

How to “ACE” a Small Group Meeting

A successful small group meeting will be one that is purposefully designed to include time for all of the ACE elements. There are several types of small groups possible. As needs are recognized, and leadership developed, a variety of groups may be added. Groups should never be started without trained and dedicated leaders. Sometimes a need may go unmet while leaders are being trained. This is to be preferable to the problems that may arise from beginning a ministry in a premature fashion.

Types of Small Groups

Not all small groups have the same appearance or function. Understanding the differences and similarities found within groups can aid in guiding the preparation, implementation and evaluation of the success of an individual group.

While there are several types of small groups, most seem to be oriented toward one, or both, of two general categories. The two categories of groups are those that are **task** oriented and those that have a **relational** orientation. A short list of groups found in these two categories is found below.

Task Oriented

1. In-depth Bible Study
2. Task-oriented evangelism groups
3. Ministry teams (Ushers, benevolence, teachers)
(Tend to be more open, and experience less primary group interaction)

Relation Oriented

1. Fellowship groups
2. Accountability groups
3. Support/Recovery groups
(Tend to be more closed, greater emphasis on primary group interaction)

The most successful model for small groups, as measured by their ability to successfully implement all of the objectives of the ACE model, has been one that seeks to incorporate elements of both categories. These “balanced groups” seek to successfully incorporate as many of these elements as possible. Keys to maintaining the balance within these groups include (1) the formation of the groups’ agenda, (2) the leader’s understanding of the purpose, and (3) continuing evaluation of the group’s performance.

Small Group Meeting Agendas

The composition of a group’s agenda determines the direction of the group. In forming an agenda, the small group must formulate a purpose that will serve as the guide for choosing the items. Once chosen, the items serve not as a rigid form but as basic guide of what needs to be covered and/or accomplished during the meeting.

Two examples of small group meeting agendas can be found on the following two pages. One is for a balanced small group; the other is for a ministry group. Small group meetings should normally be from one and one half to two hours (1 ½ to 2 hours) in duration. **It is a general rule that this time limit is not to be exceeded. When a group habitually exceeds this limit a timekeeper should be appointed.**

A Balanced Small Group Meeting Agenda

Assimilation Time (30 - 45 minutes)

Welcome (2 minute)

Words of welcome

Devotional (5-10 minutes)

Song, prayer, and/or reading (related to lesson)

Learning Time (25-40 minutes)

Bible lesson (10-30 min.)

Icebreaker or warm-up questions

Introduction of text

Thought provoking questions

Applications of lesson (10-30 min.)

Reflect questions

Summary statements

Caring Time, part I (10-15 minutes)

Prayer (15 min.)

Review prayer journal

Prayer requests

Intercessory prayer

Evangelism, (5-15 minutes)

S.E.E. (14 min.)

Planning for the future

Reports from follow-up on guests

Outreach project reports

Coordinating lessons, contacts, etc.

Prayer for the harvest

Communications (1 minutes)

Special church functions

Announcements about the next meeting

Community Time (25-45 minutes)

Refreshments and social interaction

Total Time: 45 minutes – 1 hour, 45 min.

Note: This is a balanced agenda in which Assimilation, Caring, and Evangelism all receives emphasis.

It is provided for the use of group leaders as they plan and conduct meetings. It is not to be passed out to the group as a rigid form that dictates the meeting.

Good small group meetings have a feeling of spontaneity. In reality, their leaders have taken the time to plan them well.

One way of evaluating the balance of the group's meetings is to determine how much time has been dedicated to each of the three ACE goals.

Several of these time periods serve more than one purpose. Still this basic time breakdown would seem like a good goal for balanced meetings.

Assimilation	30 minutes
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Caring	15 minutes
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Evangelism	15 minutes
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(For evangelism, the atmosphere of the meetings is of vital importance. Actual teaching will usually take place in a more personal setting.)

Evangelism is not to be limited to the time indicated on the agenda. It is a central aim of all that is done within the group. Every moment is to be infused with an evangelistic thrust.

What is done, and how it is done, will be influenced by those in attendance at any particular small group meeting.

