First Meeting

Although the dynamics vary greatly, each coach/leader relationship comes with its unique set of challenges. What would you do if you were Helen? How should she approach her first meeting with Joe? Obviously, she has a few choices to make. Sensing Joe's reluctance to being coached, Helen could feel defensive and offended: "Look here, kid, I have more life experience in my right pinkie than you've got, so get over yourself and listen up." Who of us wouldn't be just a bit annoyed when we realize that someone doesn't think we have much to offer in a relationship?

But fortunately for her ministry director, Helen is a bit more mature than that. In her wisdom, she puts aside her defensive feelings and remembers the purpose of their first meeting: story telling.

Going into the first meeting with a well-defined, understood purpose will give you confidence. No matter what the unique challenges your coaching relationship faces, every first meeting with a leader has the same purpose: telling your story. It sounds simple, but in our fast-paced, task-driven, goal-oriented culture, it takes purposeful effort and focused intention to have a meeting with only two items on the agenda: telling your story and listening to the story of the leader you are coaching. Fight the urge to be all about task and any pressure you feel to be a coaching "expert." Instead, have a meeting for the sole purpose of storytelling. Doing so will set your relationship on a solid foundation that will pay off mightily in the long run.

Asking Good Questions

In order to get the storytelling process started, Helen needs to begin by asking good questions. By asking Joe about his life, family, and work, she communicates to him that she is interested in him as a person, not just as a leader. She can then move to asking Joe about his relationship with Jesus and his leadership in the group. Through these questions,

Helen demonstrates that she cares about his spiritual development as well as his leadership development.

While each coaching experience will be unique, the following questions should be helpful in any storytelling conversation:

1. How did you start coming to our church?
2. When did Jesus first become real to you?
3. Was church a part of your family life when you were growing up?
4. What was it like growing up in your family?
5. Who have been the most influential people in your life?
6. Why did you choose to become a small-group leader?
7. What do you do for a living? Why did you choose that career path?
8. What are some of the most memorable experiences you've had in your life?

Effective Listening

While asking good questions, Helen does what all wise, wonderful, and compassion-filled coaches do. She listens—not just to hear what Joe is saying, but to understand Joe. Who has God created him to be? What are his hopes and dreams for the group? What does he struggle with? How does he feel about leadership? Although all of this may seem obvious, it's worth stating because it is so easy to gloss over the important work of taking the time to understand someone.

Most of us can hear what others are saying, but in a good storytelling conversation, we move beyond hearing to really listening for what is being said both verbally and nonverbally. By working on the skill of listening, the coach is able to connect and care for the leader more fully.

There are three levels of effective listening:

- **Internal.** Internal listening asks the question, "What does this mean to me?" Most of us listen on this level. In this level, we are busy formulating our response. As someone shares, we are thinking about how we can respond in a wise, witty, and wonderful way. Often we are thinking about what the person's story means to me as a coach. How will I be able to encourage? How can I show this person that I know what I am talking about? How can I relate my life experiences to what this leader is saying?
- **Focused.** Focused listening asks the question, "What does this mean to them?" This is the level of listening that will lead to effective coaching. As you listen on this level, you will be led to ask questions that find out even more about the leader:
 - What does this mean for you?

- How does this experience affect you today?
 - How do you respond differently to others because of this experience?
- **Global.** Global listening asks the question, “What is the emotion being shared?” This type of listening leads you to an empathic relationship with your leader. Most of us really long to be understood. Once you begin to “get” what your leader is feeling, he or she will begin to feel understood, and the two of you will be on a great adventure of learning and sharing the journey together. At that point, the sky is the limit on what God will accomplish through your relationship!

Authentic Sharing

As a coach, you have the opportunity to set the tone for the coaching relationship. As you begin to authentically share your story, you reveal God’s grace and love at work in your life. We think that is lots of fun, but it does require some vulnerability, and that can be a challenge.

As your story unravels over time, you take the risk of showing leaders that you, like all of us, are a work in progress. This kind of sharing leads the way for the leaders in your huddle to share the work that God is doing in their lives and hearts. Fortunately, your huddle of leaders is not a “we have it all together” club, but a place where leaders give and receive help, hope and encouragement.

As the coach, your authenticity will lead to growth-filled opportunities for your leaders.

Pace: Leave Them Wanting

If you can, keep your first coach-to-leader meeting at just over one hour. It’s easy, especially if you really hit it off with a new leader, to meet for a very long time. But this may set expectations for lengthy future meetings that neither you nor the leader will realistically have time for. If your leaders feel that coming into every meeting with you means a lengthy conversation, they may be less likely to find time in their schedules for this important ongoing connection.

So pace yourself. You do not have to cover all the ground in one meeting. It is our hope that you will be doing life together with this leader for months and sometimes years in the future. Leave some storytelling for subsequent meetings.

Prayer: Relying On God

As a coach, we encourage you to leave time at the end of each meeting to ask your leader how you can pray for them—and then do it right away. There is nothing about this coaching thing that we can even fathom doing without the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. Also, there is an intimacy level that builds in a relationship when we open up our hearts in prayer with one another.

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Discuss:

1. What was one of my best meetings with a small-group leader? What made it so positive?
2. What was one of my worst meetings with a small-group leader? What went wrong?
3. What will I need to change to make storytelling the focus of my first meeting with new small-group leaders?

Equipping Small-Group Leaders

Three questions that will help you provide what leaders really need.

