



PRAISE FOR

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**LEADERSHIP EXPLOSION**

“If your groups need more leaders, this book is for you! Dr. Comiskey demonstrates how effective churches develop leaders. Then he shows you how to do the same by outlining the principles of leadership development that will work in any church. This book will revolutionize your future ministry.”

**C. Peter Wagner**

*Chancellor, Wagner Leadership Institute*

“Once again, Joel Comiskey has provided a book that answers the questions of those in the small group church movement. I read the manuscript with pen in hand, underlining so many sentences that few were left untouched! This book is an excellent reference for small group leaders and might well be incorporated into their ongoing training.”

**Ralph W. Neighbour, Jr.**

*Founder, TOUCH Outreach Ministries*

“Many thanks to Comiskey for a helpful and practical book. Many church growth strategies work in the short run, but only leadership multiplication creates ongoing kingdom expansion. This book communicates biblical, proven and effective principles. Eat this book! Let it shape your heart, your vision and your strategy.”

**Jim Egli**

*Author, Pastor, and TOUCH Trainer*

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**LEADERSHIP EXPLOSION**

“Joel Comiskey shares insights as a leader who has raised up numerous leaders. From how to recognize potential leaders to small group leader training to time-tested principles of leadership, this book has it all. The accurate comparisons of various training models make it a great resource for those who desire more leaders. Great book!”

**Billy Hornsby**

*National Director, Bethany Cell Church Network*

“Comiskey provides an inspiring panoramic view of leadership in this book. The concluding chapters, which outline the guidelines, models and principles for training effective small group leaders, will prove especially helpful to churches that are seeking to develop more leaders.”

**Karen Hurston**

*Hurston Ministries*

“Joel has the divine ability to take vital kingdom information compiled from throughout the body of Christ and boil it down so churches can clearly understand and practically apply these truths.

I highly recommend this book for everyone who is serious about training leaders for the harvest.”

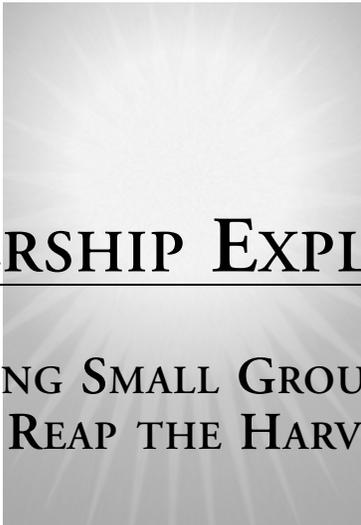
**Larry Kreider**

*International Director, DOVE Christian Fellowship International*



**LEADERSHIP EXPLOSION**

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# LEADERSHIP EXPLOSION

MULTIPLYING SMALL GROUP LEADERS  
TO REAP THE HARVEST

JOEL COMISKEY



TOUCH PUBLICATIONS  
Houston, Texas, U.S.A.

Published by TOUCH Publications  
P.O. Box 7847  
Houston, Texas, 77240, U.S.A.  
800-735-5865 • [www.touchusa.org](http://www.touchusa.org)

Revised Edition  
(First Edition Published in 2000)

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Cover design by Mark Neubauer

International Standard Book Number: 1-880828-23-5

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TOUCH Publications is the book-publishing division of TOUCH Outreach Ministries, a resource and consulting ministry for churches with a vision for small group-based local church structure.

Find this resource and many others by Joel Comiskey on the publisher's web site: [www.touchusa.org](http://www.touchusa.org)



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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This book has taken years to research, write, edit, perfect, edit, perfect, edit . . . and finally see light. In the long process, many hands and eyes have handled and contributed to the final work. Several people deserve special recognition.

First, I want to thank Greg Collard, a teacher at the Alliance Academy in Quito, Ecuador, for spending many hours editing the original form of this book. Although Greg is well-known for his editing expertise, he refused any remuneration for his work, insisting that he was doing it for the Lord. Second, I want to thank my editor, Scott Boren, for offering invaluable insight and suggestions throughout the long journey that has now finally ended in publication. Finally, I want to thank my wife, Celyce, for her continual encouragement and wise counsel along the way.



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# FOREWORD

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While I was conducting the 20/20 Vision Seminar on how to have successful small groups, an enthusiastic young pastor shared how he had discovered to his surprise that lots of people wanted to be in small groups. He then told me that his only limitation was developing and producing new leaders.

I believe that my friend, Joel Comiskey, who has committed his life to helping churches all over the world in small group ministries, is giving us what we need help with in this book. It scratches where we all itch.

This book focuses on how a church can develop leaders effectively in and through small groups. It highlights how small groups are breeding grounds for developing leaders.

