

# Fresh Insight

for holistic small group ministries

## The Core Team Approach: Eliminating leader burnout and new leader fears

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- *Home Cell Group Explosion*

The Leader-Intern/Apprentice model is used today all over the world and is considered the norm for small group leadership. By ensuring each group has at least one apprentice, the group can multiply. This model has gone unchallenged for many years because it's worked so well around the world.

However, what works around the world isn't working nearly as well in the good old U.S. of A. From what pastors tell me—and I've experienced at my own church—committed Christians in America are some of the busiest people on the planet! Too few will commit to being an apprentice in a group with the short-term goal of taking their own group in three or four months.

### Your Honor, I plead insanity!

The working definition of *insanity* is doing the same thing repeatedly, hoping for different results. If your small group ministry is hurting for new leaders, or your existing leaders are burned out carrying the load alone, you should definitely experiment with the core team approach and try something different to get different results. Here's the skinny on what a core team is and what it does.

### What is it?

A core team is comprised of committed small group members plus the leader and apprentice (if the group has one). Core team participation is typically permanent, and once a person becomes

a core team member they will probably be on a core team for a small group for a long time to come. After all, it's fun! Why not participate in this way?

### What does the core team do?

In a word, *everything*. The core team makes final decisions about the vision and mission of the small group, who will do what in the meetings, when to have outreach events, and when to multiply.

### What does the leader do?

The leader facilitates the core team meetings and remains a trusted friend to the members of the group.

### What does the apprentice do?

At first, the apprentice is enrolled as an assistant to the leader and helps the

**Core teams produce more leaders and stronger groups.**

leader with anything or anyone needing attention in the group. This person is also a core team member. In reality, every person on the core team is involved in apprenticeship for leading a future in this model . . . they just don't realize it.

### How often do core teams meet?

Once a month is best, but some very

*Continued on page 6*

## Featured Resource



**The Pocket Guide to Leading Small Groups:**  
*52 ways to help you and your small group grow*

Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey  
Published by TOUCH Publications, Houston, TX

This is the perfect little book to give to your cell group/small group leaders, especially those who refuse to read the “normal” sized books you give them.

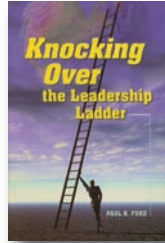
Each of the 52 chapters is just two or three short pages, containing a simple explanation of an important facet of leading others. At the end of each chapter, the author’s included “action points” to help the leader pray through what they’ve learned and practice it.

This pocket guide can be used as part of a leader’s weekly devotional time. The action points can easily be used by a pastor via email to encourage the leaders to practice what they’re learning.

Chapters include a condensed version of the habits found in Earley’s book, *8 Habits of Effective Small Group Leaders* as well as excellent new information on leading small groups. Dempsey, one of Earley’s proteges in ministry, adds a powerful biblical understanding of key scriptures for small group leaders as well.

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

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



**Knocking Over the Leadership Ladder**

Dr. Paul R. Ford

ChurchSmart Resources  
214 pages

### **About the Author:**

*Paul Ford is a leadership and teambuilding specialist with Church Resource Ministries. He and his wife Julie live in Albuquerque, NM and have one college-aged son. Paul has published other works surrounding the use of spiritual gifts in the church with an understanding that one's spiritual gifts are where God is using the person powerfully, not comfortably.*

### **Randall's Review:** ★★★★★

If you are a pastor or church planter, this is one of those reads that will change the way you do ministry and cause you to ponder your existing leadership style to see what might require change. I found the text to be quite easy to read, and the content very hard to swallow. I have a lot to pray about and work through now that I've read this book.

### **From the introduction:**

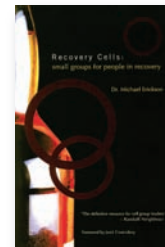
We have a climbing disease! We have a ladder that everyone is supposed to climb and the impact is everywhere. Business and management cultures have influenced how we build and lead our Christian organizations and churches. The resulting impact has changed the way we see the tasks, processes, and results of our Kingdom work.

Too often we have made leadership into a person. Leadership is not a person, but rather a series of functions fulfilled by a group of people. After all, the Church is a community.

Be the leader God created you

## In Review

to be, not the one the world says you should be. While this book will challenge many of your assumptions about leadership in the Church, you will find a healing refreshment in learning to be who you already are!



**Recovery Cells: Small Groups for people in recovery**

Dr. Michael Erickson

ChurchSmart Resources  
309 pages

### **About the Author:**

Dr. Michael Erickson has been in ministry since 1975. Since 1992, he has served as the Associate Pastor of Big Bear Christian Center in Big Bear City, California and helped this church transition from programs to cells, including a growing ministry to the recovery community.