Hebrews 13:20–21

Equipping a leader is not the task of a coaching expert, but rather a guide. If you are like most coaches, taking the stance of a guide when it comes to equipping is no easy task. Who doesn't want to be the expert? Who, when asked for help by someone, doesn't want to have a brilliant answer? But resisting the temptation to be the expert on ministry challenges—and guiding your leader toward workable solutions, instead—is the mark of effective coaching.

Equipping is about helping your leaders effectively carry out their tasks, and you'll be most effective as a coach when you guide leaders through these three questions: What are you celebrating? What challenges are you facing? How will you tackle those challenges?

What Are You Celebrating?

Celebrating successes with your leaders is essential for two reasons. First, leaders regularly need to be reminded of the vision and importance of the role they are playing. This helps them stay motivated to carry out their task. Equipping them includes recasting vision and helping renew their passion, which are both byproducts of celebration. Consider asking your leaders questions like: Is anyone in your group making a decision to follow Jesus? Who in your group is growing spiritually? What are you feeling good about right now in your ministry? What are you most enjoying in your role as a leader? In what ways do you see God using you as a leader?

Second, celebrating successes helps leaders understand what is working well and encourages them to continue executing building upon them. Equipping is not just about addressing what's not working; it's also about reinforcing things that are working well. Successes often point the way to the next steps for a leader or ministry. Consider asking your leaders questions like: What is working really well in your ministry right now? What efforts does God seem to be blessing? What have you done in the past month that has had the greatest impact? What would happen if you spent more time doing those things? How can you leverage the success of those things to take your ministry and your leadership to the next level?

Celebrate successes regularly with your leaders. Affirmation is crucial to a leader's ongoing commitment and motivation. Celebration provides an avenue for the leader and coach to honor God for the amazing things he is accomplishing in their lives and ministries.

What Challenges Are You Facing?

This question provides an avenue for your leader to talk openly about things that aren't going well. Obstacles and challenges need to be acknowledged and owned before they can be tackled and overcome. These challenges may be related to circumstances (inadequate

meeting space, difficulty coordinating schedules, and so on), people entrusted to your leader’s care (conflict, personal problems), or your leader’s own skills and/or growth as a Christ-follower.

As a coach, part of your role is to ensure that you provide a safe, confidential, and nurturing environment for your leaders to talk openly about these challenges. Encourage your leaders to look honestly at their ministry and personal leadership, and to name those things that aren’t working or could be improved upon. Affirm their insights and lead them on to the next question.

How Will You Tackle Those Challenges?

This is the ultimate test for a coach who struggles with wanting to be an expert instead of a guide! Often, once the challenges have been named, we want to jump in and start offering advice and solutions to our leaders. There are times when our insights are necessary, of course. But more often than not, our leaders possess the wisdom they need to solve ministry challenges. This wisdom simply needs to be drawn out of them.

So encourage your leaders to think through their challenges and to develop a plan of action to tackle those challenges. Ask them questions like: What would you like to see happen? What would need to take place in order for change to occur? Who might be able to help solve this problem? What steps can you begin taking to tackle this challenge?

Basic Problem Solving

To help organize your thoughts, use the following Key Questions and Action Plans to help your leader tackle various ministry challenges:

Step	Key Question	Action Plan
Heart Check	Are my own emotions or interests affecting my perception of this challenge?	Spend some time in solitude praying and/or journaling about your perception of the challenge. Ask a wise and trusted friend to point out any blind spots in your perspective.
Prioritize	What is the most important challenge?	Brainstorm a list of all the ministry challenges you are facing. Prioritize this list and deal with one challenge at a time.
Core	What is the core of this challenge?	Focus your attention on the cause of the challenge (not the symptoms). Discern what is at the root of the challenge.

Options	What are the options for solving this challenge?	Brainstorm a list of options. Do not evaluate the options at this point. Come up with as many options as possible.
Evaluate and Decide	Of all our options, what are the two or three best? Which option is best?	Narrow down your options. Pick the best option. Make sure everyone affected will agree to rally behind this option.
Roadmap	What steps do we need to take to tackle this challenge?	Outline a roadmap of steps that will take you from the challenge to the solution.
Act	What do I need to do now?	Start tackling the steps in your roadmap.
Reflect	What did I learn in tackling this challenge?	Spend time debriefing with your team.

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Discuss:

1. In what situations do I most want to play the “expert?”
2. How can coaches identify the line between giving solid advice when needed and preventing a group leader from solving their own problems?
3. How can I apply the Basic Problem Solving chart in my current relationships with small-group leaders?

Serving Small-Group Leaders

Learn the difference between "helping" and "doing."

1 Thessalonians 5:11

Running through e-mails, Heather decided to only check the ones that looked important. She only had 15 minutes before she had to run and get the kids. Then she saw the subject line: "Urgent," an e-mail from Shelley, one of the Community 4:12 leaders at church. Heather is the coach of a team of compassion ministry leaders. Her leaders oversee teams of folks who put together events for under-resourced families in a nearby community.

For a second, Heather contemplated ignoring the e-mail; after all, she didn't have a lot of time. But curiosity got the best of her, and she double clicked. The e-mail read:

Ahhhhh! Terry is driving me crazy! She doesn't follow directions. I asked her to book the school for the compassion event. We have already advertised the time and date, and now I find out Terry did not book the school! Now we have no place for this event! I asked her months ago to take care of this one small detail, and she never did it. She said she forgot. Help!

Bummer! Heather thought. *Now what are we going to do? The event is two weeks away and we don't have a space.* She automatically went into fix-it mode. As she jumped in the car to pick up her kids, she ran through the options in her mind and thought of the community center down the street from the school. Flipping open her cell phone, she began to make calls. The community center was available, but would cost an extra \$500. Being a "make it happen" kind of leader, this extra cost was not enough to discourage Heather. As her son hopped into the car, she called Mike, a neighbor and plant manager for a local food manufacturer.