When there is a new guest present for a meeting it should be expected that the sharing would not be as open as when all are more familiar with one another. When non-Christians are present the emphasis (even subject, at times) may also need to be modified or changed to accommodate their level of spiritual maturity and their search for the truth.

For this reason leaders are encouraged to have two "plans" for each evening.

* Obviously assignments to visit guests should not be made in the presence of the guests!

Initially the majority of the small groups at the Grand Central Church of Christ will be the balanced small groups (called ACE, *koinonia*, or home groups). There may also a place for ministry-based small groups that could incorporate the groups that several of our deacons are building to support their specific ministry areas.

The agenda for such meetings will be determined by the purpose of the ministry group. These groups are usually open so there will be less primary group interaction but they do provide an excellent avenue for assimilating new members and guests into the life of the body.

A Task-Oriented Small Group Meeting Agenda (Ministry, Support,)

Assimilation Time (25-40 minutes)

- Welcome* (1 min.)
 - Words of welcome
- Devotional* (5-15 min.)
 - Song & prayer (related to lesson topic)
- Learning Time* (15-25 min.)
 - Bible lesson (10-15 min.)
 - Icebreaker or warm-up question
 - Lecture or handouts on text
- Application (5-15 min.)
 - Reflections and summary statements

Caring Time (25-45 minutes)

- Prayer* (10 min.)
 - Prayer journal (review)
 - Prayer requests
 - Intercessory prayer
- Outreach Through Service* (19 min.)
 - Report on status of ministry projects
 - Planning for the future
 - Assigning tasks for the coming week
 - Reports on follow-up of guests
 - Coordination with other ministries
- Communications* (1 min.)
 - Special church functions
 - Announcements about the next meeting

Evangelism (5-15 minutes)

- Opportunities for evangelism through projects
- Reports on guest visits (assemblies & small group)
- Review and expand prospects list
- Coordinate teaching and activities for prospects
- Prayer for the harvest

Community Time (20-45 minutes)

- Refreshments and Social Interaction

Total Time for this Agenda: 1 hour, 15 minutes to 2 hours

Note: This agenda differs from the balanced agenda since these groups have a different purpose.

Ministry group leaders should use this agenda as they plan and conduct meetings.

Spontaneity, especially as it relates to the time spent addressing the group's specific ministry, is not desirable for this group. A list of the topics to be covered would prove helpful in these meetings.

In evaluating these groups' meetings leaders should take care in measuring the effectiveness of the ministry's subsequent actions.

Healthy groups will set aside time for each of the ACE elements. It is the time breakdown that will differ as it reflects their task orientation. Task oriented groups should allot times in this approximate manner:

Assimilation	20 minutes
Caring	30 minutes
Evangelism	10 minutes

Groups might consider serving snacks and drinks during the meeting. This could cut some time out of the agenda, if that is needed or desired by group members.

Small Group Leaders and Leadership

Leaders need to be Faithful, Available, and Trainable (F.A.T.)

Successful small groups are very dependent upon good leaders. A small groups ministry is a high demand ministry. This means that those who accept positions of leadership must “count the cost” and be willing to pay the price required.

We are looking for **FAT** people: **F**aithful, **A**vailable and **T**rainable. You do not have to have already arrived spiritually, but you must be involved in the journey of faith. Potential small group leaders need to be aware of what is expected of them. Many who would like to be involved in leadership may have to wait until they have adequate, available time. There must also be a willingness to take advantage of training opportunities and to learn from ongoing evaluations.

Small groups mean different things to different people. Those who have led a group before need to know *the way we do small groups*. To aid in this process, our small group leaders, co-leaders and apprentice leaders are expected, as much as they are able, to participate in all of the following.

