

Fresh Insight

for cell ministries

The Role of the “Senior Coach” ...and why we have them

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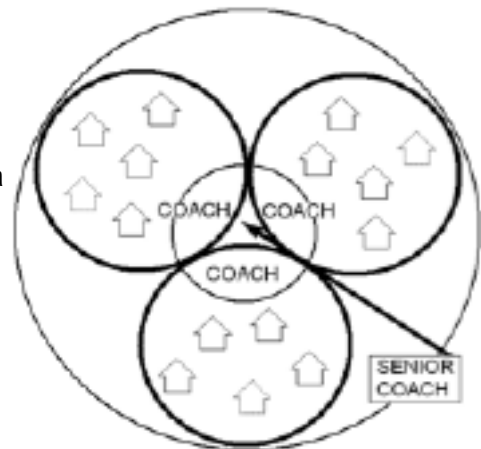
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What do you do when you're experiencing explosive growth in your small group system and cannot afford to hire adequate staff to oversee all these new groups? This was the problem that we were facing in the church where I am Director of Small Groups. We planted 3 churches in 5 years, giving away many of our seasoned leaders, resources and groups.

We found you cannot “out give” God. We held three Connections Events and a Fall Campaign. Those assimilation efforts resulted in going from 56 to 200 small groups! We realized that all these groups needed to be coached. Many of the new leaders were inexperienced. We raised up a sufficient number of coaches but I suddenly realized my span of care was out of whack. Carl George has suggested that a healthy span of care is 1 coach for every 5 small groups. He also suggests a director for every 50 groups. We found in our research that churches that are serious about becoming a church of small groups have a 1:50 ratio between paid staff and small group leaders. Those churches that want to do intentional discipling in their groups have even a smaller ratio between the director and number of small groups (1:40).

It's one thing to identify the need but it's another thing to have the resources to meet that need. I requested that we hire at least two full-time associate directors. I was told we only had the resources to hire just one. My initial response was “It's impossible! How can I do it with only one

hire?” I began to seek God and had heard about a church in Las Vegas that was trying to develop a new layer of leaders called “Senior Coaches”. I realized that I could hire six Senior Coaches (12 hours a week) for the pay and benefits of one associate director. We have found that a Senior Coach can oversee 12 to 24 groups depending upon how seasoned or inexperienced the leader is today.



The Role & Responsibilities of a Senior Coach

Churches that want to strategically reach different neighborhoods should hire to grow rather than grow to hire. Senior Coaches are affordable and you can hire one at a time. Adding a full-time staff person often seems overwhelming. Senior Coaches are like the tentacles of an octopus that are reaching into the different neighborhoods – north, south, east and west of your church. Each Senior Coach has nine areas of responsibilities:

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Featured Resource



A Pocket Guide to Coaching Small Groups

by Randall G. Neighbour

Published by TOUCH Publications, Houston.

Coaches are typically very busy people with a great deal of responsibility at home, at work, and in ministry over your small groups or cell groups. Because their schedules are always tight, reading looks like more of a chore than something one does to relax. But they still need to learn about coaching their groups!

This new pocket-sized book on coaching contains the basics of coaching—developing friendships that encourage leadership and group growth. It's filled with real-life stories from the author's current ministry as a coach in a local Vineyard church. You won't find theories here! It's all practical and easy to understand and apply.

Chapters include the following:

- Friendship-based coaching is critical for the success of any small group
- Time management
- What group leaders *want* and what they *need* to succeed
- Becoming the friend a leader will never forget
- How to help a group develop a plan of action for evangelism
- What to share with your pastor and *why* you need to share it
- How to raise a group leader into a coach's apprentice
- What to do when you visit a group meeting for maximum impact.
- How to work with persons of the opposite sex.
- How to reach down into a group and pull a future leader into position with the help of the group's leader.

As is always the case with this author's books, your coaches will love the honesty, laugh at the true stories told, and learn what takes to be an excellent small group coach!

[\[Click here to download a sample of the book and buy your copy!\]](#)

**Call 1-800-735-5865
to buy your copy**

In Review



Foreign to Familiar

A Guide to Understanding Hot and Cold Climate Cultures.

