

CELL GROUPS THAT WELCOME PEOPLE

“Every committed member was once a first time visitor that decided to stay.” Church Consultant Robert (Bob) Orr

A. Introduction

In chapter one and two we introduced you to cell groups and their growth and development. The rest of this manual is focused on practical skills for leading a cell group.

Using any new tool seems uncomfortable and unnatural at first. Listening to those who are skilled in the use of a tool, combined with practice, will ensure you also become skillful.

We will cover many practical aspects of group life (*Tools*) over the next chapters. Some of these will seem uncomfortable to you or unnatural to your personality. But determine to master them.

Understanding and practicing group skills will give a new leader a head start in effectively leading a cell group.

KEY

 Experience yourself

✓ Important note

 Illustration

Learn these skills

Practice them

**Be willing to be coached by an experienced leader
and you will become a successful cell group leader.**



I started my working life as an apprentice for a telephone company. I remember sitting down to begin joining my first telephone cable. I needed to twist two wires together, strip the insulation and hold the bare copper ends with a small pair of side-cutters. Apparently at the same time I was expected to spin the side-cutters until the bare wires were neatly twisted together.

I thought I was doing OK till the foreman showed me the “correct” way to hold and spin side-cutters. His way felt awkward and uncomfortable, but as I practiced (a lot) I became faster and the joints I created looked better.

B. Group Relational Dynamic.



Each member contributes their unique communication style, personality, gifts and needs to the group. This contribution from each member creates the *relational dynamic*. This is why no two groups are ever the same.

In a new group some members may know each other from a previous group. They will soon discover that their familiar relationship will have a different dynamic in the context of the new group

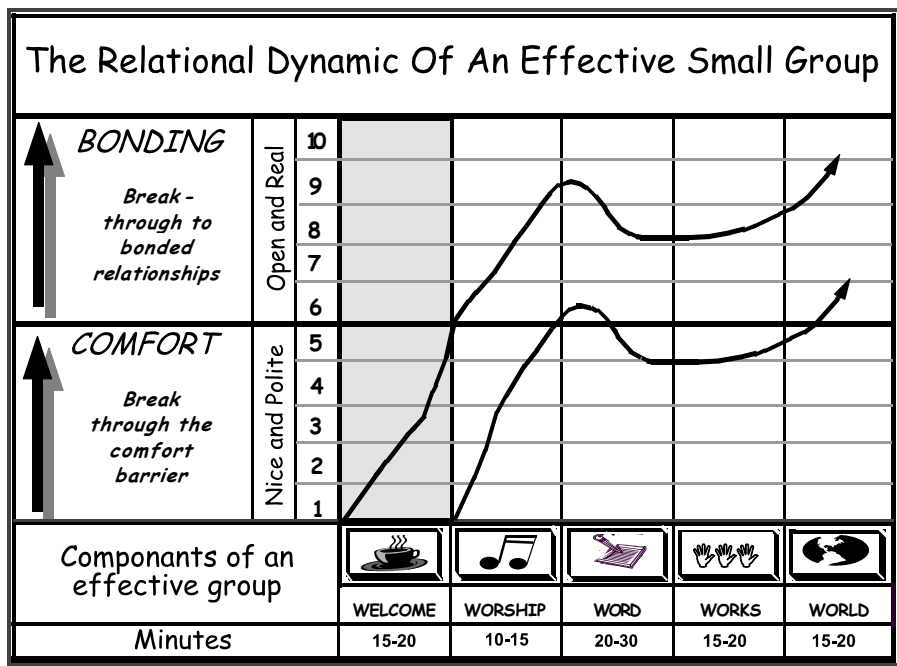
**Understanding social dynamic
will help build your group.**

C. The Welcome Time

(20-30 minutes)

The welcome time is not an optional extra. It is an essential part of helping people re-establish the group relationship. It is an important part of welcoming visitors.

The graph below shows what happens to the relational dynamic of the group when the welcome is neglected.



©1998 John B N Barton. Adapted from a graph by Eugene Seow, Faith Community Baptist Church, Singapore.

The two parts of Welcome



- Coffee and chat
- The Ice Breaker

The Welcome time at the beginning of each gathering helps people get acquainted or reacquainted. You began to see others in the group as individuals, each with their own life story to tell.



During the first weeks of this course you will notice the atmosphere becoming friendlier and more intimate. The only thing that is different from the first evening is the growing relationship you are building with others in the group.



Coffee and Chat.

There are four good reasons to have coffee and cookies (*Australians call this supper*) at the beginning of your cell group gathering.