- Grand Central’s small group leaders orientation seminar (Session I)
- Grand Central’s small group leaders training seminar (Session II)
- Regular VHS meetings
- Small group leaders and ministry retreats
- Weekly meeting with the small group ministry coordinator
- Special training seminars
- Filing of weekly reports
- Following up on the needs of group members

Characteristics of an Effective Small Group Leader

1. **Models and maintains a deep, _____ with Christ**
2. **Communicates in a way that _____ others for Christ**
3. _____ **to be involved in the lives of others**
4. **Seeks to _____ others’ vision and skills for _____**
5. _____ **the _____ of commitment and willingly pays the price**

1. Models and maintains a deep, personal relationship with Christ

- **Real relationship with Christ:** You recognize that “all have sinned” (Romans 3:23) and have responded in faith and obedience to God’s gracious offer of forgiveness of all your sins through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- **Portrays the love of Christ:** Your relationship with your family, friends, associates and others is characterized by the love of Christ. This is evident to both believers and non-believers.
- **Devoted to God's Word in its power for life:** You constantly strive for obedience to the commands and principles of God's Word. You are growing in your practice of the spiritual disciplines (e.g. personal Bible study, prayer, worship, and giving).

Before you can manage others, you must first manage yourself.

2. Communicates in such a way as to influence others for Christ

This should be evident in all arenas of your life. In the small group setting it means you have the ability to keep the group focused and guided toward its purpose. Let's face it. Some people are natural-born leaders. Others can learn to lead. Small groups must have someone leading them!

He who thinks he leads and has no one following him is only taking a walk.

-John Maxwell

Leaders possess the power to influence other people. Christian leaders recognize their power as God-given. As good stewards they must use it responsibly for the glory of God.

Christian leadership is different from the worlds in that it is **servant leadership**.

- under the authority of _____
- under the authority of this _____

A servant-leader recognizes God has placed him/her in a group to serve the needs of the group's members. Sometimes, this is difficult to exercise in a small group. You will need to maintain a constant balance between speaking and listening.

Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant.

-Jesus (**Matthew 20:26**)



3. Dares to become involved in the lives of others

Effective small group leaders genuinely care about others. A small group leader must have the ability and willingness to share his/her life with the other members of the group. This involvement in the lives of others should promote the development of relationships characterized by sharing and accountability. This is to be a voluntary, mutual relationship that promotes each individual's transformation into the image of Christ (Romans 12:1-2).

4. Seeks to develop others' vision and skills for leadership

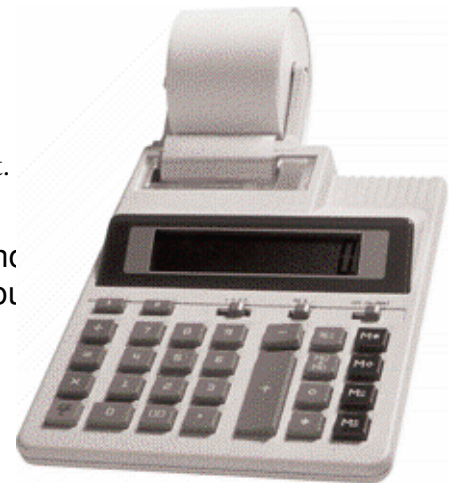
A small group must include a facilitator/leader and at least one apprentice leader. This individual is to be recruited by the small group leader with the aid of the small group coordinator. The effective leader is constantly scouting for those who display the potential for leadership. He is to model leadership, provide guidance and actively aid in the development of the apprentice's skills.

5. Counts the cost of commitment and willingly pays the price

Becoming a faithful follower of Christ has always entailed great cost. A Christian leader is called upon to count the cost of leadership before accepting a position of responsibility. Real leaders understand that the spiritual returns of leadership far outweigh its cost.

Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it?

-Jesus (Luke 14:28)



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These are some questions that a potential leader should consider before making the commitment to become a small group leader.

- Am I willing to take **responsibility** for seeing that my small group succeeds?
- Do I have the **maturity** in Christ to lead a Small Group?
- Do I have the **ability** to lead a Small Group?
- Will I commit the **time** to prepare for each small group meeting, attend our small group's meetings, and attend the leadership meetings?
- If married, is **my spouse** willing to make this commitment?