Joel has researched effective small group churches around the world and created case studies of their leadership development methods. With these insights you can learn from the most effective church leaders.

From 1972 to 1995 I had the joy of pioneering what many have called one of the most effective small group systems in North America. We experienced big things in small groups. Thousands were brought to Christ and then effectively disciplined and cared for in small groups. In retrospect, the one thing that we did that was the most outstanding was develop

hundreds of leaders. If you build leaders, they will build small groups and through them, the church.

Peter Drucker taught that to be an effective leader you don't have to do everything right, you have to do the right things. Along with Joel, I am absolutely convinced that the right thing to do is develop leaders through small group ministry.

Nothing could be more right for those who want to be effective in reaching people and building churches than reading this book and learning how better to develop your leaders through small group ministry.

If you catch what is taught in this timely book on developing leaders through a small group system, your groups will multiply and reach many more people because you will have the leaders to build new groups. Furthermore, you will produce strong leaders who will build your church into the future.

Dale E. Galloway  
The Beeson International Center  
Wilmore, KY



# INTRODUCTION

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## “WE NEED MORE LEADERS”

I recently saw *The Harvest*, a video which tells the story of a farm boy who lost his father. The farmer had impressed upon his son the importance of harvest time. When the boy was 12 his father died, right before the grain harvest. Grief struck the boy, and he was sickened by the thought of a ripening harvest with no one to reap it. He knew he could not reap it by himself. As the hot sun beat down, the fear of losing the harvest overwhelmed him.

One afternoon a sound in the distance pierced his anxiety. He looked up to see dozens of tractors approaching the farm. Friends and neighbors had gathered together to reap the harvest. It was their way of expressing appreciation for their deceased friend. In one day, they reaped the entire harvest.

Today, we're seeing the greatest harvest of souls in Christian history. This is the good news. The bad news however is that much of the harvest is not completed and is often left to spoil. The harvest is ready but workers are needed to bring the harvest in successfully. When Jesus saw multitudes swarming around him, he said to his disciples, "Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest" (John 4:35). Jesus told the church to

make disciples, not to gather multitudes. If the church is going to reap the harvest today, it must make disciples who are willing to lead others and willing to influence others for the sake of Christ. They must take the risk to lead those who seek Christ.

So often we see the multitudes but don't contemplate their awful state. Jesus did more than analyze the condition of the lost. He had compassion on them because ". . . they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Mt. 9:36). This compassion stirred Christ to exhort his followers to, ". . . Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (Mt. 9:36-38). We can't reap the harvest alone. We need help. This book is about raising up leaders to reap the harvest.

I've researched small groups around the world. Here's what I've discovered: Small groups are not the answer. In fact, there is danger in thinking that small groups are the answer. Small groups come and go; they rise and fall over time. Unless small group members are converted into small group leaders, little long-term fruit remains.

Churches do not reap the harvest because they have small groups. They reap the harvest because they have harvest workers. Churches that have no plan to develop leaders have, by default, planned to lose the harvest.

"The growth of the small group movement is based on raising up leaders from within. The highest priority of the small group leader is to identify prospective interns and begin the mentoring process."<sup>1</sup> With this quote, Gwynn Lewis pinpoints the purpose of this book. Small group leaders are not called primarily to form and sustain small groups; their primary job is to find, train, and release new leadership.<sup>2</sup> Jim Egli expands on this point: "The cell model is not a small-group strategy; it is a leadership strategy. The focus is not to start more home groups but to equip an expanding number of caring leaders. If you succeed at this, your church will flourish."<sup>3</sup>

Some people react negatively to the word *leader* because of its connotations of position and power. For example, in some cultures, a leader is a person who controls and dominates. Others imagine that a Christian leader must hold an official position in the church. A new consensus, however, has developed that defines the word *leader* in one word: influence.<sup>4</sup> When I use the word *leader* in this book, I'm referring to a person who exercises his or her God-given capacity to *influence* a specific group of God's people toward God's purposes for the group.<sup>5</sup> In this book, my use of the word leader implies such Biblical words as *servant, disciple, or harvest worker*.

I hope that by reading this book, you will obtain small group leadership

eyes, so that you can see your congregation in a new light. What a difference it made in my church when we began to see people with leadership eyes! For years we focused primarily on Sunday morning attendance. We considered ourselves successful because we filled the pews on Sunday morning. If attendance dipped, we urgently planned special Sunday events to reverse the downward trend. Today, we still long for multitudes on Sunday morning, but we now recognize that God's concept of church is more than just the people who attend on Sunday morning. Now we prioritize the converting of Sunday worshippers into small group leaders who are reaching their neighbors for Christ. Our yearly goal is how many new small groups we're going to start. We've discovered the secret weapon of the small group church: developing an army of committed small group leaders to reap the harvest.

