



Recruiting New Small Group Leaders

Recruiting New Small-Group Leaders

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How to Use This Resource

Our training downloads are completely flexible and designed for easy use. Each download focuses on a practical theme that is relevant to small-groups ministry, and is comprised of brief handouts focusing on specific aspects of that theme. 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.

The theme of this download is "Recruiting New Small-Group Leaders." It's designed to offer practical advice for churches and ministry point persons on the subject of identifying and recruiting potential small-group leaders. Each handout can be used as part of a training session for directors and coaches, or as a way to encourage and educate people individually. Simply print the handouts you need and use them as necessary.

For example, to get an overview of the principles behind leader recruitment and training, see "Fishing for True Small-Group Leaders" by Tom Bandy (p. 4). "Spotting New Leaders," by Angela Yee (p. 9) will give you a good idea of what to look for in the process. And "Recruiting Coaches and Shepherds," by Bill Easum and John Atkinson (p. 23), will help you think through the recruitment of a new level of leadership.

Our prayer is that this material will equip your church to find and train new small-group leaders as you continue to grow your ministry.

Need more material or training on another small-group ministry topic?
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Fishing for True Small-Group Leaders

Here's what it takes to reel in the kind of leader you really want.

1 Timothy 4:6–8

The biggest problem churches face in recruiting small-group leaders is that they are confused about what they are looking for. It is as if they go fishing for trout using the tackle designed for walleye. They either don't catch anything at all, or they catch the wrong kind of fish.

Their confusion is caused by their own lack of clarity about purpose. Small-group leaders are found through eye contact, not pulpit appeals. They want to be part of something big, participate in an opportunity for their own personal growth, and make the world a better place. They are not looking for a job description, but a lifestyle expectation.

The Cast

So here you are, maverick church, standing alone in a very cold stream, casting a bold vision for life-changing small groups. Notice the repetitive movement. Be patient. Keep casting. If occasionally your line gets tangled in a tree or an ecclesiastical board meeting, don't lose your temper and don't be sidetracked. Keep on casting that vision of serious, profound, spiritual growth and maturity in Christ.

Since that actual "cast" will take the form of a one-to-one, eye-to-eye, conversation with potential leaders, you need a short list of people to approach. If your church uses spiritual gift assessments, look for people strong in the gifts of hospitality, evangelism, or counseling. However, inventories are often too generic to be effective. Use the characteristics below to put together a customized profile of your church's ideal small-group leader:

- **Deep, daily spirituality.** The leader has a clearly focused faith that pervades both personal and professional life.
- **Intentional confidentiality.** The leader invites immediate trust and gives reliable guarantees to preserve secrets.
- **Unswerving fidelity.** The leader demonstrates loyalty in personal relationships with no hint of sexual exploitation, or flirtatious or abusive behavior.
- **Commitment to equality.** The leader avoids stereotypes of race, gender, generation, or lifestyle. He or she encourages respect and treats others with fairness.
- **Personal humility.** The leader is always eager to learn and grow. He or she does not fear ambiguity.
- **Self-directed, self-disciplined.** The leader works hard toward clear goals, with an internalized motivation for excellence.

- **Habitual patience.** The leader waits and prays for the work of the Holy Spirit and does not rush people or prematurely resolve differences.
- **Gentleness.** The leader is kind and sympathetic; he or she assists others to overcome obstacles.
- **Courageous perception.** The leader sees the point in situations and faces contradiction; he or she identifies the crux of decision-making.
- **People focus.** The leader prioritizes people above issues, dialogue above agendas, and growth above success.
- **Inclusive behavior.** The leader is sensitive to silence, invites people to participate, and is alert to the fringes of groups.

Once you've got a customized profile of your ideal group leader, share it with others in worship, congregational gatherings, boardrooms, and any other gathering. Ask people to write down three names that come to mind when reflecting on that profile. (Make sure they do not give their own name.) Gather all the responses and look for the names that come up over and over again. You now have a short list.

The Hook

Once you have a short list, invite each person on the list to lunch. This is the "eye contact" part of the process. Wait for coffee and dessert, then ask these four questions:

- **Does the idea of growing people in Christ excite you?** This is not an easy question to answer. Some people (even those gifted in hospitality, evangelism, or counseling) may actually get excited about implementing programs that are really about forcing people into accepted norms and dogmas. Other people (especially laypeople who imagine themselves to be "theologians") are actually excited about showing off their biblical knowledge. You are looking for neither. The small-group leader is excited about the idea of growing people and encouraging them to explore the mystery of Jesus Christ.
- **Do you use your gifts or hide them under a basket?** Although you can refer to spiritual gifts inventories, most people on this short list will know what gifts you mean. They know they have gifts for mentoring. They know they instinctively protect confidentiality, love honesty, encourage awareness, and cherish small flames that just might burst into raging fires. But do they allow themselves to do it, or are they afraid of censure? Do they take risks, or do they prefer television? You want the ones who commit.
- **Are you willing to be trained and eager to grow yourself?** The trouble with this question is that everybody will say yes, but few will really mean it. You want the ones who are serious.
- **Do you feel called at this time?** Sometimes it's best to avoid the people who eagerly affirm their sense of calling. Look for the people that gasp, "Who, me?" It will often come as a shock that popular opinion has placed them on the short list.