"Mike, this is Heather," she crooned onto his voicemail. "Just wondering if you and the family could come over for dessert some night this weekend? I've got an idea for you." By the time she picked up her daughter, Heather had an appointment with the community center to formally reserve the space and fill out the paperwork. She also made a call to the church office to change the advertising for the event location, and she got a phone tree started to get the word out among the volunteers.

Over dessert with Mike and his family that weekend, Heather presented her proposal of a corporate sponsorship for the event—not only to cover the extra \$500 rent on the facility, but to cover the entire cost of rental and supplies. She flopped into bed after dessert was over, feeling a sense of relief and satisfaction. The adrenaline rush of managing the problem and multi-tasking to get the job done had kept her mind racing the last two nights. She drifted off to sleep with the old cliché ringing in her mind: "When you want a job done right, do it yourself."

The compassion event was a huge success. Attendance was even greater than expected, and because of the corporate sponsorship, the volunteers raised more money than they

had planned—money that would assist families in their neighboring community. It was a satisfying day for Heather. When the other volunteers learned of the corporate sponsorship and the last minute crisis of space, Heather got lots of praise and encouragement for her skills of making stuff happen. Even the pastor acknowledged Heather's efforts during his prayer and remarks at the opening of the event.

As Heather cruised through her e-mails the next day, she noticed another one from Shelley. This time the subject line said, "Thanks."

Heather, I'm not sure what I would have done without you. Thanks for rescuing me. You did a fabulous job—what a great day! —Shelley

In the following weeks, Heather enjoyed a more comfortable schedule as the flow of ministry cycled down. But just when she was getting really relaxed, it happened again. This time the subject line just read "Help!" Once again, Shelley found herself with a volunteer not following through, a ministry crisis, and a deadline.

Again, Heather went into fix-it mode. She had already scheduled a meeting with Shelley for that afternoon, so she quickly prepared a list of how they could resolve the current ministry difficulty. The women met at McDonalds' while Shelley's preschool daughter played in the slides and tunnels.

"Last month's event was awesome!" Shelley said. "Thanks again for pulling things together the way you did."

"It's what I do," Heather answered, smiling. As they continued to reflect on the event, Heather realized that she was spending a lot of time accepting praise from Shelley. An uneasiness fell over her that she couldn't quite put her finger on. "It's all God," she finally said, going through the motions of deflecting the credit.

The women continued the meeting with a discussion of their current ministry problem. Once again, the same volunteer had not followed through and Shelley could not handle all the details by herself to keep the event afloat. "So here we are again," Shelley grimaced, "Time to pull some Heather magic and rescue me."

Heather squirmed. It suddenly dawned on her—she had rescued Shelley from the previous ministry mess instead of helping her discover a solution. She had accepted all of the responsibility (and praise) instead of taking advantage of an opportunity to help Shelley grow.

Looking at Shelley under the golden arches, Heather inquired, "How can I help you, Shelley?"

Shelley looked confused. "What should we do?" she asked after a moment of thought. "You always have a quick and creative solution."

"We are in a mess," Heather agreed. Solutions were scrolling through her mind. It felt clear to her what should be done, but she stopped short of blurting it out. Instead, she said, "Let's pray about this." Shelley happily agreed, but not without a moment of surprise. It was not Heather's normal mode of operation to stop, reflect, and pray before

launching into fix-it mode. The women prayed. Heather asked again, "How can I help you?"

Shelley shared her concerns about the volunteer team she leads. She was unsure why they didn't seem to have the same commitment and ownership that it took to meet their ministry objectives. "Here's how you can help me," Shelley finally said. "Help me motivate this team to get stuff done."

The two leaders spent the bulk of their meeting talking about how to motivate the team. They decided to have a team get-together which included some affirmations as well as some vision casting. Then they talked about how to resolve the immediate ministry deadlines. Instead of offering solutions, Heather asked, "What is the purpose of this event? How is God leading in this? What would you like to see happen? What needs to be done to make this happen? Who do you think should do it?"

Shelley left the meeting with a list of calls to make and conversations to have. Three weeks out from their ministry event, she was feeling confident that the event would be successful in building relationships with families in need. Two days before the event, the subject line of the e-mail read, "You're invited."

Heather, we would love to have you come to the relationship-building event on Saturday. Hope you are planning to be there. Would you like to greet at the door? All other bases seemed to be covered. —Shelley

For a moment, Heather felt sad—but just for a moment. The success or failure of this event was not about her ability to do it, but about her ability to develop other leaders to do it. Her behind the scenes role as a coach would not showcase her 11th hour, pull-it-all-together talent. But she knew that was the real test of her leadership.

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Discuss:

1. How did Heather handle Shelley's second crisis differently than the first crisis? Which way was better for Shelley's development?
2. Have I ever been tempted to "take over" the tasks that have been entrusted to my small-group leaders? What happened?
3. What are some ways that I can serve my small-group leaders and help them accomplish their ministry goals without doing it myself?

Recruiting New Small-Group Leaders

The secrets to finding the right people, making the ask, and closing the deal.

1 Corinthians 12:27

The first step towards becoming an effective recruiter—and helping our leaders become effective recruiters—is changing our mindset about inviting people into ministry. It is not about asking people to “give up” more time, it is about asking people to experience God in a new way and to partner with him on a mission that changes lives. As a coach, you are challenging others to follow in obedience the plan laid out in Scripture about being the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27).