This book draws principles from each of the most prominent small group churches around the world, so that you can apply what best fits your present needs. I have visited and studied fast growing small group churches which include but are not limited to:

- Bethany World Prayer Center in Baker, LA
- Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea
- International Charismatic Mission in Bogota, Colombia
- The Christian Center of Guayaquil in Quayaquil, Ecuador
- Elim Church in San Salvador, El Salvador
- Faith Community Baptist Church in Singapore
- Love Alive Church in Tegucigalpa, Honduras
- Living Water Church in Lima, Peru

I have also studied many small group leadership training models in the United States that have contributed to the conclusion of this book.

As you read what other small group churches are doing, remember the church growth axiom: "Don't follow methods; extract the underlying principles from the methods and apply them to your situation." Your circumstances are unique. The methods practiced in other churches won't fully meet your needs. The principles behind those methods, however, are transferable to any situation, including your own. If you capture the importance of small group leadership development and gain insight into how to do it, this book will have served its purpose.

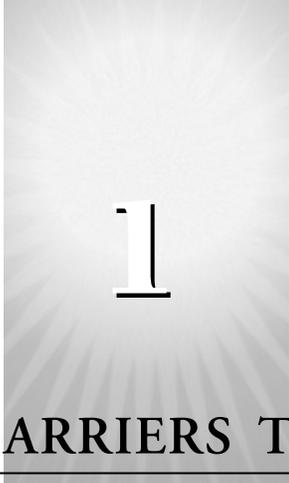


**FOUNDATIONS FOR**

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**DEVELOPING**

**SMALL GROUP LEADERS**



# 1

## BARRIERS TO DEVELOPING LEADERS

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“Our leaders are tired,” the pastor said to me. “They’ve been leading small groups for some time now, and they want a break. What should I tell them?” Without waiting for my reply, he tested me with his own answers, “Maybe I should just let them rest for awhile; maybe I should open and close the groups each semester. What should we do differently?”

I noticed that his church was already full of activity, and that new programs would soon be added to the agenda. Hoping for a miracle answer, he attended my seminar in which I focused on breaking down the leadership barrier. I taught those attending how to develop new workers and how to keep their present leadership healthy. He thanked me profusely after the seminar, which had touched a vital chord in his own life and ministry. This pastor, like the myriads before him, was face to face with the leadership barrier.

Churches rise or fall on available leadership. One of the reasons that church attendance is at an all-time low is the lack of leadership.<sup>1</sup> Unless you have a clear plan to develop church attendees into church leaders, the ebb and flow of church attendance will continue to drop. Why is there such a dearth of lay leadership? On the following page, you will find a few reasons.

## Time Drain

“I’m overloaded at work, pastor.” “Maybe next year I can get involved in the church.” Have you heard these excuses? More and more church members insist that they have no time for leadership involvement. The time drain barrier tops the list.

Studies indicate that Americans work the longest hours in the industrialized world — nearly 2000 hours per year. Between 1977 and 1997, the average workweek among salaried Americans lengthened from 43 to 47 hours. Over the same years, the number of workers putting in 50 or more hours a week jumped from 24 percent to 37 percent. Scarcely a decade ago, Americans were horrified with the work habits of the Japanese. Now, according to a recent report of the International Labor Organization, the United States has passed Japan to become the longest-working nation in the world.<sup>2</sup> The average American works eight weeks more per year than the average western European; the same report says that Americans run a risk of burning out.<sup>3</sup>

Church members know that in order to keep their jobs they must work the extra hours. The load of ministry, therefore, falls upon the church pastor. Church work is volunteer work, and with the precious time that we possess, it’s important to choose where and how to spend it. In an increasingly secular society, many people scratch church work off their list of “things to do.” Admittedly, this is a big hurdle for pastors to overcome, but solutions abound.

## Church Attendance Focus

I believe in church growth. My core church philosophy centers on church growth theory, and I believe that God wants His church to grow in both quality and quantity. If the major focus, however, is how many people attend on Sunday morning, a leadership void can occur.

When a church focuses primarily on Sunday morning attendance, the people feel like they’ve fulfilled their purpose simply by showing up on Sunday. The goal is Sunday attendance and members hear this in many subtle ways. A church, without knowing it, can produce a grand multitude that keeps shifting as people shuffle in and out. The back door is often as large as the front door and in the meantime, few leaders are developed.

Peter is a perfect example of this malady. He came to our church after

many years in a denominational church that emphasized the Sunday morning service. God had miraculously saved Peter from a life of wild living, but the church found little use for him. When he came to us, we immediately saw his potential. We asked him to enter the training track to eventually become a small group leader. In the meantime, one of our youth small group leaders began leading a group in Peter's home. We didn't view Peter as an attendee in our church. Instead, we saw him as a potential leader in the harvest and even a future leader of leaders.

