

# HOW CAN WE LEAD AS A TEAM?

## the **big** idea

A team approach to small group leadership sets everyone up for success.

### **ice breaker**

Describe a task that you performed or a problem you solved with one or two other people. What did you notice about the relationship among you?

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### **related Scripture**

*A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.*

Ecclesiastes 4:12 (NLT)

### **challenging wisdom**

*Without question, the setting where I have experienced the most accelerated transformation in the lives of believers has been in small reproducible discipleship groups I have labeled microgroups. I call them “hothouses of Holy Spirit.” Hothouses are heated enclosures that create the right environmental conditions for living things to grow at a rate greater than under natural circumstances.*

– Greg Ogden

## TRIPLE-STRENGTH LEADERSHIP

In the 1940s, famed architect Buckminster Fuller declared the triangle to be the perfect form for designing strong, light, economical buildings. Fuller observed that the simplicity of the three-sided shape achieves maximum efficiency with minimum structural effort. In fact, a triangle is more than twice as strong as a rectangle—its unique configuration allows it to bear stresses that other shapes simply can't. Based on this principle, Fuller designed incredible structures that wouldn't have been possible without the fundamental strength of triangles.

Just like great buildings, great small groups require a well-designed approach to leadership that not only withstands the challenges of leading a group but also thrives in the midst of those challenges.

**1 DISCUSS ::** Based on your experience in small groups, what do you think is the best design for small group leadership, and why?

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The demands of group life can be overwhelming. Solo facilitation casts the facilitator as a small group superhero who has x-ray vision into group dynamics, heroic power to invite people to the group, and the ability to leap over discussion-ending comments in a single bound. But who facilitates the group when the leader is out of town or sick? What happens when the leader starts to burn out or has to work late? How can the leader invite people into the group beyond his or her social circle?

A partnership of two facilitators alleviates many challenges of solo facilitation while helping someone who is new to leadership grow, learn, and begin to invite others into leadership.

And if you can start a group with two others, your group will be even stronger as you partner together to maximize each other's strengths, support each other through the ups and downs of group life, and model the sort of community you want to see in the group you lead.

**2 DISCUSS ::** If you have been in a small group with two or three facilitators, how did that compare to a small group experience with just one leader? (If not, how do you think a small group experience you have had would have been different with a team of two or three leaders?)

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There's no such thing as a perfect group facilitator—every facilitator has strengths and weaknesses. A facilitator may be great at inviting people to the group, but struggle to lead discussions. A facilitator may have great empathy, but shy away from addressing deep issues for fear of group conflict. A facilitator may be great at asking questions, but weak at waiting to hear answers. And, whatever their gift mix, every facilitator has good days and bad days, moments when they lead well and moments when they don't.

No matter the strengths and weaknesses of individual facilitators, team leadership fosters greater success and greater synergy through the power of partnership. The writer of the book of Ecclesiastes describes this power and highlights the unique advantages of three working together:

*Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble.... A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.*

(Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, NLT)

**3 DISCUSS ::** How might you apply Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, with its imagery of a triple-braided cord, to leadership in a small group?

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Every facilitator wants to succeed in leading a group. But no one facilitator has all the answers or the perspective to evaluate how the group is doing. And at one point or another, every leader finds that they get stalled—stuck in a relational challenge, overwhelmed by other pressures in life, frustrated with the momentum of a discussion.

A team of facilitators can support each other both inside and outside of the small group setting. For example, when the group discussion bogs down, one of them may offer a new question or point the group back to its guidelines. Outside of the group, facilitators can debrief, offering each other specific affirmation and constructive suggestions for future group sessions.

The team leadership approach allows each facilitator to use his or her strengths and look to others to compensate for weaknesses. As a result, he or she will feel more at home in the facilitating role and better valued for what he or she brings to the group.

More than anything, team leadership says, "We're in this together." As a team, facilitators share warmth—encouragement, prayer, ideas, support, wisdom. Team leadership lives out the concept Together Everyone Achieves More, that we can do more together than we could ever do alone.

**4 DISCUSS ::** What resonates with you regarding the success and synergy of starting a small group with one or two other people?

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What seems foreign to you, based on your previous small group experiences?

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## TEAMS MODEL DISCIPLESHIP IN COMMUNITY

Effective group facilitators strive to provide an environment that is conducive to exploration and discovery, where people

who believe differently can explore, discover, and share with transparency while the Spirit of God works through Scripture. As they create this environment for others, they need it also for themselves.

As the adage goes, “You can’t give away what you don’t have.” If a facilitator isn’t being disciplined in a loving community, that facilitator is ill-equipped to disciple others in a loving community. A healthy team lives out the idea of peer-discipleship, of “iron sharpening iron” (Proverbs 27:17).