Looking for Leaders

Okay. You are prepared to find leaders and invite them to join you on mission with God. So who do you choose? The easy answer to this question is everyone. Invite everyone to join the mission of helping people find their way back to God. Jesus did. “Go and make disciples,” he said, “Every one of you.” But as a coach, you are looking for the *leader*—the individual gifted by God to lead others on the mission.

If you start with the simple answer (everyone), your leaders will emerge. Begin by using your influence and role as a coach (and encourage your group leaders to do the same) to invite others to help in the mission. Ask people to contribute even in the smallest way. Look for those who are faithful, available, and teachable. Watch as those contributing interact with others, and see if people follow their lead. Are others attracted to this person? Does this person have influence in the team or group? Does this person have the right momentum and direction spiritually? As you watch people contribute, look for the leaders to emerge.

Take some risks. Do not wait for the “sure thing” before you invite someone into leadership. Sometimes we have a hard time seeing the potential in people, or we have expectations that are too high or unrealistic. Remember that inviting someone into leadership begins with an apprentice role. It is often the responsibility and accountability that goes along with apprentice leadership that helps the potential leader emerge. There are many “diamonds in the rough” out there waiting to be discovered. People don’t have to “arrive” to be invited.

Of course, not every person who says “yes” to leadership will find that it is the right fit for them. Inevitably, some people you invite into leadership will move on to another ministry area. Some will find that their spiritual giftedness is in an area different than leadership, or some will face life circumstances that take them out of your circle of influence. This is okay. No time invested in the development and discipleship of a person is wasted. Perhaps a person does “fail” to become an effective leader, but it is not a failure when someone takes a risk, invests in the life of another person, and challenges that person to find and live out their place in the body of Christ. Your job is

to make disciples of Jesus for the long haul. If you have affected the life of someone in a way that facilitated his or her experience of Jesus, then you have done what you are called to do.

Prayer. Occasionally you will have a hard time seeing any potential leaders on the horizon. When a church is growing at a rapid rate, sometimes it seems the number of people who need to be led and cared for is growing at a faster rate than the number of leaders who are stepping up to lead and shepherd. Jesus understood this challenge. He told his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few” (Luke 10:1). How did Jesus instruct his disciples to tackle this challenge? He said, “Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (Luke 10:2).

When you are having difficulty identifying potential apprentices, pray, pray, pray. Ask God to raise up people to lead, and then keep your eyes open to see his answers to your prayers.

Making the Ask

After we pray, then we ask. Don't ask just one or two of the best and brightest; ask and invite all those who you see as potential leaders to join you and your leaders on mission with God. As a coach, your leaders need to see you “make the ask” of other potential leaders. They need to learn and understand the importance of inviting others into leadership, and they need to see you model this effectively.

Identify strengths. Tell an emerging leader what you see in them. Be specific. What have you observed about their life, their words, their relational skills, their gifts and talents, or their character that caught your eye? What do you see in them that could make an eternal difference in the lives of others? Good, solid observation about how someone is gifted by God can be strategic in helping that person discover his or her role in the body of Christ. Be observant and then share your observations!

Vision. The effective ask begins with a compelling vision. We are inviting people into a mission that is directed by God and changes people's eternity. Tell emerging leaders how God has worked in your life and spiritual journey through your involvement in ministry. Share stories about other contributors on your team. Share stories about how your team has played a role in helping people find their way back to God. Help emerging leaders understand that they have an opportunity to grow as a Christ follower and make a missional impact through contributing on a team. Cast a compelling vision. Don't let the moment go by with a weak or apologetic ask. Make it a compelling, “trade your life for eternal work” kind of ask!

Practice articulating the passion you have for serving God the way that you do. Write it down, if that helps. Whatever you need to do, be prepared to passionately, without reservation, share why you are on mission with God and invite others to join you on this mission.

Strategic language. Language communicates much more than information. It reveals attitudes, values, and vision. The language you use when recruiting potential leaders can have a profound impact on their perception of “the ask.” Do you believe you are inviting

others to join a meaningful, adventurous, important mission? Then use strategic language to recruit!

- Instead of “We need volunteers,” strategically communicate, “Would you like to contribute to the mission?”
- Instead of “Here is the task that needs to be done,” strategically communicate, “Here’s how this ministry can play a role in helping people find their way back to God.”
- Instead of “Would you like to contribute,” strategically communicate, “We’d love to have you as part of our team.”
- Instead of “Do you have time to help us out?” strategically communicate, “We’d like to give you the opportunity to make a significant impact.”

Closing the Deal

Very often a leader does everything right. They provide people with opportunities, see potential leaders emerge, pray, and vision cast. But they fail to do one important thing: close the deal.

One leader told a story of an apprentice she had invited to join small group leadership. They talked several times, the vision had been cast, the potential leader had expressed some common reservations. But after two meetings there were no specific plans. Finally, over lunch one day, the leader asked the potential apprentice, “So are we going to make this thing official?” The potential apprentice became the official apprentice as she reached her hand across the table and shook the hand of the leader. They closed the deal.

After “making the ask,” it is helpful to place a time limit on the decision. Give the potential leader time to think and pray, and then tell them when and how you plan to follow up with them. If you say you will call in one week, do it. Don’t delay. Persist with this person until you receive an answer. If the answer is yes, share very specific steps on what comes next and give them some immediate leadership tasks.

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Discuss:

1. What has been my most successful method of finding new group leaders in the past? What have been my biggest obstacles?
2. How can our church improve our strategic communication when it comes to recruiting new leaders?
3. What will I need to do in order to “close the deal” with potential group leaders?