### **Randall's Review:** ★★★★★

When the publisher sent me this book for review, I was pleased to see someone had taken the time to research, launch, refine, and write about recovery small groups.

I am not a big fan of programs like *Celebrate Recovery* only because they create a competitive structure in a small group-driven or cell-based church. Moreover, people find healing, yet never move out of the CR house into non-recovery based community life and mission.

Erickson takes the 12 steps in AA and incorporates them into a recovery cell strategy that effectively ministers to those who drain the life out of a typical small group. Then, as a person discovers healing and sobriety, they can join a non-recovery group or start a recovery group.

# FREE Pastor's Training

## MAKING CELL GROUPS WORK

March 13-14  
June 19-20  
October 16-17  
Houston, Texas

An aerial photograph of a sailboat with a white sail and a wooden hull, moving across a blue ocean. The water is overlaid with a white grid pattern, and several dark, rocky islands are visible in the distance. The sky is a clear blue.

**This two-day event** will help you embrace a proven, 8-stage process for holistic small group implementation.

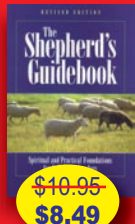
**The senior pastor must be present** (and should bring up to five key leaders).

**Syllabi & box lunch for Day 2: \$25**  
(A request for a donation will be made during the event to offset costs and support our ministry.)

Seating is limited to 30 persons. Register early!

More information can be found on our website in our "Training and Consulting" area or click on this picture to take you there!

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## Starved for new leaders? Try this!

As I coach a handful of small groups in my local Vineyard church, my goal is to see each of my groups multiply with new leaders and new Christians. For this to happen, each *member* must grow spiritually. If the members of my groups don't mature beyond where they are today, the groups I serve will stagnate.

Many pastors tell me they have no discipleship path in place for the members of their small groups. Others tell me they've established a path, but only a handful of members are actually moving through it or it's not producing disciples.

If either one of these comments reminds you of your current situation, allow me to share a truth that will surely motivate: without a simple, step-by-step discipleship path that every member is *actually moving through*, your church's small groups will experience stagnation followed by attrition.

Church services and small group participation is not enough to fulfill Matt. 28:18-20. You must do more!

The first two-pronged mistake pastors make is to "roll out" a discipleship path of their own design to everyone simultaneously. Few take hold of it and even fewer complete it when it's not tested, refined, and then implemented organically. To be successful, it must grow naturally and take on a life of its own. Here's a few pointers for success.

**Use Teamwork** - Bring together four or five passionate leaders from your small group ministry and ask them to brainstorm what a disciplined small group member looks like. Then ask them to create milestones for a simple discipleship path. Next, ask each of them to research what other churches

are doing and how they implemented it successfully. This will take two or three meetings, but it's worth it! You'll have a much better end result and it won't be a burden you carry alone.

**Challenge the Mentors** - Everyone needs a big brother or sister in Christ to grow, so the team members can easily be challenged to mentor a new believer from their own small group. This will give them first-hand experience with the process and resources they have chosen to properly "field test" it. [Never forget that mentoring relationships work best when the mentor and protégé have determined goals and a timeline as they begin.]

**Refine the Process** - As the mentors become disciple-makers, they'll provide the team with excellent feedback on where the process bogs down or must be changed. Be patient during this phase. You'll learn far more from the struggles than you will from easy successes.

**Recruit via Celebration** - Publically recognize the first mentors and protégés in a church service and in their small groups. This will help you enlist more mentors from your groups.

### Creating a pool of potential group leaders

The mentors in a discipling relationship are prime candidates for group leadership. If you focus on member discipleship, you'll gain new leaders too.

If you need help designing a discipleship path, don't hesitate to call our ministry. We're happy to discuss the milestones of member discipleship with you and help you (and your team) decide which resources will work best.

— RGN (MINI ARTICLE FOR TOUCH 2008 CATALOG)

## Create Core Teams when you launch new groups!



Michael Mack (author of *Moving Forward* and *Leading From The Heart*) has created a four-meeting curriculum book to help a new group create a master plan of action:

- Week One* - The Key to Success: Organization
- Week Two* - The "Perfect" Small Group
- Week Three* - Radically Real Christian Community
- Week Four* - Going Forward Together

By moving through this curriculum together, the leader creates a core team, a master plan of action; creates a vision for the group; determines a doable mission (something God-sized); and nails down lots of important stuff like who will champion prayer, evangelism, servanthood, hospitality, coordinate fun stuff for the group to do together, and more!