They may not feel particularly competent or credible, but this mixture of authenticity and humility is exactly what the doctor ordered.

The Catch

This new breed of volunteer is not only willing to be trained, but demands to be trained. They simply *will not* lead a small group unless they are trained. This might seem simple, but it often becomes a struggle. Small-group leaders are not passive vessels to be filled with professional ideals and techniques. They debate. They challenge. They interact.

Small-group leaders are mentors. They are not just questioners, fellow seekers, or journeymen “on the way.” Those people are small-group *participants*. In order to catch group leaders, you must be ready to wrestle them into becoming mentors. They need to share spiritual victories, not just life struggles. If you cannot promise to train them as mentors, you will lose them as leaders.

The Release

Perhaps the most important part of recruiting small-group leaders is the promise to release them for purposeful initiative. Task-group leaders fundamentally desire to be kept on a leash. They *want* to be supervised. They want to be told what to do. It is safer, more secure, to just implement the curriculum. Small-group leaders are a different breed. They want to be free. So cut the line. Release the hook. Submerge them back into the water, and let them swim.

Yes, small-group leaders want to know the boundaries, and they need to know the fundamental vision and mission toward which they are committed to serve. Tactics, however, are up for grabs. Don't dictate. Don't prescribe. Don't impose this curriculum or that procedure. And for heaven's sake, don't demand that they do fundraising for the institution. Small-group leaders must feel free to discern, design, implement, and evaluate mission in their own way. They don't want to file reports, ask permission, or achieve quotas. Trust them or dismiss them—but make up your mind.

—TOM BANDY; copyright 2008 by the author and Christianity Today International

Discuss:

1. What characteristics would make up our ideal small-group leader?
2. What steps should I take to start meeting with potential group leaders for an “eye contact” session?
3. Are we prepared to train group leaders that accept our call? How can we improve our training?

A Commonsense Approach to Recruiting New Leaders

A broad look at finding and developing the people you need

Jeremiah 3:15

How to Recognize Potential Small-Group Leaders

There are three qualities to look for in a person who is capable of leading a small group. The first two are non-negotiable and must already be present in the life of the potential leader *before* they start; the third is most often discovered through experience.

First, look for people with good character. This certainly does not mean they are perfect—just that there is nothing hindering their witness for Christ and the church. When small-group leaders are asked to step down from their positions, it's rarely because they are bad facilitators or do a poor job at praying out loud. Most often it is because of a character flaw that is hindering their witness, hence their effectiveness.

Next, look for individuals with good people skills. This does not mean that you find the friendliest person in the congregation to lead a group. Rather, find the people who get along well with everyone and handle conflict well. One key to look for is how individuals handle relationships in conflict. Do they become defensive, or do they listen and try to resolve the matter? You won't always know potential leaders well enough to determine their character and people skills; therefore, don't be afraid to seek out others who do. If potential leaders come forward on their own, ask them for references—preferably another small-group leader who knows them well.

Third, look for people who value community. These are people who value sharing life together. They understand the importance of remaining connected to the body of Christ through close friendships. Like many things, this is something that is caught rather than taught.

How to Raise Up New Small-Group Leaders

Now that you have potential leaders identified, what is the best way to invite and develop them? Start by setting a goal of how many groups you want to launch in the next ministry season. Without such a goal, it's hard to develop a strategy or tactics for recruitment. Also, be intentional. New leaders need to be asked.

Next, plan several training opportunities for new leaders. Announce this training regularly to the church, and cast a vision for the life-change and impact people can have when they step out and lead. As you begin your training process, be sure to teach new leaders the basics—don't assume they know what is required in order to lead a group. If they don't know, they usually won't ask for fear of looking less than "leader material."

Third, identify the model through which you will primarily raise up new leaders. Examples include the apprentice approach or the host-home approach, both of which have their merits.

Troubleshooting

If someone volunteers to lead a small group who is not spiritually or emotionally ready, you have two choices. You can try to help them heal or grow within the context of a small group until you believe they are ready (if ever), or you can redirect them to another ministry that is best suited for them. The main thing is to always find a willing volunteer a place in which they can serve.

Finally, it's possible that potential leaders might not say "yes" right away to your recruitment efforts. They may even say "no." But as long as they don't say "never," keep them on your radar. There is often an incubation period from the time the thought of leading a small group is presented to the point of acceptance.

