

Week 4:

Relational Leadership

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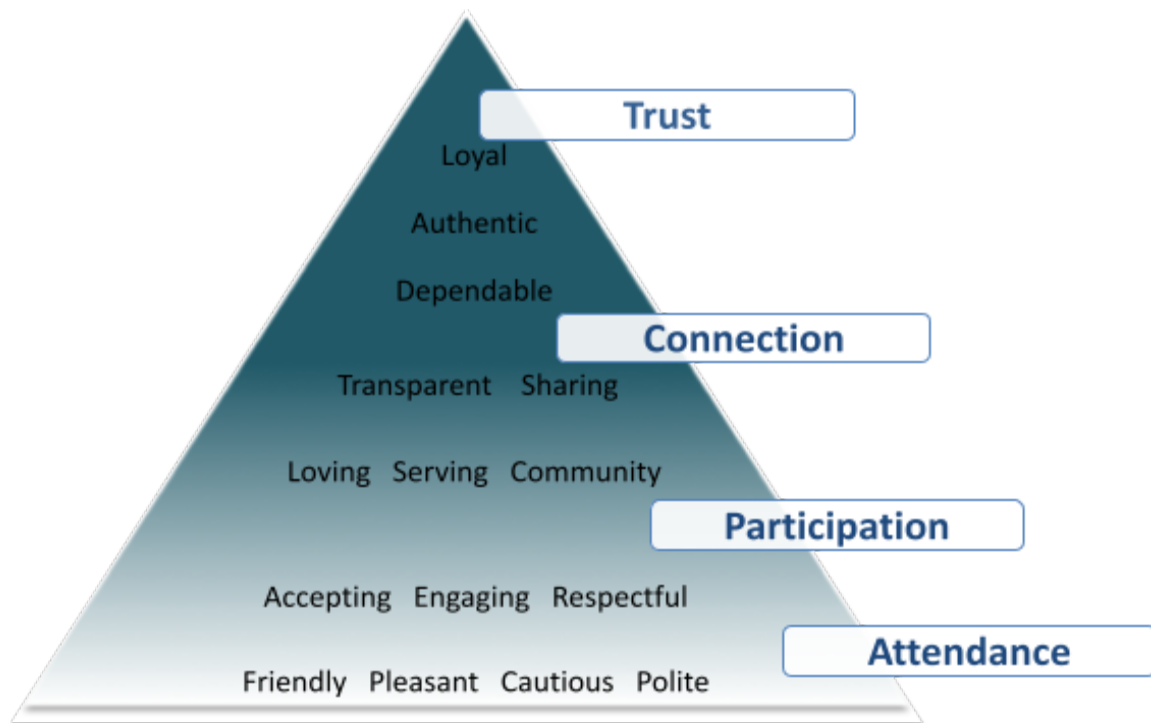
Introduction

Becoming an effective Small Group leader is about much more than running good meetings. Small Group leaders are leading people, not just meetings. In order to serve and care for people well, there must be genuine love growing towards the group members. As group members feel cared for, they will grow in their ability to trust leaders and should flourish as a result. In this final session, we will look at the importance of relational leadership and how to develop real relationships.

1. What is Relational Leadership?

As a network of churches, we value relational leadership as the conduit to carry out Jesus' mission of making disciples and teaching them to live out his commandments (Matthew 28:16-20). Leaders in Jesus' church are called to love, serve, and sacrificially give themselves to the care of the people they lead. In order to effectively lead relationally, it is important to understand what real relationships look like, so we know what to look for in our lives and in the Small Groups we lead. The following figure shows the natural progression that occurs in genuine relationships.

Figure 1 – Real Relationship Progression



The effective Small Group leader will be working to move relationships in this direction. It is helpful to be aware of this progression so that we don't expect more out of people than they are reasonably able to give. Growth in real relationships and our ability to relationally lead people generally moves through these stages.

a. Attendance

Naturally, most people will have their walls up and be guarded when they first attend a Small Group. There might be friendliness but no depth. At this point the leader should be friendly but also aware that people will be cautious at first.

b. Participation

Real relationships will begin to grow when attendees become accepting of the warmth and friendliness shown to them. They are engaging and willing to participate. They will begin to participate in other activities outside of the normal group night.

c. Connection

The relationship progresses further when people begin to feel a meaningful connection with group members and/or the group leader through time spent together outside of group night. At this point, they will consider themselves part of a community and be open to giving and receiving. As their trust in people grows, they will begin to open up more in bible discussions and in receiving prayer.

d. Trust

At this stage there is a healthy mutual trust and dependence. They trust their group leader and are trusted individuals in the Small Group. They will willingly seek the counsel of their leaders and friends. They will be loyal and dependable group members.

