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WHAT MAKES A GROUP LAST?

Value is what makes a group last. Every time a man shows up, he has decided **not** to do something else. Most men have many choices, so your small group has to meet the “real and felt needs test” or it won't last.

So what do men find valuable? Life can be brutal. Every day men must manage their lives against the Fall. Because life is so hard, men need to be encouraged. They need a hug from God. They need the human touch. And this, while wearing the skin of a loner.

The mega-answer? Care. Caring creates, captures, and sustains value, momentum, and disciples. Men will come if they sense you really care about them. If they don't, they will eventually drift away—but rarely tell you why.

You will know you have succeeded when you hear men saying: “*I really feel like my group cares about me personally;*” “*The leader makes sure I get a chance to air my thoughts;*” and “*I cannot believe how my life is changing.*”

Business leader, author, and speaker, Patrick Morley helps men think more deeply about their lives, to be reconciled with Christ, and to be equipped for a larger impact on the world.

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How to Lead a Weekly Men's Small Group

Patrick Morley

Few things have changed my life like the small groups I have been in over the last 30 years. Currently I'm in two—a leaders discipleship group and, for 25 years, a weekly one-on-one meeting for fellowship and prayer. The most intense learning, growth, sharing, encouragement, accountability, prayer, and fellowship I've experienced has taken place in small groups.

However, most men's small groups peter out. Ironically, the same small group that can bring about great change is also fragile to sustain.

The goal is to “create, capture, and sustain disciples.” How can we overcome inertia? To make disciples we need momentum—we must “create, capture, and sustain momentum.” So what's the secret? The secret of momentum is to “create, capture, and sustain value.”

I would like to show you how small groups open the door to creating, capturing, and sustaining all three—disciples, momentum, and value.

THE CASE: WHY SMALL GROUPS?

Jesus used a small group to create momentum. Jesus launched his divine plan to redeem mankind by making disciples out of a small group. Impressive. The question, of course, is why would he do that? Why a small group?

Jesus knew that most meaningful change takes place in the context of small group relationships—men sharpening men with truth, encouraging each other for the daily battle, and sticking with each other over the long haul.

Small groups date to the 17th century, when Philip Jacob Spencer (1635-1705), the father of German Pietism, initiated a series of reforms. Central to his method was the *collegia pietatis*—“small groups” for Bible study, prayer, and intimacy—intended to renew a staid and arid church.

Even secularists understand the value of small groups. Anthropologist Margaret Mead said, “Never doubt the power of a small group of people to change the world. That's about the only way it has ever happened in the past.”

Today, despite the “gospel saturation” in America, only 8 million of 98 million men are involved in any kind of ongoing discipleship. The main method of Jesus has fallen into disuse—it has lost momentum.

That is tragic, because *Mission Number One* of Christian service is to make (create, capture, sustain) disciples. Often we are so busy treating symptoms—marital problems, wayward children, gossip, ethical failures, apathy, backbiting, etc.—that we never treat the root disease.

This is like treating cancer with morphine. It takes away the pain for a moment, but does nothing to cure the patient. God wants to bring men to full maturity in Christ. Making “small groups” a core value can create the momentum to get you where you want to go.

HOW TO FORM A GROUP

1. First, make a list of men you might like to have in your group. Figure you need to ask two men for every slot in your group. Pray over their names. Ask God to give you names you might not ordinarily think of.

2. Next, decide what kind of group you want to lead. You could wait and make a group decision, but it will likely fall apart. Leaders lead—and men like that. There are many different types of small groups (after each type I have offered a suggested size, but this is an art not a science): *Bible Studies* (6 to 12 men—remember, 12 is a number that’s been successfully used before); *Discussion Groups* (4 to 8 men); *Support Groups*: specific issues like addictions (6 to 12 men); *Prayer Groups* (2 to 6 men); *Accountability Groups* (4 men); *Fellowship Groups* (2 to 8 men); *Mentoring Groups* (2 to 4 men); *Mission Groups*: service projects (5 or more men).

3. Decide when and where you want to meet. Friday mornings are good because most men try to be back in town by then, and it's often a catch up day. If all your men are from the same church, meet on Sunday, on Wednesday evenings, or one morning during the week at the church.

4. Next, invite the men to an informational meeting to discuss the small group. Pick the time, place, and stick to one hour. As you invite them...

- ◆ Do explain to men what you are trying to accomplish and why.
- ◆ Don't ask men for a long-term commitment right away.
- ◆ Unless you feel strongly otherwise, do tell the men you will initially meet for 4, 6, or 8 weeks (pick a number), then decide as a group where to go from there.
- ◆ Do graciously let men decline your offer.

THE FIRST MEETING

The first meeting is informational...

- ◆ Have coffee and donuts or cokes and cookies. Plan to meet for at least one hour but no more than one and a half hours.

- ◆ Start on time and open with a brief prayer.
- ◆ For 10 minutes: Mention (again) your purpose for wanting to start a small group. Give the men an opportunity to comment on your proposed Purpose Statement for the small group (write it out—Francis Bacon said, “Writing maketh an exact man”). They will appreciate being asked, and feel a stronger sense of ownership.
- ◆ Next 40 minutes: Depending on how many men you have, ask each man to take 3 to 5 minutes to share briefly where he is on his spiritual pilgrimage today, and what he hopes to “give and get” from the group.
- ◆ 5 minutes: Inspire them with your vision for the group. Encourage the men. Don't go too far too fast. Be sensitive that most men will not jump in until they have tested the waters for a few weeks (or months).
- ◆ Last 5 minutes: Pass out materials for the kick off meeting.

HOW TO LEAD AN EFFECTIVE DISCUSSION

Here are some hard learned lessons about leading an effective discussion....

- ◆ “Air time for every man every week.” You should draw out the quiet man without making him feel uncomfortable. Sense his pace. Privately ask the man who talks too much to help you draw out the other men.
- ◆ Don't talk more than 25% of the time. If there is silence when you ask a question, don't try to fill the space.
- ◆ Ask open-ended questions, not ones that can be answered, “Yes,” or “No.” Instead of asking, “Do you struggle with making good decisions?”, ask “What kind of decisions do you find difficult, and why?”

OTHER SUGGESTIONS TO BE EFFECTIVE

- ◆ Call your men each week. ***This is a make or break point.***
- ◆ After your group is formed host a couple's social outing.
- ◆ Spend five hours per week on your personal ministry including group time (phone calls, personal visits, counseling men, etc.). Take each man to lunch once a year.
- ◆ Credo: “Long term, low pressure.” A small group is many things, including a hospital for men with broken wings. Make yours a “safe place” for men. Do not put pressure on men to conform to certain behavior. Instead, show men Christ.
- ◆ If you are a marketplace small group, encourage your men to be actively involved in a Bible believing church.

SELECTING MATERIAL

Bible Studies: If you have the time, aptitude, and interest you can develop your own curriculum. If not, try the Man in the Mirror Weekly Bible Study.