—MARK INGMIRE; copyright 2008 by the author and Christianity Today International.
Originally appeared on SmallGroups.com.

Discuss:

1. What has been our best source of new group leaders? What obstacles have existed in recruiting them?
2. How does our church currently evaluate the character and people skills of potential leaders? How can we improve this evaluation?
3. Which model will our church use to develop new leaders? What steps do we need to take to get started?

Spotting New Leaders

They may not step forward, so here's how to find the leaders you need.

Acts 18:24–26

Julie was a quiet girl in our Bible study. Petite and soft-spoken, she shared things on her heart and expressed her love for God. One day my husband and I drew Julie aside. “I think you may have the spiritual gift of leadership,” said my husband. “Me?” Julie looked stunned. The thought of being a leader had never occurred to her.

We began giving her leadership assignments in our small group—leading worship time and Bible discussion questions. She tried leading in bite-sized chunks. Our Bible study eventually ended, but Julie led another Bible study group; then she led worship one Sunday. Now Julie leads the worship team regularly.

This would have never happened had not someone nudged her toward leadership. This is part of our calling as leaders—to spot and cultivate other potential leaders to serve God and use the gifts given them. How do we find these hidden people and encourage them to lead? Three steps are involved.

Seeing

Leaders come in a wide range of giftedness, personalities, and working styles. The better we understand the different kinds of leadership, the better we are able to assess those who may have leadership potential.

Some are “natural leaders.” Leadership seems to come naturally to them. Their teams flourish. They have a compelling vision of what God has called them to accomplish, and they lead effectively. These leaders are easy to spot—they usually talk about leadership or ministry direction. The thought of impacting people gets them excited. They enjoy facing a challenge and empowering people to meet it.

Other people are “situational leaders.” They may not have a natural inclination toward leadership, but if the need presents itself and no one else is stepping up, they will step in and lead. Situational leaders do an excellent job overseeing an area of ministry for a limited time, but if they are in ongoing leadership positions, they begin to feel frustration and burnout. Unlike natural leaders, who thrive in a leadership setting, situational leaders do best in short-term projects where they can rest from the draining role of leadership.

Still other people are “undeveloped leaders.” Most leaders are not born with automatic leadership skills; they discover their leadership gifts over time. Those who discover their leadership gifts at a later age are usually unaware of their leadership potential.

Understanding the different kinds of leadership helps us know how to spot potential leaders and match them with ministries where they can develop. So keep an eye out for every kind of leader—they are all needed!

Searching

The next step is to actively seek out leaders. Start with prayer. Ask God to bring you to the right people and to make them available. Then search. But where do you look? Natural leaders are usually immensely busy and leading multiple ministries at once. If you're looking for a natural leader for your ministry, try looking at:

- **People already actively leading in ministry.** The most effective leaders are those who have been sharpened through experience. Although natural leaders may already be quite involved, if the leadership opportunity is in an area they are passionate about or feel called to, they will be willing to lead and reprioritize their other commitments.
- **People who are leaders at their workplace but aren't serving at the church.** Sometimes "secular" leaders do not realize the need for leadership within the church. They may be leaders in their career, but haven't stepped up to minister in the church. Often they mistakenly assume that only those with Bible degrees can be leaders, or that their skills are not needed, or that they are not called to serve.
- **People with a passion for their ministry.** The best leaders are those who have a passion for what they are doing. They are naturally motivated and their enthusiasm spreads to others. If you're trying to find a leader, find someone with a passion.

Sometimes all you need is a situational leader—someone willing to step up on a temporary basis. These leaders arise because of their willingness to serve. They know that even though they may not be the most qualified, they'll lead because needs will otherwise not be met. Their motivation is not because they enjoy leadership, but because they know that service pleases the Lord.

Undeveloped leaders are the most challenging to find. They exist in obscurity and are often discovered by accident. How can you be more intentional in finding these leaders? Look for:

- **People who take initiative.** Non-leaders are content to follow what others plan and rarely take initiative in relationships or tasks. If you see someone who is willing to take initiative to change something or to improve a situation, you have a motivated person who may be a potential leader.
- **People who are reliable.** Don't ask someone who doesn't follow through! Leadership requires reliability and integrity. Look for people who have a track record of faithfulness and dependability. Undeveloped leaders are respected by those around them, even though their efforts may be haphazard due to inexperience.
- **Ask friends for referrals.** Sometimes undeveloped leaders lack confidence or are too modest to step forward, but their friends are willing to volunteer them!

Setting

Placing leaders into leadership should be just as intentional a process as searching them out. It's not enough to drop leaders in a ministry and hope that they swim. The best way of developing leaders is to walk alongside them.