The Coach's Spiritual Journey

Helping others grow spiritually starts at your own relationship with God.

Philippians 3:12–14

To be effective coaches, the small-group leaders we oversee need us to be cultivating an intimate relationship with God, growing in our own journey as Christ-followers, and protecting the things in our lives that renew and refresh us. In other words, the best gift we can give to our leaders is a healthy, energized, Spirit-led self.

But this kind of Spirit-led ministry doesn't just happen without intentional effort on our part. Becoming Spirit-led coaches demands our best in faith and effort. It requires discipline. It has no room for apathy. It demands setting boundaries. It is about leading ourselves before we attempt to lead others. The truth is, God hasn't just invited you to a role that will impact others; he has invited you to a role where your own life will be transformed. Coaching begins with your own journey with God.

Cultivating Intimacy with God

At its core, the Bible is the story of a loving, awesome God pursuing intimacy with the people he created. He desires to be at the center of every detail of your life. The question is not whether God is intentionally pursuing you; the question is whether you are intentionally pursuing an intimate relationship with God.

Spiritual disciplines provide a means for us to grow closer to God. Through prayer, solitude, Bible study, worship, spiritual retreats, journaling, and other spiritual disciplines, we have the opportunity to spend time with God—learning more of his heart and sharing our own heart with him. Each of us needs to consider this question: What combination of spiritual disciplines do I need in order to keep my heart tuned to God's? The answer to that question may be different for each of us, and may vary as we pass through the seasons of our lives. But it is crucial that we have an answer and commit to the regular practice of those disciplines if we want to cultivate our relationship with God.

Spiritual disciplines are not a relationship with God. They are the activities that help us cultivate and grow our relationship with God. It is so important to remember this because a lot of our frustration and inconsistency in practicing the disciplines comes when we lose sight of why we are doing them. They become a checklist of things we *should* do instead of an opportunity for the closeness we *want* to experience.

Our first role as a coach is to intentionally cultivate our own relationship with God. Our own souls will flourish as we grow closer to him, and our leaders will receive the best care possible as we serve them with hearts that are full and energized by God.

Focusing On Your “Next Step”

As coaches, we must be asking ourselves this question—and asking it regularly. “What is the next step for me on my journey as a Christ-follower? In my role as a coach? In my relationships with my family? In my relationships with my neighbors?” Growing Christians are those who ask the “next step” questions.

Set aside some time for solitude and reflection, and use one or two of these questions as a guide in helping you discern some “next steps” in your journey as a Christ-follower:

- Read 1 John 1:9–10. Spend some time searching your heart. Ask God to show you any un-confessed sin in your life. Confess that sin to God and think about the steps you need to take to be released from the bondage of that sin.
- What decisions (big or small) are you facing right now? Read James 1:5. Ask God to guide you with his wisdom in those decisions. As you quiet your heart and listen, what steps do you sense the Holy Spirit prompting you to take?
- What have you heard recently—during church services, in your own study and reading, in conversation—that really stuck out in your mind? Why do you think the Holy Spirit wanted that thing to stick out to you? What step is God prompting you to take in response?
- Who are the people that have been on your mind the most lately? Ask God to show you if he is putting these people on your mind for a specific reason. Is there something he is prompting you to do for these people?
- Ask God to bring to your mind a command from Scripture that he wants you to pay attention to (look through Matthew 5–7 if you need some help). What steps do you need to take to live in obedience to this command?
- What step has God challenged you to take in the past that you haven’t taken yet (reconciling a relationship, sharing Christ with a neighbor, getting out of debt, and so on). Talk to God about that step and your reluctance in taking it. What could you begin doing right away to move towards obedience in this situation?
- What would you like to see happen in your relationship with Jesus over this next year? What steps do you need to take towards that future?
- What would you like to see happen in your family over this next year? What steps do you need to take towards that future?
- What would you like to see happen in your ministry over this next year? What steps do you need to take towards that future?
- What would you like to see happen in your career over this next year? What steps do you need to take towards that future?

God has a “next step” for you in your journey as a Christ follower. As coaches we must be people in motion that in turn help our leaders find the steps God is inviting them to take.

Finding Your Rhythm

Coaching is a high calling to a consistent, relational investment in those you lead. Yet this investment can leave coaches vulnerable to discouragement and even burnout if not careful. If the best gift we can give to our leaders is a healthy, energized, Spirit-led self, we must discover and protect the things in our lives that keep us healthy and energized.

What are the things that fill your tank?

- **Relationally.** Who are the people that build up, encourage, and challenge you? Is there a healthy balance in your life between the people that are draining to your soul and those that are nurturing to your soul? Are you protecting time in your schedule for those key relationships?
- **Physically.** Are you protecting time for physical activities that energize you or times of rest that refresh you?
- **Mentally/Emotionally.** Are you taking regular breaks from the mental and emotional drains of ministry? What activities are mentally restful to you? Make time for them in your schedule.

As coaches, we need to find the right rhythm for our lives—the blend between work and rest that will keep us healthy and energized for the long haul. From the beginning, God’s design was for a rhythm of work and Sabbath rest. Sabbath is about stopping. We don’t stop because we are finished with ministry tasks; we stop because it is time to stop. Jesus modeled this principle of stopping. In the midst of his busiest and most productive times of ministry, he stopped and called his disciples to stop. “Come away with me by yourselves to a quiet place and rest for a while,” he said in Mark 6:3.

If you want to be a difference maker for the long haul, you must discover the right rhythm for your life and live that rhythm out consistently. It will be hard at times. It will involve drawing some boundaries in your life that may require difficult choices and will certainly not please every person in your life. But your calling as a coach is too important to risk the dangers of burnout.

