

## TEN THINGS TO THINK ABOUT BEFORE STARTING A SMALL GROUP MINISTRY

BY STEVE GLADEN

Are you starting a small group ministry, or are you thinking of retooling an existing small group ministry? Here are some points you might want to consider before moving ahead.

1. **Know where you are headed.** When you look at a believer, a follower of Christ in your church, what is it you want them to look like, act like, “be”? Too many start a small group ministry because it’s the thing to do. It may not be the thing to do. Once you know what you want, then you can back up and decide what will get you there. At Saddleback Church, we want a follower of Christ to balance the Great Commission and Great Commandment in their heart. We want to see them “belonging” to Christ and His church, “growing” deeper in Him, “serving” God where they are gifted, “sharing” Christ and “surrendering” every aspect of their life to God. That is Spiritual Health for us. See <http://www.smallgroups.net/sha.html> for our Spiritual Health Assessment. What do you want? Once we knew our “end in mind”, we asked the question - what would get us there? Our answer, Acts 5:42...Weekend Services and Small Groups.
2. **Find the lay of the land in your church.** Talk to people. Talk to key opinion leaders in your church— don’t know them...ask! Get the people who made the church and go through step one above. Find the history of the church and the passion that made your church what it is today. What’s the heartbeat of your Lead Pastor? What makes them tick? What is their strategy to number one? Before you ask any of these questions, ask yourself, do I have the relational capitol to ask these questions. If you do, great! If you don’t, take the time to get to know the people you are asking these questions of. Relationships take time. Sometimes you will find the answers to the questions without asking the question.
3. **Who will run point?** Paid or not paid isn’t the question—passion is the question. Who has the passion for the people to be the healthiest followers of Christ in your church? Who has the passion to build a delivery system to handle the people God will send your way? Who has what Psalms 78:72 describes in David? Who has the humility of knowing it’s not “them” but “God” (1 Corinthians 2:4-5)? Who is willing to do “whatever” (John 10:10) with the right attitude (1 Peter 5:2-4)? Who is “called” and willing to learn?
4. **Who’s on the team?** Every leader needs a team. If you were to start a business you would get your “C” team together...CEO, COO, CIO, CSO, CTO, etc. Who is your “C” team, your Christ Team to make this happen with His grace and strength? Start praying for people who want to see the same thing you want to see and who have different gifts sets than you. Then, ask. People won’t volunteer. You need to ask them. Claim back some of their 168 hours a week for Kingdom work. For some, you may need to align their Kingdom work for greater Kingdom efforts.
5. **What will be your strategy?** At Saddleback Church the greatest way to start a small group ministry is through a Campaign Strategy. Now, understand if you don’t do the process outlined above, you will start a bunch of groups, but they will be purposeless and drift. To learn more about our Campaign Strategy go to <http://www.saddlebackresources.com/en-US/Campaigns/CampaignOverview.htm>. Since I have been at Saddleback, this has been our most effective tool for aligning the church and starting small groups. Along with strategy, you need to continually cast vision to drive strategy. Campaign’s are successful because throughout the year our people hear from the pulpit the importance of small groups through testimonies, sermons, commercials, and most importantly through personal stories of the teaching pastors in their sermons.
6. **When will you start?** Look at the calendar and your church culture. There are three ideal times to start small groups: fall, January and post Easter. For Saddleback, fall is the best time for us. We start our Campaign a few weeks after school starts so families can get into their new routines. We use the summer to

get ready, September to recruit and October to launch. Your church will have a different schedule, and that's okay. Do what culturally fits your church.

7. **What's your Pathway?** When you start groups, your leaders need to know what you want them to do. Not only do you need to know your "end in mind"; you need the same for your small group leaders. Just like Jesus took His disciples from "come and see" through a three year relational process to "come and die"; we too have a relational process for our "hosts" to become "leaders". Now we pray none of them need to die, but we do want to take them from where they are to a deeper commitment in Christ. For a peek at our pathway see <http://www.smallgroups.net/ltkit.html>. Whatever you design, know where you want to take your leaders.
8. **What's your infrastructure?** It's easy to start groups; it's hard to sustain them. Since 1998, our small group team has seen our small groups grow from 280 groups to over 3,500 groups. That doesn't happen without infrastructure. Just like a city needs roadways to develop as a town turns into a city, your small group ministry needs its roadways. Two critical parts of your infrastructure are Community Leaders (CL's) who are the leaders of leaders. They are the relational arm of your ministry. They provide the care and direction to your small groups. They help with focus so groups don't drift. At Saddleback we have over 180 volunteer CL's who give their time for the betterment of our small group community. Another part is "Gatherings". Gatherings are the vision arm of your ministry. A gathering is bringing your leaders together periodically for alignment and vision. It can be done over dinner or coffee. At Saddleback we do two Gatherings a year, one in the beginning of the year (to get us out of the holiday funk) and in August (to gear us up for the fall).
9. **Don't stand alone!** The enemy loves to lead in isolation and fear. Fear stops us from taking risks for the Kingdom. Isolation cuts off our supply lines so we can't fight the good fight! In 2006 God inspired me to start the Purpose Driven Small Group Network so that no one would stand alone. I know what it's like to do the day in and day out ministry of running a small group ministry. I don't sit in an ivory tower writing things I think might be true, but write out of the 20 years of doing small group ministry in churches of all sizes. I know what it's like to be the only one in your church thinking community is the greatest thing since Easter. I am blessed with an incredible staff. My prayer is this Network will be your staff, standing with you to help you fight the good fight. Don't think you need others around you—think again! To learn more about this free Network, see <http://www.pdsgn.wordpress.com/>.
10. **Prepare your heart.** Probably the greatest thing I've learned along the way I learned in Seminary. It's called the Messiah complex. It's where you take on the role of the Messiah and bear everyone's burdens on your cross. The problem is, you can't do it. You will burn out. Symptoms are a lack of quiet time and/or Sabbath forgetfulness. Just as God can take your financial tithe and make 90% go farther than your best 100%; He can do the same with a Sabbath. He can make 6 days go farther than your best 7 days. The principle God is working on has nothing to do with finances or time, it's all about obedience. If you don't prepare your heart now, the work FOR God will destroy the work OF God in your life.

To get a greater scope of what I am talking about, check out the DVD Small Group Point Leader Training at <http://www.smallgroups.net/dahsgm.html>. This nine hour DVD goes into greater detail and explains the points above.