Prepare your leaders to be successful. Give them the tools, training, resources, and encouragement they need. Communicate the purpose of the organization. Having an understanding of the church's goals helps them define how their ministry fits into the big picture. They will be able to better make decisions and know how to plan for the future. Review accountability and decision authority. Let your new leaders know ahead of time what kind of authority they have to make decisions. Go over what kind of decisions they can make and to whom they are ultimately responsible for their decisions.

Also, find out their working preferences. Every leader has a different preference for the environment and situation in which they work most effectively. Ask them:

- **How frequently should I meet with you?** Many new leaders will appreciate regular meetings with you for guidance about the challenges they are facing. Others see frequent meetings as a sign of micromanagement. Ask!
- **How can we best communicate?** What's their preferred mode? E-mail or phone calls? Instant messaging? Communicate in a way that best suits them, not you!

Finally, work with them to build a long-term plan for direction. Beginning leaders tend to be more short-sighted, focusing on the needs of the present. As you meet, prod them for longer-term goals and vision for their ministry. At the same time, give them a short-term goal to work on, which will give measurable results. As they achieve these results, their successes will build their confidence as a leader.

—ANGELA YEE © 2004 by Christianity Today International.

Discuss:

1. How did I step into leadership at this church? What made me think it was a good idea? What fears did I have to overcome?
2. How can our church improve at spotting different types of potential group leaders? How can I improve?
3. How can we ensure that leaders are placed in the best setting within our small-groups ministry?

Eight Characteristics of Potential Leaders

Here are some practical ways to identify leadership potential.

2 Timothy 2:24

When identifying potential leaders, it's helpful to find the natural leaders, of course. But it's also important to determine whether a person is capable of learning leadership. The natural leader will stand out. The trick is identifying those who are capable of learning leadership over time.

Here are several traits to help identify whether someone is capable of learning to lead:

- **Do I see a constructive spirit of discontent?** Some people would call this criticism, but there's a big difference in being constructively discontent and being critical. If somebody says, "There's got to be a better way to do this," I see if there's leadership potential by asking, "Have you ever thought about what that better way might be?" If he says no, he is being critical, not constructive. But if she says yes, she's challenged by a constructive spirit of discontent.
- **Do they offer practical ideas?** Highly original people are often not good leaders because they are unable to judge their output; they need somebody else to say, "This will work" or "This won't." Brainstorming is not a particularly helpful practice in leadership, because ideas need to stay practical. Not everybody with practical ideas is a leader, of course, but leaders seem to be able to identify which ideas are practical and which aren't.
- **Is anybody listening?** Potential leaders have a "holding court" quality about them. When they speak, people listen.
- **Does anyone respect them?** Peer respect doesn't reveal ability, but it can show character and personality. I also look at the family of a potential leader. The family's feelings toward someone reveal much about his or her potential to lead.
- **Can they create or catch vision?** When I talk to people about the future, I want their eyes to light up. I want them to ask the right questions about what I'm talking about. A person who doesn't feel the thrill of challenge is not a potential leader.
- **Do they show a willingness to take responsibility?** When I worked in business, if the vice-president and the security guard were paid the same money, I'd still want to be vice-president. Carrying responsibility doesn't intimidate me, because the joy of accomplishment—the vicarious feeling of contributing to other people—is what leadership is all about.
- **Do they finish the job?** A completion factor is essential. I might test somebody's commitment by putting him or her on a task force. I'd find a problem that needs solving and assemble a group of people whose normal responsibilities don't include tackling that problem. The person who grabs hold of the problem and

won't let go, like a dog with a bone, has leadership potential. This quality is critical in leaders, for there will be times when nothing but one's iron will says, "Keep going."

- **Are they tough-minded?** No one can lead without being criticized or without facing discouragement. A potential leader needs a mental toughness. I don't want a mean leader; I want a tough-minded leader who sees things as they are and will pay the price.

—FRED SMITH; adapted from our sister publication LEADERSHIP Journal, © 2003 by Christianity Today International.

Discuss:

1. Which of the qualities above do I possess? Which qualities do I need to work on?
2. Which of the above qualities are essential for small-group leaders before they begin a group? Which qualities can be developed "on the job"?
3. What is the best way to evaluate the above qualities in potential small-group leaders?

Small-Group Leaders Require Unnatural Selection

Practical advice for spotting and training new group leaders

Isaiah 55:8–9

The Bible shows us time and again how God's ways are greater than our own. He repeatedly does things that surprise and even shock us. For example, his selection of leaders is very *unnatural* from a human perspective. Moses murdered a man in cold blood and talked with a stutter. Joseph was a convict and a slave. Paul was a pharisaical killer of Christians. And I haven't even mentioned the unprofessional band of men Jesus selected to kick-off the greatest revolution in human history!