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Discuss:

1. Has God been trying to start a conversation with me in the past week? How? What does he want to say?
2. What combination of spiritual disciplines will help me keep my heart intimately in tune with God’s?
3. What obstacles get in the way of my practice of the spiritual disciplines? How can they be overcome?

Checking a Leader's RPMS

Assisting your leaders' relational, physical, mental, and spiritual development.

Luke 2:52

When coaching small-group leaders, relational development is the core out of which everything else will grow. With that in mind, RPMS provide a way to easily remember the areas of a leader's life that we want to influence as a coach. Just as we check the RPMs on a car to see how well it is running, we can check the RPMS on ourselves and our leaders to see if all is in balance. RPMS stands for Relational, Physical, Mental, and Spiritual. The idea comes from Jesus' growth in Luke 2: "And Jesus grew in wisdom [mental] and stature [physical], and in favor with God [spiritual] and men [relational]."

Before we go any further, let's be honest: relationships take time. Does the idea of addressing these four areas of your leaders' lives feel uncomfortable right now? It should. Diving right in to an RPMS conversation before a relationship has been established will likely do the opposite of what you are trying to accomplish—developing a close, trusting relationship.

In addition, having an RPMS conversation with a leader is counter-cultural to our individualistic way of doing life. Culturally, we are just not used to asking people how their physical health is, let alone their relational and spiritual health. So take your time and use some relational wisdom. You were likely chosen as a coach because of your leadership and relational gifts. You will need to rely on these instincts and God's prompting to know when the time is right to begin the RPMS conversation.

Relational

Our relational world is the people with whom we interact regularly—our immediate family, friends, neighbors, and small-group members. Getting to know your leaders means getting to know their relational world.

Here are some good questions to ask about relationships:

- What about your family life is going well? What would you like to change?
- Who do you consider your closest friend? How is God using that relationship to grow you?
- What are your relationships like at work?
- What is the most challenging relationship in your life? The most rewarding?

Physical

What comes to mind when you think of someone's physical wellbeing? Maybe sickness and health? Diet and exercise? Rest and pace? All of these things are part of it. The physical

aspect of our lives and ministry is the ability to have a balanced, healthy life. This is probably one of the most overlooked aspects of a leader's life. However, if we are truly serious about developing the whole person, we have got to help our leaders see that our physical wellbeing can affect our ability to lead any given ministry with enthusiasm, passion, and energy.

Here are some good questions to ask about physical balance:

- How is your work schedule?
- What does a good night's rest look like for you?
- Where is your energy level on a scale of 1–10?
- What about your physical health do you want to change? What parts of that are in your control?

Mental

Another often-overlooked aspect of coaching is the development of your leader's mind. One aspect of this developmental process is to keep a good pulse on the "education" of your leaders. What are they learning from the biblical teaching they have been exposed to? What are they learning in their own times of Bible study, or through their small group? What books are they reading to sharpen their skills as a leader, to challenge their growth as a Christ-follower, or to stretch their understanding of their culture?

Some of us are highly motivated as self-learners; others need the accountability and encouragement of a friend or mentor to take the initiative in developing our minds. Part of our responsibility as coaches is to make sure our leaders are being equipped for life and the ministry they have been called to. Regularly ask your leaders about the things God is teaching them, and encourage them to apply that learning to their lives and ministry in real and practical ways.

As coaches, not only can we help our leaders absorb learning, we can also help them filter out certain thoughts and information. We can ask questions that help us gauge if our leaders are avoiding certain forms of media or entertainment that may be negatively affecting their thought life. By asking about their learning, we can help them avoid being influenced by unhealthy theological sources. By discussing what's on their minds, we may discover areas of their understanding that are misguided and need to be replaced with biblical truth.

Checking the "M" of your leader's RPMS can be a little intimidating. It requires that you listen with careful discernment and speak the truth with wisdom and love. As you talk with your leader, maintain a constant prayer in your heart for God's wisdom to flood your heart and saturate your words (James 1:5). Here are some good questions to ask about mental learning:

- What have you been learning lately?

- How have you applied your ongoing leadership training to your small group?
- What thoughts have been dominating your mind lately? Are these thoughts having a positive or negative effect on your life? Are they thoughts that are pleasing to God?

Spiritual

In Joel Comiskey's book *Home Cell Group Explosion*, he presents the results of a survey he conducted among the largest churches in the world. This survey revealed that personality and gifts weren't the biggest factor in the growth of the church—prayer and the devotional lives of the leaders were. Spiritual vitality is crucial to your leader's life and effectiveness in ministry. When leaders' hearts are intimately connected to God, they will be tuned to his leading and effective ministry will flow from their lives.

Too many times we get this turned around. We fill our lives with the tasks of ministry and find very little time left to connect with God. When this happens, not only are we in danger of wearing out (because we aren't staying connected to our Source of strength and power), but we are also in danger of missing God's plan and purposes because we aren't sensitive to the leading of his Spirit.

The number one responsibility of a leader is to grow in his or her own relationship with God. As a coach, you can help your leaders figure out what they need to do to find and maintain intimacy with God. It might be different for each person, and may even differ for the same person through different seasons of life. But it is crucial that your leaders are building and protecting things in their lives that will nourish and grow their spirits.

One of the best ways to pursue intimacy with God is through the practice of spiritual disciplines. Remember, the goal is not the discipline itself; the goal is intimacy with God. But spiritual disciplines such as prayer, Bible study, journaling, meditating on Scripture, worship, fasting, retreats, memorizing Scripture, and others are doorways that help usher our hearts into the presence of God where he can speak to us, lead us, equip us, and strengthen us for the mission he has called us to.