A. Social custom.

Every culture has normal social rules that are followed when you want to welcome a visitor. In Australia (*and many other nations*) a welcome visitor is offered coffee, tea or a cold drink soon after they enter the home.

If a visitor is not welcome (i.e. A sales person) they may not always be offered a drink. We need to ensure that visitors to our cell groups feel like welcomed guests.

B. Comfort of visitors.

Visitors will feel more comfortable with a cup in their hand. They can choose to interact with the group, or withdraw (*take a sip of their drink*) whenever they choose.

C. Allows time for the group to connect.

Group members have all had a busy day. Take time to allow people to unwind from the pressures of the day and begin to connect with the group.

D. Real life challenges are shared.

"...out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks." Matthew 12:34.

If a group member is facing challenges in life, they will normally speak about it to friends over coffee. The real prayer needs of the group are often revealed over coffee.

The Ice Breaker

- While it's not a game, it can be fun.
- It is an activity to help people share something simple about them, or accomplish something simple with others.
- It's OK for Ice Breakers to be superficial.
- They bring people focus and start simple group interaction.

Many Australians never talk about their inner thoughts, dreams or feelings with another person.

Simple Ice Breaker activities and questions help to teach people to talk about themselves, see others as individuals and appreciate that we come from different backgrounds.



Always use Ice Breakers

Using Ice Breakers

Ice Breaker Questions should not dig too deep or be too personal. This is especially important in new groups or when you have a guest.

The leader should answer the question first. This shows the group the appropriate level to share at, and how much time to take. The next person in the circle can then share.

The Friendship Questions¹

The Friendship Questions are to be used at the start of every new group.

Use this ice breaker at the beginning of every new group or when you get an influx of new members.

1. **Where did you live between the ages of 7 & 12 and how many brothers and sisters did you have?**
2. **What kind of transport did your family use?**
3. **Who was the person you felt closest to during that time?**
4. **When did God become more than just a word to you?**

Let everyone to share the answer to one question at a time. When everyone has shared (*moving around the circle*) you can then ask a second question.

Sample Ice Breakers

- What's the best thing that has happened to you this week?
- What is your favorite color and why?
- The best thing that every happened to me was...?
- If you could not fail what would you like to do?
- Who was the teacher at school who positively influenced you the most?

¹ The Shepherds Training Manual, ©1993 by Faith Community Baptist Church, Singapore.

D. VISITORS

Every committed group member was once a first time visitor who decided to stay.

People may come to your group through a variety of means.

1. Visitors to worship services who have requested contact.
2. Friends of group members.
3. New Believers referred to you by the church office,
4. Someone who has found your contact number on a 'Cell Group' information list.



Visitors Who Are Referred To You

The day following their visit is the best time to follow up a new person.

It has been said to me that there is...
80% likelihood of interest the day after the visit
65-70% likelihood interest two days after the visit.
40% likelihood of interest will drop sharply after three days.



It has been proven that a lay leader in a church is more successful in following up visitors than paid staff. My guess is that visitors think that staff are paid to say nice things about their church, but a lay leader is more believable.

If a visitor to a worship service has been referred to you, please make this contact a priority for your group.



- Phone the person and invite them to your next gathering.
- A group member could perhaps drop over some baking and extend a welcome to the church/area.
- You, your apprentice or a group member could invite the person for a meal i.e. Sunday lunch
(This is a good opportunity for the apprentice to begin to bond with new people).
- Visit them in their home with your spouse or apprentice.
- Assign a member of your group to take a special interest in them.

Contacts through a Cell Group Information List.

For someone who has never met you to phone and want to come to your group is an act of faith. It shows that they are very keen to be involved in a cell group.

Warmly invite this person to your next gathering and/or for a meal.

Visit to meet the person and share about your cell group. This is a good opportunity to take your apprentice with you.

Assign a member of your group to take special interest in them.

Welcoming Visitors

We have all experienced the uncomfortable feeling of being the new person in a group. We must ensure that the whole group welcomes the visitor.

- It's a good idea to regularly remind group members what to do when a visitor comes.
- Remind members to not use Christian jargon and having all the answers during discussion times.
- It's a good idea to limit answers to any discussion questions to things you have experienced and practice in your own life. (*sharing "right answers" that you don't live is to be strongly discouraged*)



Helpful Hints for Phoning Contacts.



- Introduce yourself
- Explain why you have rung
- Warmly welcome them to the area/church
- Invite them to your next gathering or make a time to drop in and meet them
(*offering a few possible appointment times is helpful*)
- