



For Leaders of Small Groups¹

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Being an effective group leader calls upon the basic social virtues of the Christian. On the one hand, the group has a task to fulfill and only a limited amount of time. But maintaining kindness, patience, and a profound concern for others are even more important than accomplishing the tasks.

1. A. Why Small Groups?

Two major needs underlie the planning to put a substantial amount of the Congress time into small-group activity:

- (1) The experiences of the Congress are much more likely to have long-term value for those who take time to think through and talk about what they are hearing.
- (2) The need for some carefully considered position statements and specific plans will demand the broadest sort of consideration of needs and issues. It is not enough to put together the best ideas of the five or ten most “famous” people at the Congress. The Holy Spirit is at work in the church, and the church is widely represented at the Congress. Thus, we face a unique opportunity to hear from our brothers and sisters who come from many lands and represent many different viewpoints.

B. The Leader’s Tasks:

The leader’s major task is to encourage people to listen to each other. The successful leader will be able to establish a respectful sense of openness within the group. To make it easy for each person to speak out, to encourage polite debate, to protect anyone who is verbally attacked, to delay moves for premature decisions, and to help the group summarize its deliberations are the important activities of the leader.

Group leaders were selected for their ability to help others discuss and share—not for their expertise in the matters under discussion. Though perhaps all of the leaders are quite competent to make speeches, this is not what is needed!

2. Effective Groups:

Almost always show these three characteristics:

A. Acceptance:

The style and warmth of that particular kind of friendship that does not try to change the other person.

Indicates Acceptance

“I’m glad you said that—it helps me see more clearly even though I can’t completely agree.”
“Since you are my brother/sister, all our points of difference are less important.”

Does not Indicate Acceptance

“I wish you hadn’t said that because I disagree.”
“There are things about you that I don’t like.”

¹ Training Manual: Prepared for International Congress of World Evangelization (ICOWE): Lausanne, 1974

B. Empathy:

The ability and willingness to think and feel along with someone else's point-of-view.

Shows Empathy

"Let me try to understand your situation . . ."
"I feel *with* you, friend."

Does not Show Empathy

"But my situation is different . . ."
"I can't share that with you."

C. Unconditional Positive Regard:

Respect and friendship based on relationship, not dependent on being or becoming qualified.

Shows Positive Regard

"I like people, because every person is important."
"I love you because you are my sister."
"Being with you helps me."

Shows Conditional Regard

"I like people whom I can trust."
"If you behave like me, I will love you like a brother."
"If it helps me, I'm willing to be with you."

3. Effective Communication in Groups:

Remember!

- a) Meaning is formed by the receiver of the message (others hear what they think you mean).
- b) Feedback is valuable. Clarify your communication by re-shaping your message after you hear what others have heard.
- c) Effective communication depends on effective hearing.

Message to Send

Encouragement and support (even when you don't agree, you can be appreciative.)
Clarifiers ("What I hear you saying is . . .")
Messages that let people see inside your "shell."

Messages to Avoid

Clichés and "pat proofs."
Premature challenges.
Closure statements ("The last word.")

4. Encouragements for Group Leaders:

- a) Learn the names of your group members and *use* the names. Make a seating chart. Make a new one each day, if necessary.
- b) Help others to express their viewpoints.
- c) Gently encourage others to make their contributions concise.
- d) Search *with* your group for new insights and understandings.
- e) Encourage people to re-state what they think they heard others say.
- f) Discuss to gain clarity—ask people to define their terms and to simplify obscure comments.
- g) Maintain a positive approach; inspire others to be positive, rather than negative.
- h) Teach through others.
- i) As an effective group leader, you must make sacrifices; your freedom to "preach" should be sacrificed while you are a group leader.
- j) Effective leadership requires certain virtues, graces, and gifts:
 - (1) Patience.
 - (2) Helps.

- (3) Peace-making.
 - (4) Humility.
5. Small-Group Leadership Procedures:
- a) If your group is smaller than 20 people:
 - (1) Appoint 1 *Recorder*.
 - (2) Appoint 1 *Editor*.
 - b) If your group is 20 people or more:
 - (1) Appoint 2 *Recorders*.
 - (2) Appoint 1 *Editor*.

Duties:

Recorder:

- Takes notes on important ideas while they are being discussed. Make a distinction between ideas of *general agreement* and items of *important disagreement*.
- At the end of each meeting of the group, review the major ideas discussed.

Editor:

- Combine and condense the notes provided by the Recorders. (This writing should not exceed two pages on *each* meeting of the group.) The work of the Editor takes place *after* each session of the group.
- Prepare the final report of the group with the help of the group leader.
- Suggestion—At the beginning of each session, the Editor could review the previous work of the group by reading his or her report.

6. Possible Problems and Suggested Actions:

What to do when . . .

- a) Someone wants to talk too much. Use the 3-Step Procedure:
 - Step 1. Offer a gentle hint.
 - Step 2. Deliberately divert the discussion away from the person.
 - Step 3. Speak directly to the person who is monopolizing.
- b) Someone changes the subject prematurely:
 - At the first opportunity, bring up again the earlier topic or ask someone who was interrupted to re-state the point that was being made.
- c) Someone tries to argue and to debate constantly:
 - Use the 3-Step Procedure. [See (a)]
- d) Someone wants to say nothing:
 - Encourage participation, but don't force or embarrass the person.
- e) Conversation lags or people in the group seem to wander away from the main topics:
 - (1) Ask someone to summarize what has been said recently in the group.
 - (2) Ask someone to identify one important idea that has not yet been adequately discussed.
 - (3) Allow your group to stand, stretch, take a short walk to relieve fatigue, or to go together to take refreshments.

7. Concern for Christ above All:

Some of us emphasize *product* and *production*. Others, especially those who come from less industrialized regions, emphasize *relationships* instead. Some of the people in the small groups will

be concerned primarily about the outcome or conclusions of the discussions; others will be more concerned about the value of discussion itself. We will need to be patient with each other.

In all that we do, it is important to observe the basic virtues that Christ taught. Consider the following decisions in light of Scriptural principles:

1. As the leader of small-group will you be *commander* or *servant*?

2. An unkind comment is made to you, the leader. What will you do? *Reply with harsh vigor* or “*turn the other cheek?*”

3. A member of your small group is late for the second time. What will you do? *Welcome him with kindness* or *embarrass him so that he will not be late again?*

4. A member of your small group doesn’t participate in the discussions. What will you do? *Gently invite her to comment from time to time* or *ignore her?*

5. There is a period of “awkward” silence in the group. What will you do? *Say something yourself to keep things moving* or *accept the beauty of silence as a time for careful thought?*

Consider the specific ways that these “fruit of the Spirit” can be shown in the actions and words of a leader of a small group:

1. Love _____
2. Joy _____
3. Peace _____
4. Patience _____
5. Kindness _____
6. Goodness _____
7. Faithfulness _____
8. Gentleness _____
9. Self-Control _____

Since these words appear as distinct ideas in Galatians 5:22-23, try to see each word as adding a specific suggestion for the small-group leader.

Are you willing to let these verses be your guidance as you lead your group? “If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another” (Galatians 5: 25-26).