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Obstacles to Effective Leadership

- Wrong motives for leadership: self-exaltation
- A sense of inadequacy (To overcome seek training)
- Having a short fuse or exhibiting outbursts of anger
- A fear of failure, discouragement, or disappointment
- Unrealistic schedule
- Constant relational conflicts
- Constant conflicts with those in authority or unwillingness to work with other leaders
- Inability to handle a diversity of opinions within a group
- Inability to restrain from offering advice to others

**OBSTACLES
ARE THOSE
FRIGHTFUL
THINGS YOU SEE
WHEN YOU TAKE
YOUR EYES OFF
YOUR GOALS**

Good Leaders rise up on wings of EAGLES

Small group leaders realize that all Christians are called to live lives in mutual submission to one another. To maintain the quality of our small groups, each leader must be open to group evaluations. These evaluations are not to be viewed as threatening but as a tool to provide insight into the functioning of the group and to allow for each leader to grow in his/her ability to lead.



But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength;
they shall rise up on wings like eagles.

Isaiah 40:31 (KJV)

The process of evaluation encourages group leaders to renew their strength as they are constantly seeking to improve in their service to the Lord and others. The EAGLE evaluations look at the life of the group and the effectiveness of the individual leaders. The evaluations' results will be used to encourage leaders and aid them in directing their efforts to improve their small group.

The evaluations are to be made by group members, group leaders, apprentice leaders and the small group coordinator. Group evaluations should take place at the end of the first, third, sixth, twelfth, and twenty-fourth months of the group's life. Evaluations for leaders will take place in the group and in VHS meetings. The twin EAGLE's of evaluation involve:

- **Evaluating and Assessing Group Life,** (and)
- **Evaluating Group Leaders.**

The individual leaders and the coordinator will review evaluations on a regular basis.

Strong Leadership Is Key

By Shelley Castetter

From experience here are five elements in a good small group meeting:

1. Good interaction with all participants.
2. A good balance of "stronger" and "weaker" Christians
3. Trust between participants
4. Willingness to pray sincerely
5. Strong, unwavering leadership, which includes control by leadership when things get too "off-track" or move into questionable territory

The last group I was in is an excellent case in point. We were a strong prayerful group. There were a number of new Christians who were really shaky. As time went on, one of these people brought issues into the group which were of a very sinful nature. The leadership of the group would not deal with these issues directly in the group and soon the group divided down the middle. After a while, the person who brought the sin into the group became more and more out of control and the leadership continued not to address the issues. Eventually, the group was essentially destroyed. This person's life has spiraled downward and he is now institutionalized. This whole thing went on for more than a year and it was a nightmare.

What went wrong? When this person came into the group with these sins, it should have been confronted lovingly in the group and prayed about. The person should not have been indulged and ignored; this made the situation worse. He needed to know that his sin would not be tolerated, but that we were there to love, help, and guide him. People should have joined in constant prayer for this person, including times when the group was not meeting. Leadership should have taken strong control and the group should have addressed the issue as a whole since it impacted the whole group.

This issue eventually led us to leave the church we were at (the repercussions of all of this were unbelievable). We are now at another church and the small groups are much different. In the end, strong leadership is the real key to good or not so good groups.

This article adapted from a post on the Cell Church Discussion Group listserv

An advantage of small group ministry
is its development of new

The Jethro Principle

Jethro's suggestion, given to Moses as he began the task of leading God's people, is as appropriate today as it was when it was originally offered. The small group's ministry will be constantly seeking to identify, train, and encourage the development of new leaders. All small groups will be expected to have a leader and an apprentice leader. The apprentice leader is one who is receiving training while awaiting the opportunity to lead a new group. Normally this opportunity will come in two years or less.