2. Our Approach to Relational Leadership

We base our model of leadership on biblical examples of real relationships. Throughout the bible, we see that authentic relationships were nurtured through interaction and instruction between those who were called to lead and the people they led. Building real relationships takes time and intentionality. We build relationships by:

a. Spending time together

Friendship grows through time spent together. While some of the time spent with people will be intentional disciple-making work, there is also great value in simply

enjoying each other's company as we get to know people. We can include new friends in on the things we already enjoy doing.

b. Inviting people into our space

Jesus' disciples got to be in his space and he in theirs. We develop relationship with people in close proximity. We are intentional about inviting them into our space and take opportunities to get in theirs. There are unique advantages to getting into personal space. People will feel like they've gotten closer to us when they have been in our space. There are often fewer distractions, more opportunities to dig deeper, and more time to pray for people.

c. Caring, loving, and serving

Our friendships will develop into mutual trust and love when we take opportunities to show we care, and serve the people we are called to lead. This is how Jesus lived and he taught his disciples to do the same. We shouldn't miss the opportunities that life presents to reach out with care when people are hurting, struggling, or celebrating.

d. Encouraging and admonishing

When we show people by our actions that we love and care about them, we begin to build relational equity and trust. As genuine relationships grow, your group members will understand that you will encourage them because you want the best for them. Similarly, you will have equity to lovingly correct, pray for them, and hold them accountable in their areas of struggle.

e. Providing opportunities for people to develop spiritual gifts

A group leader who is in community and prayer for their group members will have an idea of what their gifts and abilities are and will be able to encourage group members in their use of spiritual gifts. Small Group leaders are often used by God to help group members see things in themselves before they are able to see it for themselves. Group members will feel greatly encouraged as God uses their group leader to bring things out of them that they never knew were there.

3. Building Genuine Relationships

Building relationship takes time and intentionality. If you will develop relationships and see spiritual growth, you must recognize the value of relationship building and pursue it as a priority. Here are some practices of effective relational leaders that will help your Small Group members to grow over time. Effective relational leaders:

a. Understand that there are different levels of relationship

It is important to recognize that you will not have the time availability or emotional resources to pour equally into all of your relationships. It is not wise to attempt to do so! In the life and ministry of Jesus, there are clear differentiations in the level of relationship he had with people. We can place these relationships in three categories.

1. Primary relationships are those to which we devote the majority of our time. Jesus spent more time with the twelve than with the crowds. Even within the group of the twelve, he gave a majority of his time to Peter, James, and John. We should dedicate the largest chunk of our time to core members, potential core members, and future leaders. These will be people who are connected, willing to be equipped, and capable of equipping others.
2. Jesus' ministry also shows many examples of him spending valuable time with people outside of the twelve apostles. These are people who are willing to learn and follow, but are not yet ready to lead others. While we won't seek out as much extra time with them, we want to care for them well in the contexts where we are around them. We give them time and attention during Small Group, Sunday service, or other church events to develop and maintain these relationships. They should feel cared for and attended to through conversation and prayer, but they won't receive the same kind of intentional, relational discipleship as the first group.
3. Finally, there were some people in proximity to Jesus who stubbornly resisted him. From time to time, you may encounter people who are unwilling to learn and unwilling to follow. These should take a minimal amount of your time. These people should be led in a way that causes them to either change or leave. The hope is that they change and become people who will be led, but if not it is better for the Small Group and the church that they move on.

b. Know what to expect in different interactions

It is helpful to be aware of different opportunities for interaction and what you can expect with each.

1. Small Group nights are the primary starting point for relationships. The social time during a Small Group or party night provides an opportunity to get to know people on a surface level. The bible discussion can be a first chance to get to know a little bit more about what is going on below the surface. Finally, praying effectively for someone can do wonders in opening up the relationship to greater depth.
2. Sunday services and Discipleship Community night provide opportunities for light touch to maintain the relationship. These are also good times to connect new people with others from the Small Group.
3. Retreats and/or conferences can be times of great growth in relationships! The extended time for prayer and conversations will strengthen relationships.

4. Time outside of group is extremely valuable. Having people over for dinner is an incredibly helpful and effective way to develop deep, genuine relationships with people. Even going out for coffee will provide a good opportunity to grow in closeness.

c. Recognize obstacles in pursuing real relationships

Our lives are legitimately busy. We easily tend to be selfish. Real relationships take time, energy, and commitment. Identify what will hinder you personally and purposefully deal with it.

d. Have purpose when meeting with people

A lot of the leading that you do will come in the form of meetings with people. Learning how to have good meetings with people will help them and make your life easier and more enjoyable! Here are some tips for good meetings.