When your church begins to focus on developing leaders, those attending Sunday worship will catch a greater vision and will become fishers of men, thus reaching out to others. The result is church growth, the very thing that pastors desire.

### Academic Training Mindset

Many church leaders know how to develop teachers but not leaders. Education, not leadership, dominates the agenda. The first volunteer position to fill is the Sunday school teacher. When the Sunday school spots are occupied, the pastor might look for committed people to lead other church programs, but the creative, energetic lay person is stymied. Since few leadership positions exist, those aspiring to lead feel frustrated.

Leadership is more than volunteering to complete a task in the church. Leaders lead people. A leader with no one following is only going for a walk. A teacher can impart information and a department head can administrate a program, but leaders minister to others and influence their lives. They get involved in the nitty-gritty details of other people. This requires a shift from academic training to leadership training.

### Faulty Leadership Training

Christian education in many churches is not conducive for mobilizing lay leadership. The goal of training is unclear and the training process is even fuzzier. Everyone is encouraged to enter the classes, but few know what they are being trained to do. The hope is that leaders will develop by themselves. This barrier is often imperceptible. "After all," many pastors muse, "I have many leaders in my church." When you look closer, you'll often discover self-made leaders who were developed outside the church.

The phrase "general education" characterizes the training in most

churches. The goal is often to prepare a person to live the Christian life, rather than to lead a group of a people. I'm in no way criticizing general education. My love for learning propelled me to acquire a Ph.D. Lifetime learning is, in fact, a highly valued leadership trait. Churches, however, are uniquely positioned to help exercise the muscles of the lifetime learners and to transfer head knowledge to the feet. Effective leaders come down from the lofty tower and succeed in the trenches, where the battle for souls is won or lost.

Yet, even when a person does feel prepared, there's often a lack of available openings for service. For these reasons and others, a few key people do all the work. Researchers have repeatedly discovered that in most churches, 10% of the people do 90% of the work.

### Inability to Mentor Others

Studies show that the North American culture is the most individualistic in the entire world.<sup>4</sup> This mindset doesn't encourage a humble posture of learning and helping others in a mentoring relationship. Mentoring others, a relational experience through which one person empowers another by sharing God-given resources, is not common in our society.<sup>5</sup> Most of us learn new truth by osmosis — lots of knowledge making its way through a wide variety of sources.

Gratefully, others have worked their way through my shell and helped mentor me. I was especially privileged to work under Pastor Henry Alexander, a mentoring pastor. He took me under his wings and imparted years of experience to me. As I looked down upon Henry at his funeral, I thanked God for the resources he poured into my life. I said to the crowded church that morning, "Pastor Henry was a spiritual father to me." More than anything else, he was there for me.

Very few mentor like Pastor Henry. I worked under one pastor who developed few relationships with others (including myself), wore an attitude of superiority (rather than the attitude of a learner) and was eventually asked to leave the church. The failure to mentor potential leaders has erected a huge leadership barrier in the church today.

## Theology of Priesthood of Believers

Pastoral theology in the traditional Bible school or seminary focuses primarily on what the pastor should do. To be honest, I fell in love with this view of the pastor. I romanticized the pastor's role, secretly reveling in how many people would be dependent on me in my future ministry. In numerous courses on pastoral theology, I was taught how to visit, preach, marry, bury, administer, evangelize and all the other pastoral jobs. The clear message that I received was that everything depended on me, the senior pastor.

Perhaps seminaries simply reflect what most churches expect: that the pastor performs and makes it all happen. After all, he's getting paid for it. The suggestion that members should do the work of the ministry is offensive to some. The expectations of church members, along with traditional pastoral training, erect a high leadership barrier.

While the church has done a good job of training people to go directly to God, by and large, it has failed to train people to minister to others. The pastor is still considered the priest, the only one fit to minister. This barrier, tied in with lack of mentoring, produces a church of spectators who watch the pastoral performance each Sunday. Long accustomed to sit and soak, the "sermon tasters" in many churches become experts in critiquing the pastor and grumbling when their needs aren't met. How far have we fallen from New Testament Christianity of Peter's day when he depicted the church as ". . . a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God" (1 Peter 2:6).

Just what is the role of the pastor? To care for those who attend church each week? To offer services to those who pay tithes? This goes to the heart of the issue and the major reason for writing this book. Maybe you are reading this book as a frustrated pastor looking for answers. You've grown weary with the traditional role of pastor. You feel locked in a box, playing a tit-for-tat relationship with church members and church boards. This book will suggest a reexamination of Scripture concerning the role of the pastor. Theology must breed practice, not vice versa. Many of the problems in today's church stem from faulty theology.