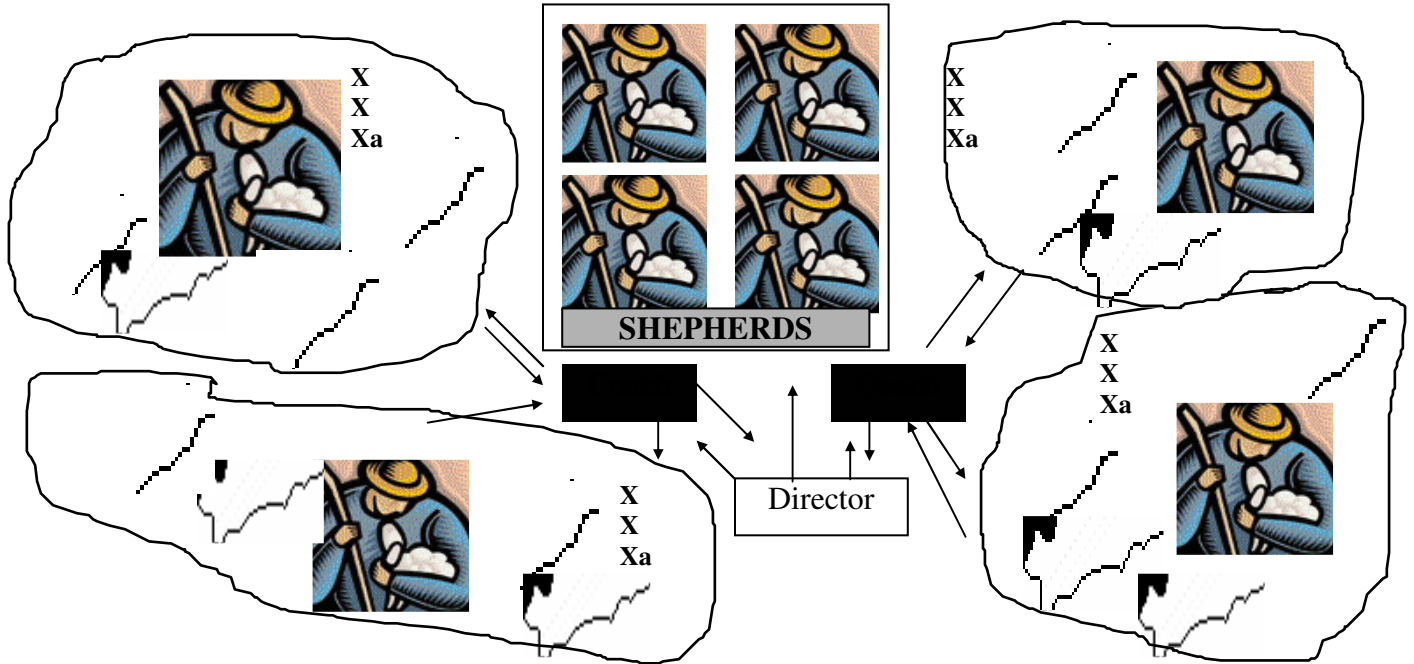
What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone. But select capable men from all the people-- men who fear God, trustworthy men... appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens."

Exodus 18:17-18, 21

In any larger group there is a need to share the responsibilities of leadership. In a church the size of the Grand Central church it is unrealistic to believe that our shepherds could personally perform all of the shepherding that is needed (nor would it be particularly biblical). Their responsibility is to see that the flock is shepherded.

Key to chart:
X- Leader of Small Group (5-14 members)
Xa- Apprentice Leader
C- Coordinator (Coach), Oversees 5-10 X's
D- Director (Staff member for Small Groups)
Shepherds- Insure shepherding takes place
Staff- Public support and involvement

For more insights on the Jethro Principle see the book:
Prepare Your Church for the Future
 by Carl F. George



Monthly V.H.S. Meetings

Each month the small group leaders, apprentice leaders, coordinators, director, and pulpit minister will meet on a Sunday evening. These VHS meetings will be a time when those involved with this ministry will receive encouragement, support, and help in developing their ability to lead.

The V.H.S. meetings have three purposes.

V

Vision: a monthly reminder of where we are going and what we are seeking to accomplish in our small group ministry. (“We haven’t arrived, but we are on our way!”)

H

Huddle: these meetings will serve as a “support group” for those who lead small groups. It is a time to share our various experiences, our joys and frustrations, and to pray for one another.

S

Skills: three or four times a year the opportunity to develop skills that leaders need (like conflict resolution, group evaluation, leading a discussion) will be provided.