

**Praise for**

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## **How to Be a GREAT Cell Group Coach**

“Joel Comiskey’s *How to Be a Great Cell Group Coach* is a super book! It is a timely book based on timeless truths. It is pertinent, practical, memorable, usable and powerful. This might be the best and most important book Comiskey has written. I can’t wait to get it into the hands of all of our coaches.”

DAVE EARLEY

*Senior Pastor, New Life Church*

*Author of 8 Habits of Effective Small Group Leaders*

“Super! In this book Comiskey has compiled the best of the best of practical help and inspiring stories to help any coach better minister to his leaders. Dr. Cho once called a coach ‘the most important member of the church,’ for if coaches were well caring for their leaders, leaders would then be better caring for their members. Comiskey’s book is well worth its weight in gold to any existing or aspiring coach.”

KAREN HURSTON

*Hurston Ministries*

“This book is a welcomed addition to the literature on the cell church. From building strong life-long relationships, perfecting ‘plays,’ and trouble shooting problems, Joel Comiskey accurately covers the necessary skills for effective coaching. Learn inter-personal skills and how to develop leaders as you strengthen and motivate your team. Read this book!”

BILLY HORNSBY

*Director of the Association of Related Churches.*

“I am very grateful for Joel Comiskey’s new book and am buying one for all of my small group coaches. He communicates both the principles and practicalities that will help them take their coaching to a new level.”

JIM EGLI

*Small Group Pastor, The Vineyard Church, Champaign, IL*

## ***Praise for***

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# **How to Be a GREAT Cell Group Coach**

“The number 1 mistake cell pastors make is thinking cells will run themselves. If cell leaders are to genuinely lead, guide, and pastor the people in their cell, they must have a coach who is leading, guiding, and pastoring them. From my experience cell coaches are the key to an effective cell structure. However, cell coaches often don't know what to do. That's what Joel's book is about. It's practical and hands on. Any cell coach who reads this book will come away a better coach.”

JAY FIREBAUGH

*Senior Pastor, Clearpoint Church*

“Joel has again taken a vital component of healthy leadership development and translated it into practical application for the cell-based church. Coaching is critical to growing leaders at all levels. If cell group coaches read and apply the principles in this book they will find not only that they are more effective leaders, but that their cell leaders and cell groups will be increasingly healthy.”

BOB LOGAN

*Executive Director, CoachNet, Inc.*

“When working with churches, the advice I offer most often relates to the urgent need to increase the level and quality of coaching of their cell group leaders. This resource practically explains all the aspects of coaching and fully lives up to its name. If you apply these principles, you really will become a great cell group coach.”

RANDALL NEIGHBOUR

*Senior Editor, CellGroup Journal*

“Anointed coaching is THE key element in weaving successful cell groups into a cell-based church. Joel's new book dynamically trains us into a coaching lifestyle that constantly births and develops new ministers and ministries.”

ALAN CORRICK

*Cell Pastor, Door of Hope*

“Huge resource in a small package. The number one need in group leadership is effective coaching. Here is the best practical, clear, and easy to follow tool to help coaches empower leaders to excellence. Effective feedback, diagnosing problems, warnings, and coaching habits are all rolled into this great book.”

BRUCE CRAMMER

*Cell Group Pastor, Shepherd of the Hills Church*

**How to Be a  
GREAT  
Cell Group Coach**



# **How to Be a GREAT Cell Group Coach**

**Practical Insight for  
Supporting and Mentoring  
Cell Group Leaders**

JOEL COMISKEY



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<http://www.cellgrouppeople.com>

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# Acknowledgments

Special recognition belongs to Jeff Lodgson, Associate Pastor at Flipside Church, a post-modern congregation in Rancho Cucamonga. God placed Jeff Lodgson into my life at a crucial point on my journey. At that time, I was supposed to be a coach, but I was acting like a consultant, and I didn't have any idea that the two were different. Jeff provided me with materials and counsel, meeting with me on several occasions to teach me coaching concepts and principles. I owe many of the ideas in this book to Jeff's insights.

I am also very thankful for Jay Firebaugh's excellent work on cell leader coaching and his generosity in sharing coaching principles with me.<sup>1</sup>

I want to thank Bob Logan for his overall teaching on coaching. Logan, who knows more than anyone about coaching, has taught coaching concepts for years and is the chief promoter of Christian coaching today (he also disciplined Jeff Lodgson).