Here are some good questions to ask about spiritual health:

- Does your relationship with God feel close and intimate right now? If not, can you think of something in your life that is standing in the way?
- What combinations of spiritual disciplines do you need in order to keep connected with God?
- How could I help hold you accountable to the practice of those disciplines?
- How has God been speaking to you lately? What has he been saying?

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Discuss:

1. Which of the RPMS will it be most difficult for me to ask a leader about? Which will be easiest? Why?
2. How many of my relationships with small-group leaders are ready for an RPMS conversation?
3. How can I work these questions into my regular interaction and conversations with group leaders?

How to Lead a Meeting of Group Leaders

Practical advice for training and supporting your leadership team.

Ecclesiastes 4:9–12

One of the most rewarding aspects of contributing in ministry is the experience of being on a team. Small-group leaders who serve on their own—disconnected from the encouragement and camaraderie of a team—are in great danger of burnout and losing heart. Those who experience the support and community of a healthy team have a great advantage towards long-term effectiveness. As a coach, the one-on-one relationships you build with your leaders are foundational to creating a sense of community on your team, but your leaders also benefit greatly from opportunities to connect with one another.

Gathering a group of small-group leaders together for training and support—a meeting that we refer to as a “coaching huddle”—provides an avenue for you and all the leaders entrusted to your care to connect on a regular basis. Whether these huddles take place monthly at the church or at a Starbucks on a weekday evening, they play a critical role in the development of your team. In coaching huddles, your leaders exchange ideas, draw from each other’s experiences, practice leadership skills through role-playing, minister to one another, and inspire one another. Coaching huddles build a sense of community within your ministry that will deepen each leader’s commitment to the team and ownership of the mission.

Preparing for a Huddle

Time with your leaders is precious and limited, so it is essential that you make the most of your huddle time. Your leaders are looking for something that will meet their needs and feel worth their time and effort. Don’t neglect the important task of spending time in prayer asking the Holy Spirit to guide your preparation by helping you to plan an effective huddle agenda.

When preparing for your huddle, ask yourself these basic questions:

- **What do my leaders need spiritually and emotionally? What challenges are they facing? What skills do my leaders need to be equipped with?** Consider asking your leaders a week or two before your huddle time what their needs are. You won’t be able to meet every need in every huddle, but you may find that several of your leaders have similar needs.
- **How can I meet my leaders’ needs as part of this huddle?** Once you have an idea of the needs of your leaders, the huddle can provide a great avenue for addressing those needs. Be sure to brainstorm possible tips and solutions.
- **What do I want my leaders to take away from this huddle that they can apply to their lives and their groups?** Have a clear idea of the central thing you hope to

accomplish with the huddle. This focus will help you in planning the details of your huddle time. You will want to give the greatest amount of time and attention to this central thing you hope to accomplish.

- **What are the skill building or informational priorities of my staff director?** Ask your staff director for ideas and/or tools that you could use to help equip your leaders for their ministry tasks. Find out information about upcoming events, initiatives, or changes that need to be communicated to your leaders.
- **What are my peer coaches focusing on in their huddles this month?** Draw ideas from your fellow coaches in planning your huddles. Often the best ideas are stolen ideas!
- **Is there something I want my leaders to do prior to our huddle to prepare?** If you plan ahead, you could make your huddle time more effective by having your leaders think about key ideas you will be discussing, or by having them read an article or chapter on the topic you will be addressing.

The Huddle Agenda

Once you have a clear idea of what you hope to accomplish in your huddle, it's time to start planning an agenda. The following items could be included in your huddle agenda. As you pray and plan, ask the Holy Spirit to show you which components will be most helpful to your group leaders.

- **Vision.** Vision leaks. It has been said that people need to be reminded every 30 days about why they do what they do. Leadership is hard work, and without an ongoing opportunity to hear the mission and priorities of your ministry, leaders can lose heart. What is your ministry's unique mission in the church? How does your ministry fit into the bigger picture? What can you do in your huddle time to reinforce and recast that vision?
- **Relational needs.** Spend time sharing personal praises and challenges. Encourage your leaders to share about their own lives (not their uncle's barber's wife). What can you do in your huddle time to help your leaders build authentic, open relationships with one another?
- **Prayer.** Spend time praying for one another in your huddle. Keep prayer time fresh by rotating approaches (have leaders pray with a partner, write down prayer requests, assign prayer partners, and so on).
- **Celebrate.** Share stories with one another about the way you see God at work in your lives and ministry area. Celebrate your ministry's wins together.
- **Problem solving.** Don't be afraid to talk openly about challenges and problems. (Of course, be careful not to let the huddle become a gripe or gossip session.) In your huddle, brainstorm steps to tackle those problems.

- **Leadership development.** What can you do in your huddle time to equip your leaders with leadership skills, or help them take next steps in their spiritual formation? Use your ministry's training resources to equip your leaders.
- **Information/announcements.** What important information do you need to communicate to your leaders?

Most likely, you will not include all of these agenda items in every meeting. And you'll emphasize different areas in each meeting for what you do include. But taking the time to plan for your huddle will help ensure that the meeting will be purposeful and beneficial to your leaders.

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Discuss:

1. What are some of my favorite memories of being part of a team? What made the "team" experience unique?
2. How can I use the individual strengths of each of my leaders to improve the team as a whole?
3. Have I been putting as much effort as I should in planning training/support events for my small-group leaders? How can I ensure that I prepare well?