What to Look For

All these biblical examples have led me to produce a very short list of what qualities a person must have to begin the process of leading a small group. They must have a desire to:

- **Grow closer to God.** This is demonstrated not by how long they have known the Lord (or how impressive of a resume they have), but by how much they are willing to invest in their own spiritual growth. These people are excited about their own spiritual growth, which can be seen in their appetite for studying God's Word, their spiritual questions, and their eagerness to learn what they can do to experience greater intimacy with the Lord.
- **Love others.** New group leaders don't have to start with a large pool of potential members. A following will develop if they simply love others with the kind of selfless love that Jesus demonstrated.
- **Be open.** The best group leaders don't have an agenda they want to push through; they want to be a real help. They are flexible and open to having leaders speak into their lives and plans. They embrace the fact that spiritual leadership requires sacrificial service that involves giving their time, talents, and treasure.

Those you are considering as small-group leaders may not be well-read, well-spoken, well-known, or even well-thought-of. They may not have a charismatic personality, good facilitation skills, or a lot of self-confidence. But if they have the three qualities listed above, the raw material exists in their lives to become successful and influential small-group leaders. Other skills—like being a good listener or asking good questions—and characteristics, like being authentic, will naturally flow out of these other three qualities and can be strengthened.

When potential group leaders approach me as volunteers, I rarely say "No," and I do so only when one of the qualities above is noticeably absent. Most of the time I say "Yes," provided they are connected with another leader who will help them get started and work with them through a leadership development plan. Sometimes I say "Not yet" when the person is in a place that is not emotionally healthy, or if there is such a lack of

stability in their lives that it would be unwise for them to add anything new to their plate or attempt to care for other people.

What to Do Next

The need for leaders is not new (Matthew 9:37–38). The harvest is ripe, and we need to ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field. But we also need to think long-range. We need to think about how to raise up workers *for* the harvest, but also to raise up leaders *from* the harvest.

Effective leadership development is a highly relational process. The meaning of a New Testament figure's name, Barnabas, gives insight into what our role should be in relation to the leaders we are raising up: One who comes alongside (Acts 9:27). Our job is not to "make" leaders. Rather, it is to help develop people's God-given abilities.

Therefore, one of the best ways to train and develop future small-group leaders is for present small-group leaders to "take them under wing." Here are ten relational ways you can prepare and empower others to lead within the context of a small group:

1. Pray for them regularly.
2. Be a good friend (a Barnabas) by sharing your life with them.
3. Think about the concerns, questions, and principles you wish *you* knew about leading a small group before you started, and share them with the leaders you are raising up. Listen to their questions and empathize with their feelings of anxiety and doubt.
4. Do not just delegate—empower! Come alongside of them and train their skills. Share your resources with potential leaders and consider attending leadership development events together.
5. After group meetings, informally debrief your new leaders. Discuss what happened with the group. What was good? What could have been better? Encourage them to ask questions. Don't just talk about what you do, but emphasize why you do it. Pray together for each group member and for the next meeting.
6. Strategically and progressively empower them to lead different parts of the small-group meetings until they can lead entire gatherings themselves. Model what servant leadership looks like. The following pattern is an effective discipleship paradigm that you can use to groom people for group leadership:
 - a. I do, you watch
 - b. I do, you help
 - c. You do, I help
 - d. You do, I watch
 - e. You do, someone else watches
7. Help them to recognize and raise up another leader (2 Tim 2:2).

8. Involve them in following up with group participants early on to build their leadership skills and encourage their relationships with others in the group. Invite them to spearhead outreach efforts and plan studies. This will give you tangible things to address and work with.
9. Set goals with them. When do they want to be ready to lead a small group? In what ways would they like to grow, and when would they want to see positive change? Prioritize the goals that you set and then determine specifically and strategically how you both will work on fulfilling the first one to three goals.
10. Regularly encourage them. Give plenty of praise, but do not forget constructive feedback. Make encouragement calls outside of your regular meeting times and ask them, "How can I pray for you this week?" Share what the Lord is doing in your life and ask them what God is doing in theirs.

The principle of "you reap what you sow" holds true in reference to leadership development. Remember: More will be caught than taught. Most likely, what new leaders will walk away and lead with will not be based on what you said, but on how you came alongside of them and led.

—REID SMITH; copyright 2008 by the author and Christianity Today International.
Originally appeared on Smallgroups.com.

Discuss:

1. Did I possess the three qualities mentioned above when I first started leading a small group? How have I grown in those areas?
2. Who in my current small group possesses the three qualities mentioned above?
3. Of the ten steps listed above, where am I currently at in terms of "coming alongside" a potential leader? How can I effectively move to the next step?

Growing New Leaders as Apprentices

A step-by-step approach to finding and developing apprentice leaders
1 Corinthians 11:1

One of the biggest challenges we face as small-group leaders is recognizing and recruiting potential apprentices. No matter how much we read on this subject, choosing an apprentice will always be a difficult task because we have to look into the current lives of people we know and try to predict their future behavior. But it's also an important task because the apprentices we choose will one day influence the lives of others.