McDougal Publishing,
128 pages

Reviewed by:
Randall Neighbour

My church (which is probably similar to your church) is filled with members from many backgrounds and cultures. People from all over the world and from across the country are a part of our cell groups.

This makes cell life challenging. If they were just attending a Sunday service together, there would be few hurt feelings because the level of intimacy would be low. But cell life requires deep friendships and the formation of spiritual teams!

A few weeks ago, a cell leader called my wife Etna to ask for some advice. A member of her group (born and raised in Houston) left the meeting crying over the way she had been treated by another member, a woman from Holland. It seems the woman from Holland just stated her opinion about the woman and her prayer request without any consideration for her feelings. The leader was a bit timid, and didn't know how to approach the Dutch woman for fear she'd get "blasted" as well.

A week later, I boarded a flight to England for a cell conference and met the author of this book. As we discussed the fact that we're both authors and in full-time ministry, it dawned on me how serendipitous it was that we should meet! She's an expert in what is called "hot and cold" climate cultures.

As I shared how forward and abrupt the Dutch woman was with her group and in most every other encounter with church members and

the staff, Sarah said, "That's how people typically treat one another in Holland. It's an integral part of their cold climate culture. Don't expect this cold-climate woman to naturally withhold her opinions or be sensitive to a warm climate person's emotional state."

Wow. It was all starting to make sense! This cell group had a culture clash, and it was not going to change until she became sensitive to her new culture and the cell group became knowledgeable about her home culture. My advice to the cell leader was simple. "Fight fire with fire on this one. If she says something you don't like, tell her plainly and immediately that you do not agree with it or that you find it offensive. She will probably be a little surprised that you, a warm climate person would be so straightforward, but she will certainly know how to respond!"

At the beginning of each year, I consider what I want to write for the cell church world. This year, I was planning to write a book on how to move through conflict in a cell group. However, after reading this wonderful book about cultural differences by Sarah Lanier, I don't feel I need to write on that subject. This book explains so much, and I can easily see how many of the conflicts that arise in cell group life are caused by hot and cold climate differences within the group members.

While TOUCH will not carry this title in our catalog or web site, I highly recommend that you click on the book picture above or the link below to buy it from Amazon.com as a resource for your library. You may not need it right now, but you'll surely need it in the future as your cell groups become cross-cultural!

[\[Click here to buy "Foreign to Familiar"\]](#)

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Authority & Accountability:

- Report to the Director of Neighborhood Groups.
- Hand in time card and ministry report weekly.
- Set growth goals (newcomers assimilated, potential apprentices, leaders, coaches identified and recruited, and new groups birthed) for their geographical area and are evaluated for their effectiveness quarterly.

Vision

- Champion the Five Point Strategy for Small Groups – Win, Build, Equip, Multiply & Worship.
- Identify small groups that should be recognized at a “Leadership Community Meeting” or in the “Testimony” section of the web site or newsletter for succeeding at Winning, Building, Equipping, or Multiplying.

Meetings

- Meet one-on-one with the Director of Small Groups monthly.
- Attend & help facilitate scheduled Leadership Community, Leadership Training and Coaches Meetings as needed.
- Make at least 6 contacts each week. (1 group, 2 coaches, 3 leaders) Three of the six contacts must be face-to-face visits and one of the three must be a group visit.

Maintaining

- Assist coaches and small group leaders to deal with EGR's so they don't drain these leaders.
- Assist Coaches & small group leaders in needed referrals for lay counseling, professional counseling.
- Direct Coaches & small group leaders to the best and most relevant resources on-line and in our Resource Lending Library.
- When small group leaders contact you directly, partner with the coach to help the leader.
- Return emails and phone calls within

24 hours. You may not be able to respond to the request immediately but get it on the calendar as soon as possible.

Inspecting

- Visit one small group weekly in your geographical district.
- Make at least 6 contacts each week. (1 group, 2 coaches, 3 leaders) Three of these contacts must be face-to-face visits and one of the three must be a

Small groups are not a ministry... they are the way we do ministry in order to fulfill the Great Commission.

group visit.

Producing

- Help small group leaders set annual numerical goals broken down to monthly objectives. Goal setting is closely tied to staff accountability.
- Thank leaders for their hard work.
- Spend an hour in prayer for your district weekly. Build a prayer team to intercede on behalf of you and the leaders in your district. Take “prayer journeys” in your district.