*Empowering Leaders through Coaching*, a tape series by Steven L. Ogne & Thomas P. Nebel, has had a powerful impact on my life. The major chapter divisions of this book (Listening, Encouraging, etc.) were derived from the concepts in Ogne's and Nebel's tape series.<sup>2</sup>





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# Introduction

The word “coach” comes from an old Hungarian term which meant “cart from Kocs,” a village where carriages were made. On the American western frontier, the large horse-drawn carriage was called a “stagecoach.” The use of the term evolved in the 19th century as a part of university slang to mean an instructor or trainer, “the notion being that the student was conveyed through the exam by the tutor as if he were riding in a carriage.”<sup>1</sup>

Today, most people think of a coach as a person who helps athletes be successful—who carries them forward and helps them do things that they couldn’t do on their own. In the world of athletics, a coach’s goal is to move his or her team toward a championship. But the methods used by different coaches vary. Len Woods writes, “Successful sports coaches come in all stripes. ... There are ‘old-school’ tough guys like Vince Lombardi and Bear Bryant, ‘human volcanoes’ like Bobby Knight and Mike Ditka, ‘gentleman teachers’ like John Wooden and Dean Smith, ‘motivational gurus’ like Phil Jackson, and ‘player favorites’ like Duke’s Mike Krzyzewski.”<sup>2</sup>

The same ideas apply to coaching in the church. The goal of Christian coaches is to move people toward Jesus Christ. Paul expressed his goal as a Christian coach: “We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me” (Colossians 1:28-29). The Christian coach strives to lead people forward to conformity with Jesus Christ, knowing that the ultimate crown is the one that will last forever (1 Corinthians 9:25).

## Cell Group Coaches

Cell groups or small groups have become the focus of many churches around the world. Cell groups are exciting because they provide a place

where people can share their lives with one another, people can reach nonbelievers without using high-pressure evangelism tactics, and ordinary people can become new leaders. Pastors and church leaders who learn about the cell group vision usually become incredibly excited about the things that can happen in their churches.

These churches often begin by starting groups and focusing on recruiting cell group leaders. Once leaders have been trained, they are set free to lead their groups. But most churches who do this run into a problem: they lack qualified coaches. Without solid coaching, initial small group excitement runs dry. Leaders who were once thrilled about cell groups find themselves drained, wishing they were involved in a less demanding ministry. Without coaching, cell groups that were once healthy begin to die slow, painful deaths.



### **The Importance of Coaching<sup>3</sup>**

1. *Coaching keeps a group leader's motivation strong.* Consistent coaching can keep a leader inspired and sharp.
2. *Coaching can improve a group leader's ability to lead.* Small differences in strategy (along with little mistakes) make the difference between winning and losing.
3. *Coaching can prevent disasters before they occur.* Discouragement can be dealt with before it becomes deadly.
4. *Coaching helps leaders work together as a team.* Cooperation prevents unhealthy isolation and promotes unity.
5. *Coaching can foster the discovery and development of new leaders.* A group system grows when potential new leaders are discovered in existing healthy groups.

David Cho, the founder and pastor of the largest church in the history of Christianity, once said, "The key behind the cell system is the coach."<sup>4</sup> The research of Dwight Marable and Jim Egli confirms this. They researched small group churches around the world and discovered that coaching was the key element for assuring long-term cell group success.

Egli says, “We looked at six church elements in our research. Coaching surpassed even training and prayer.”<sup>5</sup>

Just as the best athletes in the world require coaches to help them play their best games, so do the best cell leaders. No cell leader, no matter how gifted or how well trained, will be able to lead as effectively alone as he or she would with the help of a cell group coach.

## What Is a Cell Group Coach?

A cell coach equips cell leaders with the tools, knowledge, and opportunities they need to develop themselves and become more effective.<sup>6</sup> A cell coach encourages, nourishes, and challenges cell leaders to grow and multiply their cell groups.

The word “coach” is descriptive of the role a person plays as he or she supports cell leaders under his or her care. It is not a sacred term. In fact, churches use many terms to identify the role played by the cell group coach: supervisor, section leader, G-12 leader, cell overseer, cell sponsor, even “L” (the roman numeral for 50).



### Why Coaching?

“Counsel in another’s heart is like deep water; but a discerning man will draw it up.” — Proverbs 20:5

The purpose of this book is not to prescribe a specific structure for the number of cell group leaders a coach should oversee. This number varies from church to church, depending upon the vision of the church and the capacity of the coach. The point is that a cell group coach oversees at least one other cell group leader. For more on coaching structures see my books *Groups of Twelve* and *From 12 to 3*.<sup>7</sup>

Just as a cell group leader does not stand alone, neither does a cell group coach. He or she is also cared for by another leader, usually a staff pastor (although in larger churches this might not be the case). Successful cell group-based churches have developed people to care for cell coaches as well as cell leaders, so that all people are nourished and protected—from the senior pastor down to the cell members.

It is easy for church leaders to become so enamored with the cell group structure that they fail to understand the roles within that structure. So many people have confessed to me, “Joel, I don’t know how to coach! I know the structure and the logistics, but I don’t know what to do when I’m actually coaching. Please help!” To make matters worse, there is very little material addressing the role of the cell group coach. There are great resources available on how to lead cell groups, how to train leaders, and how to start a cell group system in a church. But little has been said about what a coach actually does to help his or her cell group leaders become more effective.