These are big questions to tackle, but churches can take a crack at them by first identifying the "must-haves" of their specific ministries—qualities that simply *must* be in place before someone can be considered as a potential apprentice. Beyond these, churches should also identify several "bonuses"—characteristics that aren't necessarily vital for every leader to possess, but are a huge blessing when present.

The Must-Haves

You can't drive a car without wheels, and you can't bake a cake without flour and eggs (not a good one anyway). So think about the must-haves you've already identified for your small-groups ministry—the places where you've drawn a line in the sand and simply refuse to cross. These often come about through conviction from God, combined with several real-life experiences.

Here are a few of the must-haves that God has developed in our church when it comes to entrusting people with the high privilege of leading a small group:

- **Spiritual velocity.** The apprentice must have a Jesus-centered life. This is not a life of perfection, but a life centered on Jesus. People with spiritual velocity will be impacted in all areas of their lives. You'll see it in their private and public commitment to following Jesus. You'll see it in the way they treat their spouses or establish boundaries while dating. You'll see it in the way they handle their money.

But spiritual velocity isn't about perfection or arrival. It's really about the journey. What if we were to choose apprentices based upon spiritual momentum and direction instead of relying on their current position? After all, do you think the disciples had totally arrived when they received their calls? Of course not! But they were moving in the right direction, and Jesus saw that.

- **Teachability.** People who are teachable are able to process affirmation, accept feedback, and change their behavior when necessary. This teachability needs to be coupled with trust, which we as leaders are responsible for developing. So ask

yourself: Are my potential apprentices willing to take constructive criticism, and do they trust that the person giving it has their best interests in mind?

- **Relational intelligence.** Potential apprentices need to have the basic understanding that people matter to God, and therefore they should matter to us. A person with relational intelligence has the knack for seeing the best in people. They don't possess a blind optimism that makes them oblivious to people's growth areas. Instead, they possess a keen ability to see the potential for greatness in the people they interact with.

The Bonuses

In addition to the traits that are necessary for a church's new apprentices and leaders, there should also be bonus traits—characteristics that aren't required for apprenticeship, but can be huge assets to the leadership journey. Here are four possible bonuses to look for:

- **Missional.** Many Christian leaders today fear that the Church has abandoned its mission—to seek and save what is lost (Luke 15). Therefore, it would be a huge asset to identify potential apprentices who are missional in their thinking. These people are willing to sacrifice time, money, and personal interests in order to help others find their way back to God.
- **Discerning.** Some potential leaders are gifted with the unique ability to discern what's happening in any given situation. This will help apprentices be successful in leading a group because it allows them to figure out people's needs, wants, passions, and dreams. They will know when to push people and when to let them work things out on their own.
- **Inclusive.** Many of us are wired to be selfish with our time, and even more so with our friends and communities. Once we've found a safe place to laugh and cry, we are generally selfish about whom we allow to experience that place. An inclusive person, however, constantly includes people in their conversations, their community, and their life.
- **Biblical knowledge.** Knowing God's Word is vital to our spiritual growth. It's one of the key ways for us to learn about God's character, his will for our lives, and his mission for this world. But while extensive biblical knowledge is valuable, it's not a must-have for someone to begin in leadership. Indeed, it is often easier to teach someone the Bible than it is to teach them how to be more loving.

Recruiting Potential Apprentices

Once you have identified the specific individuals you would like to invite into the apprenticeship process, use the following steps to recruit and develop them as leaders.

- **Information.** It's important for coaches and small-group leaders to gather as much information as possible (and reasonable) before recruiting someone as an

apprentice. This involves intentionality, some discernment, and a real faith in God and his ability to work through people.

- **Invitation.** Once we have gathered information and insight about a potential apprentice, the next step is to “make the ask”—to actually invite the person to join us on the leadership journey. This may seem obvious, but don’t be fooled. There are times when it can be extremely tempting to let the process fizzle out here. Why? Because we can think of a hundred reasons why the person will say no. Nevertheless, it’s up to us to present the opportunity, and it’s up to God to work from there.
- **ICNU.** These letters are license-plate language for “I see in you.” Seeing true potential in an apprentice is infinitely more important than simply filling a need with any warm body. And once we are convinced of that, we need to make sure that our recruits know it, too! Joseph Meyers explains in his book *Organic Community* that when you are recruiting someone, the number one question they want answered is not “What’s in it for me?” The question they really want answered is “Why me?” They want to know why you selected them out of everyone else. And they hope that the answer is tied to who they are as a person and how God can uniquely use them to fulfill some special role in his mission.
- **Include.** Sometimes your first request of any recruit is to simply come and watch what you do in your role—to observe with full permission to ask questions. In other words, including people in what you are recruiting them to do can be a great way to help them see why they should say yes.
- **Readiness.** How do you know when an apprentice is ready to lead? Good question! We train our leaders to make this decision based upon two factors: if the leader feels like the apprentice is ready, and if the apprentice feels like he or she is ready. When those two things line up, we launch the apprentice into leadership.