Recruiting & Apprenticing

- Recruit and develop new leaders and lay coaches.
- Know what the next step is for every leader in his development as a leader.
- Surface potential leaders and help them make the connection in a formal apprenticeship and register for the next Leadership Training Course.
- Model and train small group leaders in your district how to do “Home Ministry Visits”.

Connecting

- Meet new people and connect them in small groups.
- Contact church families in your district and encourage them to get involved in a small group.

Evangelizing

- Work with your 3+ coaches & 12+ groups to sponsor a district prayer meeting that focuses on the advancement of the Gospel in that area and end your time together with communion.
- Work with your 3+ coaches & 12+ groups to sponsor an outreach event (Eternal CPR) in your district (geographical area).

The Value of Senior Coaches

Senior Coaches are closer to the action than a director. Even if I had hired an associate director rather than six Senior Coaches – the two of us could never match the number of contacts these 6 Senior Coaches make even if we spend three evenings doing visits each week.

The Senior Coach job description requires no less than 6 contacts a week. Three of these contacts must be face-to-face and 1 of the 6 must be a group visit. Senior Coaches first and foremost meet with the Coaches under them. Other contacts include visits with prospective and existing small group leaders.

The Senior Coach position allows for maximum exposure to the evening and weekend hours. A single individual would only have one chance at those hours. Our Senior Coaches can all concentrate on those hours, which is mostly when the coaches and leaders are available for interaction.

Senior Coaches are required to spend one paid hour interceding in prayer for coaches, group leaders, group members and apprentices each week. This has proven to heighten their spiritual awareness and alertness to the needs of those under their care.

During Directors Meetings (when we

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Events, Training & Resources

Click on any of the graphics below to be taken to a page on our website with more details!

MAKING CELL GROUPS WORK

October 26, 27, 2006 • Houston, Texas

This two-day event for pastors and church leadership will give you the tools required to create a game plan for your church. You'll enjoy the interaction with TOUCH staff and other pastors in a limited size group, and leave with a clear understanding of how to proceed in your unique environment.

[Click here for special discount pricing and hotel information!](#)

NEW RESOURCES NOW AVAILABLE!

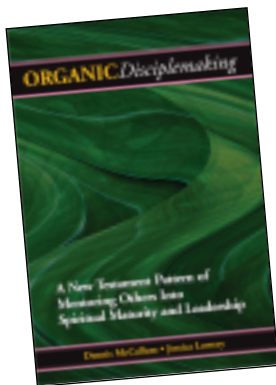
Organic Disciplemaking (Dennis McCallum & Jessica Lowery)

ORGANIC Disciplemaking will undoubtedly be one of those special books that radically changes the way your church develops others into leaders. Why? It contains everything committed members need to mentor someone into spiritual maturity and leadership through a relationship, not a program!

Inside, you'll find practical ideas for . . .

- Selecting the right person to mentor
- Becoming the true friend who makes a good discipler
- Setting goals for your relationship to ensure progress and success
- Asking powerful questions that cause spiritual growth in others
- Encouraging, challenging and confronting a disciple in love
- Releasing a disciple to lead others and lead a small group
- Coaching a disciple as he or she becomes a disciple-maker

Through numerous personal stories, McCallum and Lowery explain how and why the organic disciplemaking process works so well at Xenos Christian Fellowship in Columbus, Ohio. As your leaders read this book, they will fully understand their role in making disciples and how to develop others with confidence.



A Pocket Guide to Coaching Small Groups

(Randall G. Neighbour)

What your leaders need most is a friend . . . a friend who will support them in ministry and help their group achieve its goals. Without this kind of highly relational support, a small group ministry won't grow and birth new groups.

This pocket guide provides excellent tips for time management, preventing burnout, investing in leaders for maximum impact, and the role of the coach in developing new leaders. If your coaches embrace the simple principles found in this book, they will become the kind of coach that makes small group ministry a life-changing experience for everyone involved.

**CLICK ON THE PICTURES OF THE BOOKS
TO READ SAMPLE CHAPTERS!**



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gather all our coaches together) they sit with their senior coaches. This approach makes it possible to serve our normal coaches 6 times more intimately than if there were only a few full time persons in that role.