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

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

# www.smallgroupfriends.com

You'll forget all about myspace or facebook when you start using smallgroupfriends.com. It's small group-based social networking for the rest of us, and it's totally free. Join today!



## What is Small Group Friends?

It's a totally free social network (similar to myspace or facebook) designed for small group pastors, leaders and group members. Unlike other social networks, real names are required and the site is closely monitored to ensure privacy and on topic: small group life and leadership.

## Will it help my small groups?

The site is an excellent place to discuss what's working in small group ministry and gain ideas. You can blog, use the forums, upload documents and forms for your leaders, all free of charge. Your small groups will have an online place to privately post prayer requests and keep a group calendar.

## What about privacy?

When you join, you'll see that the site gives you control over who sees what in your own profile and the online groups you establish.

## How can I win that iPhone?

Sign up for a free membership and start inviting your leaders and small group members to join. The member with a completed profile and the most friendship connections by midnight on 4/30/08 wins the iPhone. Any motivated pastor can win. Just invite your small group members and leaders to join!

# www.smallgroupfriends.com

*The fun, free way to connect small group members and leaders*

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established core teams only meet once a quarter.

### Where do core teams meet?

Core teams typically meet over a meal. Some meet for Sunday lunch after church services at a quiet restaurant; others choose a potluck meal in a core team member's home so the kids can play outside or in the basement while the parents are busy making plans.

### Who serves on the core team?

All the usual suspects are on the core team:

- **The Small Group Leader**
- **The Apprentice/Intern**
- **The Worship Leader**
- **The person whose home is used for meetings.**

There are a number of extra roles to expand the core team. Filling these gives the group momentum:

- **The Host/Hostess** - Coordinates in whose home the group will meet; arrives 15 minutes early and helps prepare the meeting room; greets members and visitors as they arrive; asks a few members to stay behind and clean up after everyone leaves.
- **Service Captain** - Helps the group find a "community cause" and coordinates the plans for each event.
- **Communication Captain** - Makes calls or sends Emails to group members, communicating important information.
- **Social Events Captain** - Plans, involves others, and delegates responsibilities for parties, barbecues, outings and the like.
- **Kid's Slot Captain** - Coordinates who will work with the children each week.
- **Outreach Captain** - Leads out in prayer for unchurched friends; encourages relationship-driven evangelism; coordinates plans to serve at the church's outreach events.

### How many serve on a core team?

For new groups, a core team usually consists of four to six persons. As the group grows in number with committed members, they are invited to join the core team and assume a new role or take one from an existing core team member.

In the months before a group births a new group, the core team strategically invites new members to join the team so the nucleus of the group can replicate itself.

### What happens in a typical core team meeting?

My core team meets monthly, and we create a plan of action for the next six weeks of meetings and life between meetings. This overlap is very helpful to keep us on track and make course corrections.

My core team meetings are very productive. Each thing we decide to do has a person's name by it and when he or she will have it completed or perform that task.

Each core team member is

**Core teams make leading a group a burden-free joy!**

encouraged to take copious notes on everything we discuss, noting "who will do what by when." This broad accountability makes our monthly meetings fun because we actually do the stuff we talked about.

After we review plans in progress and make new plans, we spend time praying for the group as a whole and individual members of the group.

### Coaching core teams

My wife and I are currently members of one group (discussed above) and coach two other groups as well. To connect with the core team members of our

other groups, we open our home for one of their core team meetings per quarter.

We provide the meal (something simple like spaghetti or frozen lasagna) and ask each core team member to chip in a couple of bucks to cover the cost of the groceries.

We sit in on the meeting and listen intently to the plans they're making. We also watch to see who is taking initiative aside from the leader ... that's the new leader of the next group.

Hosting or visiting a core team's meeting is just as effective as visiting a small group meeting for a coach.

### Ready to try the core team approach?

Here are a few tips for the pastor who wants to try this new approach to small group leadership!

Choose one group where the leader is burned out and would be open to trying something new that will make leading a group fun and not a burden.

Or, find a group that's about to give birth to a new group and teach the members and leader of the new group about the core team approach.

This is the smart way to experiment with something new and minimize the extra work you will surely encounter. What you don't want to do is teach all your leaders about the core team approach simultaneously. Moving from a "leader does it all" mentality to facilitating dialog on a team to gain a plan of action requires a steep learning curve for you as well as the group members and leaders. ♦

**RANDALL NEIGHBOUR** is the president of TOUCH Outreach Ministries. Randall is happy to visit with you about your small group ministry, so don't hesitate to contact him at [randall@touchusa.org](mailto:randall@touchusa.org) or call him toll free at 1-800-735-5865. His new book, *The Naked Truth about Small Group Ministry* will be available this fall.