Some people are born leaders; some are refined as leaders through patience, life-experience, coaching, and God’s provision. The question at the heart of the issue is this: Do we really believe in people? Does God really believe in people? If our answer is no, then the concept of apprenticeship will never work. But if we say yes, then this life of following Jesus is about to get more real and inspiring as we invite others to experience the leadership journey with us.

—ERIC METCALF, NICK PLASSMAN, AND CARTER MOSS; adapted from the Apprentice Field Guide, © 2008 by Community Christian Church. Used with permission.

Discuss:

1. Who identified me as a potential leader? Who cast the vision for my ministry?
2. What are the must-haves for apprentices in our ministry? What are some of the most important bonuses?

3. What is my next step when it comes to recruiting an apprentice for my small group?
What needs to be done before I take that step?

Transforming Hosts into Spiritual Leaders

Moving from low to high on the scale of responsibility

Romans 1:11–12

The Host-Home Strategy is a fairly recent model of small-group ministry that has had a profound effect on birthing new small groups and connecting people who may never have considered participating in such groups before. This strategy involves a church-wide emphasis aimed at encouraging people to become “hosts” of a short term, DVD-driven study in their home. During this period (often six-weeks), the Sunday-morning sermons are aligned with the same topic the host homes discuss during the week.

In studying the experiences of churches using the Host-Home Strategy, it is clear that encouraging the spiritual development process of the host is essential to overall group and ministry success. To accomplish this, four steps are crucial in helping facilitate the transformation from host to spiritual leader: prayer, coaching, vision, and practice.

Prayer

Oftentimes, the basic foundational principles of spiritual development can appear trite. You may be thinking now, “Yes, I know we start with prayer, but what else is there?” However, this attitude is precisely what we need to guard against. We must ensure that our privilege of communicating with our Creator is not taken for granted.

Regretfully, we often assume as ministry leaders that prayer is happening because we are doing the Lord’s work. But that’s not always the case. Remarkably, our most basic source of strength is the one most easily overlooked. Here are some thoughts to keep in mind:

- Plan and prepare your strategy for prayer, just like any other step in the coaching/shepherding process.
- Do not fall for the illusion that prayer naturally happens just because your hosts are spiritual people doing spiritual things.
- Encourage hosts to recruit one or more persons to pray specifically for their group.
- Develop a creative way for the whole church to pray for the entire Host-Home Strategy.
- Ensure that the worship service involves prayer for the Host-Home Strategy.

Coaching

Partnering hosts with a coach means providing someone who will come alongside the host to offer prayer, support, encouragement, and assistance. Coaching has become a highly discussed topic in small-group ministry. Critics of coaching proclaim that coaches are rendered ineffective because hosts typically do not ask for help. Though sometimes true, it is important to understand *why* hosts are not asking for help. For example, if everything is

running smoothly, a host has no pressing need to call a coach. Conversely, if the state of affairs is not very bright, the host may fear revealing this information.

Consequently, without intentional effort on the coach's part, communication from the host is often scarce. However, the more intentional a coach is at genuinely taking interest in a host, the more likely that host will have a desire to reciprocate. Granted, not every coach and host relationship will reach its fullest potential. The coaching structure and the relationships that develop will vary drastically from church to church and group to group. Nonetheless, providing an opportunity for a coach-to-host relationship is essential. Whether that opportunity is fully embraced is a choice the host has to make!

Here are some suggestions for coaching/shepherding your church's small-group hosts:

- Encourage coaches to schedule an initial face-to-face meeting with their hosts to build rapport early on.
- Not every host may need a coach; focus on those who do.
- Regular points of contact help assure that a host is not "tossed here and there..." (Ephesians 4:14)."
- Encourage hosts using phone, e-mail, and text messaging where possible and desired. Communicate in the ways preferred by the hosts.

Vision

For our purposes, vision is understood on two levels: "general vision" for all hosts, and "personal vision" for each individual host. General vision must be intentionally communicated. The goal is to help hosts understand the direction in which God is leading them to proceed. From day one, hosts are encouraged to be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit, despite what their initial intentions for their group might be. Those who allow themselves to be vulnerable before God in this way are often amazed at how he begins to work in their group. What initially seemed like a short-term act of obedience has the potential of being used to spur them on toward a greater measure of spiritual maturity.

Personal vision provides the avenue for the hosts to travel the transformational journey from "host" to "spiritual leader." This transformation requires coaches to be involved in building meaningful relationships and getting to know the hosts. Genuine interest shown toward hosts who have been called and are ready to pursue spiritual transformation will provide unique opportunities for spiritual reproduction, and coaches can play a vital role in this transformational journey.