Jesus modeled this community-within-a-community approach; while investing in all twelve apostles, he gave extra attention to the team of Peter, James, and John. Jesus exclusively invited them into specific highs and lows of his ministry—the resurrection of a little girl (Mark 5:37-42), the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-13), and his night of prayer at Gethsemane (Mark 14:32-34).

Surely Peter, James, and John talked together about these experiences. That processing-in-community perfectly captures the essence of a team—meeting together to work through our responses to Jesus and partnering together in the Kingdom work Jesus gives us to do. Team meetings outside of small group meetings can offer a rich discipleship environment for facilitators.

**5 DISCUSS ::** Why do you think Jesus had an inner circle of Peter, James, and John among his twelve apostles?

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## TO LEAD A SMALL GROUP, START WITH A TEAM OF TWO OR THREE

The idea of starting a small group for seekers might seem daunting, overwhelming you with questions such as *Where will I find enough people to be in the group? What should we discuss? How will I deal with challenging group members?*

But even if you are feeling confident about the basic aspects of starting a group, doing this with one or two others is worth the effort!

So, where and how can you find your team?

Start by asking God to point you toward acquaintances, friends, or even strangers who might consider starting a group with you. Team members don’t have to be close friends of yours, but they do need to have a heart for people without Jesus.

Mention the idea of starting a group for spiritual seekers to a Christian who has come to mind, explaining why you want to do this. Ask if he or she would prayerfully read through the Art of Facilitating to see how this works. You can also go through the book *How to Start a Q Place* together.

If neither of you knows how to start a seeker group, go through Q Place Coaching together. (Register through QPlace.com.) You will both be encouraged with practical training, tips to avoid pitfalls, true stories of people growing in faith, and ongoing support in this adventure.

As you move toward launching your group, pray together for people you’d each like to see there. Set the place and time for the trial meeting and hold each other accountable to extend invitations.

After your group starts, pray in person or by phone together for your group and evaluate together how it’s going.

Also, watch for group participants whom you could add to your team, mentoring them to co-lead your group! Your participants are learning on-the-job about how this kind of group works, so share group leadership responsibilities from week to week and see who arises. For non-Christians who are introduced to the Bible in a Q Place setting, this kind of discussion is intuitive and powerful. After they become Christians, they are likely to draw others into your group.

In San Jose, CA, groups are set up to multiply through “apprentice” leaders who are clearly growing as followers of Jesus and are faithful and available to help facilitate. In time they also lead new groups with new apprentice leaders!

The high calling of leading a group for seekers is too important to do alone. Team leadership offers a strong discipleship-based model for starting and leading a small group. Beyond all these benefits, it’s simply more fun to lead, celebrate, and grow in community!

**6 DISCUSS ::** What benefits do you see in starting with a team of facilitators before launching a small group? Challenges?

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Do you think the foundation of a team of facilitators might increase the likelihood of new groups starting? Why or why not?

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## PRACTICE ON YOUR OWN

This week take some time to list the attributes of a person you'd consider inviting to join you in launching and facilitating a small group. Write down the reasons that these attributes are important to you. Spend some time in prayer and write down any individuals who come to mind. Pray for those people and ask God for guidance to find one or two co-facilitators for discipleship and leading of a small group.

## GETTING THE BIG IDEA

A team offers strength to fit the demands of starting and facilitating a small group. In a team that works well together, you will have climate for spiritual growth as you are mutually accountable, transparent, and supportive, applying Scripture and depending on God together in the process of leading a small group.

## A STORY OF FACILITATING

Michelle was inspired to start a small group for people in her community, so she prayed for God to show her one or two people who would join her. Later that month, she met with two friends from her church to see if they would meet together regularly and prepare to launch a spiritual conversation group with her. Nicholas and Karen were intrigued.

The first time the three got together, they spent time getting acquainted at a deeper level, sharing their fears and apprehensions as well as their excitement about reaching out to people outside of the church. The next time, each one brought a list of acquaintances who might be interested in coming to a group to discuss questions about God. After describing each person on their lists, they committed to pray for each one. They also shared their reservations: Karen wasn't sure she had time to add one more activity to her schedule. Nicholas, a pastor, recognized his tendency to teach rather than facilitate and

was afraid that it might be awkward for him to be in a group like this. Michelle was traveling a lot with her job and wasn't sure if she had the time or consistency to make this group happen. They all agreed to pray for each other. They also decided to connect intentionally with the people on their lists and meet periodically to share what was happening.

Four months later, this team had seen God do amazing things in their relationships with the people on their lists. He had also united their team as they made plans for their trial meeting, and now they were ready to do this! They extended personal invitations, several people came, and they saw their group become a reality. They started out discussing tough spiritual questions, and it wasn't long before they moved into the Bible. Over time they saw God transforming the lives of everyone in their group—including their own.



**Getting Ready:** Noticing, Praying, Listening  
**Getting Started:** Asking Questions, Loving, Welcoming  
**Keeping It Going:** Facilitating, Serving Together, Sharing

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