Scripture dictates that we are to know the condition of our flock. Prov.27:23 *“Know well the condition of your flocks, and pay attention to your herds.”* The weekly reports from our Senior Coaches allow the director over the small group ministry to know at any given week the condition of our small group system. Those reports become a director’s prayer list and the agenda for discussion when the director meets with the senior coaches.

The level of accountability and dependability of our paid Senior Coaches surpasses that of our volunteer coaches and rightly should. We have dedicated volunteer coaches that sacrificially give themselves away on a regular basis but sometimes “life gets in the way” and these dear folks feel the liberty (and rightly so) to back off in their number of hours and do less as needed.

Our Senior Coaches are in a small group with the director. Their fellowship with each other is enriching to our entire system.

Senior Coaches are the Director’s eyes and ears. Proverbs 20:12 says, *“The hearing ear and the seeing eye, the LORD has made both of them.”* Two or three full-time Small Group staff members could never make the number face-to-face contacts with groups and individual coaches and leaders. We ask coaches to accomplish their jobs through 1) one-on-one meeting; 2) group visits; and 3) huddle meetings. The most valuable of these 3 are the “one-on-one” meetings. This is true with our senior Coaches. What they hear in those small group meetings and one-to-one meetings is valuable. But in our high tech culture, ministry becomes more impersonal by the minute. Ask any of our Coaches or Leaders and they will tell you how much they cherish the “high touch” (personal) approach of these part-time Senior Coaches staff members when they do “one-on-ones”.

Senior Coaches strategize and help Coaches and the small group leaders implement what comes down from the top. We are an Elder Led, Staff Run and Lay-Powered Ministry. This position helps leaders at the grass roots level to figure out how to live out the core commitments of our ministry.

- They move the ministry from mere philosophical agreement to practical buy-in. These Senior Coaches help the Coaches and leaders under their oversight to see the “big picture” and yet think through the “nuts & bolts” of how they will implement the strategy.
- They are the servant leaders behind the scene that are familiar with the spiritual climate in our groups as well as the communities they are trying to reach.
- They give a solid and consistent 12 hours every week (two paid vacation weeks a year). In twenty-six years of pastoral ministry I’ve never seen volunteer Coaches consistently (50 weeks a year) devote these kinds of hours and attention to the small groups under them. I’m so glad I didn’t settle on just hiring one person. Even a highly motivated salary person who worked 50 hours a week could never match the 72+ hours these six Senior Coaches give.

Each of these Senior Coaches was a volunteer Coach in the past. Adding the element of financial compensation does a number of things:

- It makes it easier to schedule their time for meetings or service to be convenient to the Director.
- It helps them to press through the hard parts of the job and not give up.
- It helps to protect the training investment that the Director makes. When he invests in leaders and trains them and then they go off and do a different thing it is discouraging and exhausting.
- It extends the authority of the Director. The flock knows that the Senior Coaches act in his name and it extends his reach and influence into the entire system. Solo Directors tend to be reactive rather than proactive.

Senior coaches energize the goals of our small groups and keep the momentum going.

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“In the last several decades literally hundreds of ‘how to’ books on small group ministry have been published. As valuable as some of these books have been, many of us pastors (as well as many lay people) have been sensing that something fundamental is missing.

After all our best efforts, why have we made so little progress transitioning our churches from once-a-week, individualistic centered gathers to organic bodies where authentic kingdom community occurs? The problem, as Scott Boren suggests, is that we have not approached the issue from a uniquely kingdom—and distinctly biblical—perspective.

Consequently, we’ve been trying to pour new wine into old wineskins. This is the caveat this book fills. Rather than giving us yet another list of ‘how to’ tips on building small groups, Boren insightfully explores the profound theological foundation for a vision for kingdom community. From this foundation he draws out principles of kingdom living. For all who long to see God’s passion for community manifested in our far too westernized churches, and for all who have grown somewhat cynical about ‘how-to’ books on small groups, The Relational Church is a must read!”
— Greg Boyd, Senior Pastor Woodland Hills Church and author of *Repenting of Religion* and *God at War*.

Watch the TOUCH Outreach web site and your email box for the release of this new book by Scott Boren, author of *Making Cell Groups Work*, *Cell Group Leader Training* and the compiling editor and writer for *The Navigation Guide for Making Cell Groups Work*.