Practice

When hosts are being prayed for, coaches have modeled and encouraged, and vision has been cast, it's time to focus on putting everything into practice. Now is the time when hosts must believe and commit to chasing after God and all he desires for them and their group. The perception of their role begins to shift from that of "host" to "spiritual leader." This

process of spiritual maturation certainly does not happen overnight; however, hosts should quickly begin to notice that the horizon that once lay before them has changed, and that they are anticipating the new journey ahead.

These “hosts turned spiritual leaders” are now on a quest to live in community with those the Lord has placed in their lives. The pathway of transformation from hospitable host to community-driven spiritual leader may be strewn with countless accidents, dead-end paths, stalled attempts, and aborted missions. The host embraces the risk of the group never getting off the ground, as well as a variety of other detours along the way. However, these words of assurance from Isaiah and referenced by Paul hold endless hope to this worthwhile pursuit, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him” (Isaiah 64:4; 1 Corinthians 2:9).

These thoughts are not an exhaustive discussion of (or prescription for) completing the “host to spiritual leader” journey. Hopefully, they will serve as general talking points to spur small-group ministries toward dialogue about what this process should look like in their setting.

—TODD SMELTZER; copyright 2007 by the author and Christianity Today International; originally appeared on SmallGroups.com.

Discuss:

1. When was the last time I prayed for the spiritual development of our small-group leaders and hosts? How can we get the whole church involved with such prayer?
2. What is the ideal personal vision for our group hosts? What do we want them to become?
3. How do the four steps listed above apply specifically to our church setting and culture? What are two things we can do in the next two weeks to support the spiritual growth of our hosts?

Recruiting Coaches and Shepherds

When it's time to develop the next level of leadership for your ministry

1 Timothy 3:1–7

As your ministry grows and the number of leaders and small groups increases, you as the small-groups point person can quickly begin to feel overwhelmed. That's why you'll need to develop different levels of leadership—coaches and shepherds who can minister to and support your group leaders. Doing so is a very important step in managing a healthy small-groups ministry, and there are two key issues to think about when doing it.

1. **Timing is key.** One of the biggest mistakes I (John) made was waiting until I was completely overwhelmed before I set up the next level of leadership (which we called coordinators). Don't wait until you have problems to do this. Set up your next level before you feel like you need it.
2. **Picking the right people is extremely important.** Don't just go find the first warm and willing bodies and put them in this position. The key here is to begin working on this prior to the need so that you can take your time and pick these leaders carefully and prayerfully. The wrong choice here will cause more problems than it will solve.

Finding Coaches and Shepherds

So how do you find the next level of leadership? These leaders will come from the best of the best of your small-group leaders. You'll know who they are because they are the leaders who have led healthy and *multiplying* small groups. They will be the beginning of the creation of your inner circle of leaders whom you will turn to for advice and ideas as you grow the ministry.

Be smart as you fill these roles. These must be loyal and smart leaders who are on board with the vision and are willing to be a part of a team. Trust them, listen to them, and let them have the freedom to be honest and speak their hearts at all times. But when the meetings are over and you walk out the door, you need to know they are with you even if everything didn't go exactly the way they thought it should.

Because great small-group leaders are so hard to find, one of the hardest things you will have to do is pull some of them out of their successful groups and move them to the new levels. It will eat at you because they are so good at what they are doing and their groups are the ones that are multiplying all the time. But these leaders are more valuable to the future of the ministry if they are put in a position where they can train other leaders. Most great leaders will replace themselves before they leave their group anyway, and the group will stay together and be healthy without them.

Changes to Your Role

As you develop different levels of leadership (coordinators, coaches, directors), your role as the point person of the ministry will begin to change. Your main job at this point will be to pour your heart and soul into your coaches and shepherds, and to encourage them do the same for the small-group leaders they oversee.

Making this shift could be a tough change of roles for you, because it requires you to step back and let your leaders lead, which also means giving them the freedom to fail. We know it's hard to let go, but they will never become great leaders if you don't.

—BILL EASUM AND JOHN ATKINSON; adapted from *Go Big with Small Groups* (Abingdon, 2007); used with permission.

Discuss:

1. What can I do to start identifying coaches and shepherds now so that I don't become overwhelmed?
2. What specific qualities should we look for when selecting coaches and shepherds?
3. How will I redefine my role once this next level of leadership is in place? How can I ease that transition for

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.

Creating Community: Five Keys to Building a Small Group Culture

Andy Stanley and Bill Willits

Multnomah, 2004

The authors describe how they established a small-group culture at North Point Community Church.

Go Big with Small Groups

Bill Easum and John Atkinson

Abingdon Press, 2007

This book offers step-by-step advice for beginning and developing a small-groups ministry