## What a Coach Is Not

Many people have become cell group coaches only to find themselves frustrated. Most of these frustrations stem from misunderstandings about the coaching role.

Most people confuse coaching with consulting. Consultants are experts who provide wise counsel and advice on a short-term basis to a client. Consultants play an important role, but when cell group coaches adopt this model, there are at least two dangers.



### Fulfilling the Leader’s Dream

“This [coaching] is different from consulting, for example, where the consultant brings specialized expertise and very often sets the agenda for the relationship. The coach’s job is to help...[people] clarify their mission, purpose, and goals, and help them achieve that outcome.”<sup>8</sup>

**Danger #1: Creating dependency.** The leader is forced to depend on the expert and rarely ever breaks away from that dependency. A coach, on the other hand, is a listener and encourager with the goal of enabling leaders to be all that God wants them to be.

**Danger #2: Information overload that doesn’t work in the long run.** Information is necessary to successfully lead and multiply a cell group. The major obstacle, however, is practically applying that information over the long haul. Consultants provide information for a predetermined purpose, while a coach

focuses on working with cell group leaders over an extended period of time on whatever issues are important.

Another misconception about coaches is that they are middle managers. Many coaches feel like they are paper pushers who only relay information to their cell group leaders and make sure their leaders turn in their reports on time. The image of the coach as middle manager depersonalizes ministry and disrupts or even destroys cell group ministry. When coaches model information-pushing and fact-checking to cell group leaders, they set a bad pattern for cell leaders to imitate.

Another misconception is that the coach is a counselor, a person to whom cell leaders go when they face major problems. A coach doesn't wait for a cell leader to come with concerns or complaints. A coach must proactively support his or her cell leaders, seeking to intercept problems before they occur.

At times a coach will provide advice, act as a middle manager, and serve as a counselor in crisis situations, but such roles should not be the focus. A coach is someone who helps another person fulfill his God-ordained calling.

## **The Best Coaches Are in the Battle**

Some coaches see their role as graduation from the hands-on ministry in the cell group. This could not be further from the truth. In order to encourage cell leaders, a coach must be able to say, "I've been there." At a minimum, coaches should participate in a cell group to continue experiencing cell life so that their lives speak as models. It is even better if coaches can continue leading a cell group while coaching. (This can usually be done when coaching three leaders or fewer.)

The best coaches are those who have successfully led and multiplied a cell group. Why? Because they know what it's like to experience the pain of giving birth, the joys of ministry, and the struggles of evangelism. They can offer a fresh word and relevant counsel to the leaders they're coaching.<sup>9</sup>

# The Habits of Great Cell Group Coaches

The best cell group coaches embrace common habits in the ministry and support of their leaders. Habits are practices that a person does without thinking about them. They become such a part of a person's character that no conscious effort is required. There are seven habits of great cell group coaches. Great coaches:

- Receive from God (chapter 1)
- Listen to the leader (chapter 2)
- Encourage the leader (chapter 3)
- Care for the leader (chapter 4)
- Develop/train the leader (chapter 5)
- Strategize with the leader (chapter 6)
- Challenge the leader (chapter 7)

To adopt these habits, a cell group coach will have to consciously work on each one. These habits have been written in sequence, as a seven-step plan to help coaches re-order their habits for effective coaching. I have adapted this coaching sequence from a tape series called *Empowering Leaders through Coaching* by Steven L. Ogne and Thomas P. Nebel.<sup>10</sup> I have added Receiving and applied the concepts they teach so well to the specific role of the cell group coach.<sup>11</sup>



“Habits are powerful factors in our lives. Because they are consistent, often unconscious patterns, they constantly, daily, express our character and produce our effectiveness ... or ineffectiveness.”<sup>12</sup>

In Section I (chapters 1-7), I will unpack these habits and show you how to use each one in a coaching situation—whether you're coaching one-on-one or in a group setting.

In Section II (chapters 8-12), I will discuss increasing your coaching authority (chapter 8), diagnosing cell group problems (chapter 9), the different stages of cell coaching (chapter 10), the coaching huddle meeting (chapter 11), and cell group visitation (chapter 12).



## Give What You Have

You might be feeling too inadequate to coach someone. But remember that God isn't looking for perfect coaches. View yourself as a catalyst to help others develop themselves (coach versus consultant). Don't be afraid to give what you have. When you do, God will pour back into your life new insight and wisdom so that you can continue.

## Special Features of This Book

Throughout this book, as in my book *How to Lead a Great Cell Group Meeting*, you will find tips and practical advice that will help you understand and apply the principles of great coaching, revealing how to implement them with your leaders. You will find these special tips in the following sidebars.



### Try This!

These quick and easy ideas will spark your own creativity.



### Insight

These great testimonies and quotes will help you improve your coaching.



### Strategy

These proven strategies provide practical ways to coach better.



### Dictionary

These basic definitions or descriptions will clarify common questions about cell coaching.

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