Guidelines for Speaking the Truth in Love

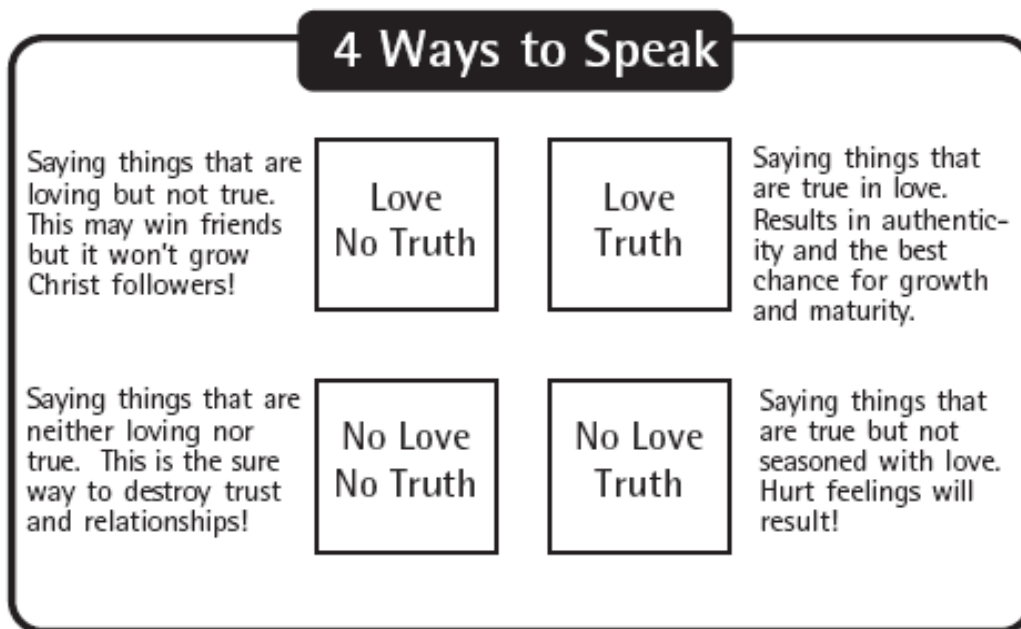
Practical advice for your most difficult conversations.

Ephesians 4:14–16

“Speaking the truth in love” can be the hardest part of coaching. If a leader isn’t carrying through with his or her responsibilities, it is the coach’s responsibility to speak words of truth. When something in your leader’s life seems questionable, or when your leader is unaware of a personal weakness or problem, God may desire for you to be the voice of truth in that leader’s life. Speaking the truth in love will enable your leader to take another step in his or her journey towards maturity.

In the same way, failing to speak these words of truth might keep your leader from growing and prove problematic or dangerous for your team and the people entrusted to that leader’s care. Truth speaking is hard. There is no way around that. But it is something a coach must do for the good of the leader and the ministry.

As you navigate relational encounters with your small-group leaders, it’s helpful to keep the following diagram in mind:



Tips for Speaking the Truth in Love

- **Pray. Pray. Pray!** Do not enter into a truth-telling conversation without praying for God to prepare your heart and the heart of your leader for the meeting. Pray for wisdom and discernment to speak the right words. Pray that your leader's heart will be receptive to correction.
- **Struggle.** If it is easy for you to speak hard words into another person's life, you probably shouldn't do it. If it is difficult for you to speak hard words because you don't want to hurt the other person or ruin your relationship, then you probably are speaking from a heart of love.
- **Decide** that you love the person enough to not allow anything to stunt their growth as a Christ-follower. Gently affirm to your leader that the words you are speaking come from a desire to see that leader grow.
- **Ask questions** that communicate that you care about your leader—you're not just performing a ministry task or solving a problem. For example: "I've noticed that you don't seem to be serving with much enthusiasm lately. Is there something going on in your life that is burdening you?"
- **Affirm** your leader continually throughout the conversation. Affirm your desire to maintain a close, authentic relationship with that leader. Affirm the leader's value to the team.

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Discuss:

1. When was the last time someone “spoke the truth in love” to me? How did it feel? How did I react?
2. Do I find it easy or difficult to speak hard words into my leaders’ lives?
3. Of the tips listed above, which do I do well? What steps can I take to improve my areas of weakness?

Further Exploration

Resources to help you . . .

SmallGroups.com. We specialize in equipping churches and small-group leaders to make disciples through life-changing community.

BuildingChurchLeaders.com. A website with practical training tools for various church leadership roles.

CTPastors.com. A website offering practical advice and articles for church leaders in pastoral roles.

WomenLeaders.com. A website ministering to women leaders in the church.

Coaching Guidebook

Community Christian Church and the NewThing Network.

This downloadable guide provides a framework and practical details for coaching ministry leaders.

Coach: Empower Others to Effectively Lead a Small Group

Joel Comiskey

CCS Publishing, 2007

Influential small-groups author Joel Comiskey brings trusted research and practical advice to discuss coaching group leaders.

Coaching Life-Changing Small-Group Leaders

Bill Donahue and Greg Bowman

Zondervan, 2006

Here is a practical guide for those who lead and shepherd small-group.

Coaching Questions

Tony Stoltzfus

BookSurge Publishing, 2008

This is a coach's guide to asking powerful questions.

How to Be a Great Cell-Group Coach

Joel Comiskey

Cell Group Resources, 2003

Here are practical insights for supporting and mentoring cell-group leaders

Leadership Coaching

Tony Stoltzfus

BookSurge Publishing, 2005

Learn the disciplines, skills, and heart of a Christian coach.