1. Be in prayer for them prior to the meeting.
2. Know what's next for them. Have one thing in mind that is the "next thing" for them. Ask yourself: what is the most pressing area of discipleship that they need to grow in? How are they doing with consistency at Sunday service and Small Group? Are there any lifestyle issues to ask about? How is their marriage or dating relationship? How are they doing with commitment in the church?
3. Let the Holy Spirit lead you. Be listening for the Holy Spirit in the midst of your meeting. Prayer and thoughtfulness beforehand will help in this. Humility in recognizing your need for God's help will also cause you to be more alert.
4. Don't waste time. Have a plan to quickly move from chit-chat to deeper things. With people you don't yet know well, simply ask them their story and tell yours.
5. Find out how they're doing. You must genuinely care for them! You may have something in mind before the meeting but find that they are concerned with something else that goes in a different direction.

e. Facilitate relationships among Small Group members

An important job of the Small Group leader is to help facilitate relationships among the people in the group and model how to build relationships. Model this for your next leader and core. Be intentional to select specific people and coach them through investing in others in the group. We don't assign friendships or "accountability partners" but we can encourage intentionality among core group members so they are actively pursuing growth in relationship with other group members.

4. Building and Leading a Core Group

Each Small Group needs an identified, trained, and functioning core of people that help plan group events and care for the other members. These are the people that you count on. A healthy core will generally lead to a healthy, growing group. The core shouldn't be thought of as an exclusive club but is rather the growing group of people that give evidence of devotion to Jesus and the church.

a. Identifying Core Members

Here are some things to look for to help you identify those who belong to the core of the Small Group.

1. You like them. A core member should be someone that you enjoy being around! The people that you feel drawn to will often turn out to be core group members.
2. They are committed to the church and the Small Group. They should be members of the church and are significantly moving in that direction. You know they will be at Small Group every week and they can be counted on to participate well.
3. They possess character qualities and values that you want caught. The way they participate in discussion, prayer, community, and social events is an example to others in the group.
4. They are teachable. When you have an opportunity to challenge or correct them, they respond well. You feel comfortable bringing up issues with them.
5. Your Discipleship Community pastor approves.

b. Leading the Core

The core will be most effective in helping the group leader if the leader invests in them. Meet with the core consistently to coach, encourage, care for, pray for, and cast vision to help them grow and lead others. This will make your job easier and more enjoyable.

During core group meetings you should:

1. Cast clear vision for multiplying, leading people, group growth, and building relationships.
2. Address issues and give challenges. Lead them through things you've noticed or your Discipleship Community pastor has pointed out.
3. Pray together. Core meetings are a great opportunity for growth in corporate prayer. Teach them to pray together and then pray for one another.

Conclusion

Leading a Small Group can be incredibly challenging and equally rewarding. Though this manual has been designed to lay a helpful foundation, there is no substitute for the experience of actually leading a Small Group over time. As you do so, we hope you are able to turn to this

material consistently for help and guidance. Beyond that, ask your pastor for the help you need and seek God first and most.

Appendix A

Sample Bible Discussion for Practical Training

THIS IS ONLY A SAMPLE. This discussion should not be used verbatim. It is meant as an example to illustrate how to write a bible discussion. You must soak on the text and write your own questions in order to lead a helpful and relevant discussion.

Vision for Small Group – We gather in Small Group weekly to grow closer to God and to one another. Both of these goals are helped by honesty and transparency as we discuss the bible together.

Announcements

Topic – Empowering Others to Lead

Main Point – It is best for God’s people when leadership is shared.

Icebreaker – Say your name and your favorite “courtroom drama” (movie, television series, book).

-OR-

Introduction Question – Before coming to this church, who has been a source of wisdom in your life? Who have you turned to for wise counsel and how did they help?

Read Exodus 18:13-23 and Pray

Question 1 – (v. 13-16) Moses is the only person hearing cases and resolving disputes while “the people stood around Moses from morning till evening.” What might you have been thinking about or feeling if you were standing there, waiting until evening?

Question 2 – (v. 17-18) Moses gets sound advice from Jethro because he is truly “not able to do it alone.” Yet many of us probably have had similar experiences where we have tried to do something alone when we needed help. Can you describe a time when you did something alone that was too heavy for you? How did that affect you?

Question 3 – (v. 19-22) The men who would help Moses have to be fit for the job. They must be able, trustworthy, and God-fearing. How can you make yourself someone who can be entrusted with more responsibility?

Question 4 – (v. 23) The end result described here is wonderful and solves the problem described in v. 18. What can you do practically to help bear the burden of someone who leads you *OR* What can you do to entrust more responsibility to others to help you?

Prayer Ministry – Let's pray for God's direction to help us share each other's burdens well.