

STEVE NOVEMBER 2009

How to Develop Your New Small Group Leaders

Posted on November 23, 2009 by Small Group Network

by Steve Gladen

For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline (2 Timothy 1:6-7 NIV).

No matter what age we are—5, 25, or 55—none of us wants to fail. That desire to avoid failing never seems to leave us. We always want to succeed. Our fear of failure is therefore one of the enemy's most effective weapons. He uses it to keep us from following God's lead.

That's why I love 2 Timothy 1:6-7, especially the critical phrase "fan into flame." As Paul writes to Timothy, he talks about doing something that will fan a spark into a flame. If you've ever gone camping and had to start a fire, you know that fanning a little bit of an ember is a key to having a roaring campfire.

That possibility of fanning into flame your hosts' leadership potential stands in sharp contrast to their fear of failing. Which road will they choose—the road toward leadership or, because of their fear of failing, a dead-end alley? They're going to go down one or the other.

When we launched the 40 Days of Purpose campaign at Saddleback Church in 2002, we started out with 3,000 people willing to be a HOST (lead a small group). Many were nervous about the prospect of leading a small group. Most likely, these new hosts were not going to become "leaders" in time for the campaign, which was just a couple of months away. Instead, we asked them to be willing to simply "HOST" a group, which meant have a Heart for people, Open their home, Serve a snack, and Turn on the video or DVD. We felt any weekend attendee could do that.

Then we devised a process of "on-the-job" training for the months after the campaign. At Saddleback we call this plan, the Small Group Leadership Pathway. It takes people from "Come and See" to "Come and sacrifice". It is what Jesus did with His disciples when he first said "follow me" and three years later to was "die for me". This pathway helps us to do just that by fanning the leadership potential of our small group Hosts into the flames of leadership. You may find this pathway helpful as you look to move small group hosts into the leadership of your own church.

The first step on our leadership pathway is Leader Training One. This is a monthly basic training session for all new hosts or leaders. The course explains the strategic overview of our small group ministry, gives the new Hosts a few basic “survival” techniques for hosting a group, and shares the support structure we’ve put into place for them. It gives them the overall picture of how groups fit into the strategy of our church and focuses the Leader on the goal of health.

The next section gives them practical things they could do over the next 6 to 12 months in their group to bring health and balance.

The last session teaches them the importance of support and how they can develop support themselves and what support the church provides.

After our Hosts have taken Leader Training One, the church sends them a letter of congratulations and a certificate, which marks their completion of this step. This affirms the Hosts for this important step they’ve taken along the leadership development pathway.

The second step along the Leadership Pathway is connecting the small group Host with a mentoring Community Leader (CL). From that point on, each Host’s Community Leader starts playing a key role in the growth process. A CL is a seasoned member of the church’s small group ministry and a person who the church has identified as someone who “gets it and lives it.” During that time the CL will help the Host realize that he or she is not alone in the journey along the Small Group Leadership Pathway. The CLs will walk with the Host each step of the leadership pathway.

To emphasize just how important this relationship is, Rick Warren, senior pastor at Saddleback Church, sends the hosts a letter introducing them to their Community Leader. Rick describes the CL as the Hosts’ 24/7 connection to the church, so they won’t be alone. In the letter, Pastor Rick encourages the Hosts to contact their CL at any point along the journey and reminds them that the CL is there to help make their small group a success.

The third step, after this connection with the CL is made, along the Leadership Pathway is Leader Training Two. This four-module training course is led by the Host’s Community Leader and often held in the CL’s home.

Leader Training 2 focuses on:

- Character – Deepening your heart towards worship
- Skills – Diving below the surface to understand true community
- Health – Determining your purpose to help your group be balanced
- Empower – Demonstrating your service to help your group do ministry
- P.E.A.C.E. – Directing your group towards the P.E.A.C.E. plan

The first module that the CL takes a group through is Health—which teaches the group how to balance the five biblical truths in their group. After that, if a group is newer in their journey we encourage them to take Character or Skills. If the group is a bit more mature, then Empower or P.E.A.C.E. is their next step. Upon completion of these modules, the Hosts receive a certificate from their Community Leader congratulating them on being a leader in our church’s small-group ministry. This certificate helps them realize that the church now recognizes them as the core of our leadership team.

The fourth step along the Leadership Pathway focuses on continuing education, which we call Small Group Host Gatherings. We continue to invest in the development of our small group leaders because all leaders should be learners. Small Group Host Gatherings consist of large-group worship followed by elective workshops designed to meet the leaders’ specific needs. We focus on a different one of the five biblical purposes each time.

We hold Small Group Host Gatherings twice a year, in January and in July. The January session is a kick-start after the holidays. The July session prepares the leaders for the upcoming fall campaign. We meet on a Saturday morning from 8 a.m. until noon. During the first two hours we have a keynote speaker; then different workshops are held from 10 a.m. until noon.

The Small Group Host Gatherings also offer continuing education for our Community Leaders. On Friday evening before Saturday’s training, we have a special dinner for the Community Leaders, their spouses, and the keynote speaker. Then, during the Saturday morning elective workshops, the keynote speaker teaches a special session for the Community Leaders.

Through this Small Group Leadership Development Pathway we’ve seen our small group Hosts follow God’s lead, overcome their fear of failure, and choose the road toward successful leadership.