

A Pocket Guide to

Coaching Small Groups

**Befriending leaders and helping
groups produce fruit**

Randall G. Neighbour

A Pocket Guide to Coaching Small Groups

Published by TOUCH Publications, Inc.
P.O. BOX 7847
Houston, Texas 77270 USA
(800) 735-5865 • Fax (713) 896-1874

Copyright © 2006 by Randall G. Neighbour

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher. Printed in the United States of America.

Cover and illustrations by Don Bleyl

International Standard Book Number: 0-9752896-8-3

All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from the Holy Bible, New International Version, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission.

TOUCH Publications is a book-publishing division of TOUCH Outreach Ministries, Inc., a resource, training and consulting ministry for churches with a vision for holistic small groups or cell-based local church structure.

Find us on the web at: www.touchusa.org

To send the author feedback, email: randall@touchusa.org

Dedication

This book is dedicated to Greg Lee, a man who coached me from a small group apprentice into a successful small group leader, and then into the role of a coach.

Greg, thank you for your friendship and your willingness to stick with me when I wanted to give up. You developed the potential within me that I did not know I possessed.

If it were not for your friendship and mentoring for those precious years in the mid 1990's, I don't think I'd be walking with Jesus today and serving the Lord in full-time ministry. May God's richest blessings be yours!

Acknowledgements

As I ponder whether yet another book on coaching groups is even necessary, a prolific writer I once met comes to mind. Florence Littauer would never remember the brief exchange we had over lunch years ago, but her casual comments motivated me to become an author and write this book.

Knowing she was a prolific writer, I asked her why an author should publish a written work. She replied, “Two reasons stand out in my mind. The first is that the topic has never been written about. The second is that the topic has not been written about fully, or new information exists.” I have written each my books for one of these two reasons, this one being written for both.

I would also like to acknowledge my wonderful wife Etna, my better half. She is my greatest source of earthly encouragement to write these little books.

And last, I am indebted to my accountability partners, Bill Hammon and David Gausepohl. Thank you both for the gentle prods and prayers to keep writing in the wake of life and ministry.

A word about the text

For the sake of simplicity (and to keep the text from becoming wordy) I refer to small group leaders, coaches and pastors as “he” in this little book.

However, I *firmly* believe that godly women should fill these leadership roles as well as godly men! As you read, insert “she” wherever it fits your situation or gender.

If we are to complete the Great Commission, men *and* women must rise to the occasion to lead and pastor others!

Table of Contents

Introduction	9
Chapter One: Why are coaches important?	13
Chapter Two: The role of the coach	21
Chapter Three: Time management	39
Chapter Four: Relating to your leaders	49
Chapter Five: Visiting a small group	65
Chapter Six: Helping groups to multiply	69
Chapter Seven: Preparing your leaders to coach . . .	73
Chapter Eight: Your small groups pastor	79
Chapter Nine: You are a minister with ministry . . .	83
Appendix 1: Working with the opposite sex	87
Appendices 2-4: Helpful checklists	88

Introduction

Beep! Beep! Beep!

(This would be my alarm clock making a racket rather early this morning...)

It's 6 a.m. and time to roll out of bed, throw on some clothes and pick up Scott for breakfast. While I enjoy sleeping late on Saturday mornings as much as the next guy, I always look forward to my regular meetings with Scott, one of my small group leaders. Although our families, ministry and work schedules make for what appears to be a crazy life, we enjoy a face-to-face meeting once a month and phone calls sprinkled in-between. I use the time to hone my listening skills, learn from him and share anything that might be an encouragement. Scott uses the time to share frustrations, process thoughts and make plans for his group.

While our waitress poured our coffee this morning, Scott shared answers to prayer. Through conversations and prayer requests during recent small group meetings, he discovered that a married couple in his group wants to move

into small group leadership. What great news! They've not been Christians nearly as long as some of his other small group members, but they have a heart for the lost, enjoy leading parts of the meeting and are highly relational. As we ate our pancakes, Scott also shared some personal answers to prayer, which we've prayed about for a few months.

After I took Scott home and I was driving away, I thought about how much I enjoy coaching my small groups. It allows me to employ the strategic side of my mind for leadership development, group multiplication and problem solving. Coaching also helps me maintain the relational side of my personality—almost every week I'm meeting with a leader, a future leader or visiting a group. I also have a strong connection with staff pastors at my church, which is special to me.

Coaching is also the most challenging thing I've done in ministry. Leaders and groups possess problems I have never encountered. I also find myself frustrated when a leader gives up prematurely or group members decide that their small group is a once-a-week, mini church service to attend when they feel like it.

As with any leadership role in a local church,

there are challenges and victories. Coaching is no different, and it keeps me growing personally as I see others grow.

Wants and Needs

A few months back, I asked my leaders what would benefit them most from our relationship. One leader hit the nail on the head when he replied, “It’s really quite simple. I want a friend in ministry.” When I asked the leader what he and his group *needed*, he said, “Someone to help us create and achieve our goals. We always seem to forget why God put us together.”

That’s exactly what I’ve sought to be and do for my small groups. Be a good friend, and help the groups succeed with their plans to love God, love each other and love a lost and hurting world.

To summarize the role of the small group coach, it boils down to one word and one goal. The word is friend, and the goal is to help the small groups under your care flourish with growth.

Got it? Great!

The rest of this little book is about how to be that friend, and how to help each of your small groups create and achieve goals to serve others and win the lost to Christ.

Chapter 1

Why are coaches important?

Years ago, I had the privilege of spending time with Jim Egli. He is an excellent small groups pastor, and at that time in his life, he was working on his doctoral dissertation in the area of small group health. His goal was to discover and document what made a small group and a small group system healthy. Here's what a portion of his research has to say to churches about the importance of a coach in the overall health of a small group ministry:

“My research involved 3000 small groups in 200 churches. The findings clearly demonstrated the most important factor for long-term success with small groups: the participative coaching of small group leaders. Churches need coaches who are actively encouraging their leaders and groups—meeting personally with small group leaders, praying for them and visiting their groups. When this is practiced in a local church, the small groups excel in all dimensions. Prayer, loving relationships, focused outreach and

leadership mobilization are present in abundance. In other words, if you want your groups to consistently reach upward toward God, inward toward one another, outward toward the unchurched world and forward in group multiplication, you must have proactive coaches helping your leaders and groups.”

Coaches make the difference between failure and success in small group ministry! Without coaches and the support they provide, small group leaders and their groups would not feel relationally connected to the pastoral staff and possibly the church as a whole. And just as important, small groups have a tendency to stray away from your church's mission if not supported and encouraged.

There's one more reason coaching is important. Coaches know what it's like to be a small group leader from *experience*. When you visit with a small group leader to discuss his group's health, a member's needs, or plans the group has made to reach out, he knows you've been in his shoes.

Where and when a coach shines

Here's a short list of what I provide for my small group leaders to make the greatest impact.

The Good Listener

A good rule of thumb for a coach is to listen twice as much as he speaks when meeting with leaders one-on-one. They need to know their coach is truly hearing their feelings about their leadership struggles and group challenges.

I am by nature a talker, not a listener. However, by asking lots of clarification questions, jotting down some notes while I meet with leaders, then following up with prayer, I am developing good listening skills. My small group leaders are often surprised when I call them out of the blue to tell them I've been praying for them concerning something they shared when we last met. Becoming a good listener in and of itself is enough to make you a very important person in the life of a small group leader.

The Balanced Thinker

When I was first leading a group, it was hard for me to remain objective when it came to my small group members. I loved them and wanted the best for them. At times, I felt as if I was their pastor or