The role of Senior Coach is especially valuable in a church that is loosely structured. In our church there is no formal membership, no business meetings, and every weekend has multiple services. We often affectionately call it “brethren–hang loose”. There are huge benefits when a church is more organic and unstructured but there are some inherent dangers. Senior Coaches allow our church to be an organized organism. Senior coaches promote accountability; stay in touch with people; minimize conflicts & divisions; and keep momentum going.

Senior Coaches share the burden of ministry as middle management. The idea of paid staff spending very little time in the office but devoting their time off-campus in the harvest field with Coaches and Small Group Leaders is powerful. This concept of having paid staff working off campus has proven successful in the world’s largest church in Seoul, Korea.

A Senior Coach approach enables the Director of the small group system to spend time with his family and not experience a “morning until the evening” (Ex.18:13) ministry as Moses had. Exodus 18:18 says, “*the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone*”. This is hard to accept if you or your board has deceived itself into thinking that the pastor of small groups is omni-competent, that he can be present everywhere, know everything, etc.... My consulting experience has led me to believe that many churches today who claim to be or aspire to become “a Church of Small Groups” have simply dumped the pastoral care off on their small group structure and have run off with an entrepreneurial spirit to start up new things. These new initiatives draw away volunteers and distract the church from its real responsibility to fulfill the Great Commission. The church is always in danger of allowing “The Great Commission” to become “The Great Omission”. Small Groups are not a ministry – they are the way we do ministry in order to fulfill the Great Commission. Carl George’s 1:50 ratio for a paid staff member (see *Prepare Your Church For*

The Future) remains the standard for a healthy span of care when hiring a staff for a small group system throughout the country. Those that violate this ratio pay in staff member turnover. Churches that want their groups to do disciplinemaking and not just provide care when there are pressing needs have a staffing ratio of 1:40. Although the Senior Coach approach allows a small group system to work off of a span of care ratio of 1:144 (or six Senior Coaches that oversee 24 groups each), which expands its staff for

A senior coach approach comes from a theology of small groups that says to just “warehouse” people in groups in the name of “pastoral care” is unacceptable.

fewer dollars, it’s important to closely monitor the span of care with respect to the kind of coaches and leaders the Senior Coaches are overseeing. It’s the rare Senior Coach that can handle 24 groups and 5 Coaches that are inexperienced. Whether you use the Senior Coach approach or hire associate directors, the bottom line is you cannot cheat the principle of healthy spans of care without negative consequences. Senior Coaching allows for a staff person to be brought on one at a time. Most churches cannot afford to bring on a second, third, fourth, etc. full time staff person who requires a full-time paycheck & benefits. Hiring part-timers (12 hours a week) as the small group system grows is doable. Besides paying them for the 12 hours we give them a small expense account.

A Senior Coach approach comes from a theology of small groups that says to

just “warehouse” people in groups in the name of “pastoral care” is unacceptable. Incompetent leaders & coaches need more than just a book or a training seminar – they need a Senior Coach that can take them to the next level in their leadership & discipleship skills through one-on-one. Early on in ministry I was taught there is a huge difference between delegation and abdication. Abdication finds a warm body and gives them some ministry responsibility with some parting words like this – “Listen, you won’t hear from me, but if you get in deep weeds theologically or morally let me know so I can replace you. Delegation involves supervision. Supervision provides the attention needed to the system so that every leader knows there is someone who is assisting him to be fruitful and fulfilled in his ministry responsibility. This approach comes out of a theology of small groups that says that Pastors are responsible to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry (“Lay-Powered”). Senior Coaches are Equippers that help our volunteer leaders truly know their sheep so they will not be guilty of the indictment against the foolish shepherds of Israel (Ezek.34:1-34; Zech.11:15-17).

When I initiated this approach two years ago there were only a few churches that I knew of who were experimenting with this kind of part time position. Today this approach is considered cutting edge ministry. This approach allows a director to sleep better at night with a clear conscience knowing that “those allotted to his charge” (1 Pet.5:3) and for whom he must one day “give an account” for (Heb.13:17) are being well led and cared for.

Rick Leineweber is the Director of Neighborhood Small Group at Grace Fellowship Church in Baltimore, Maryland.

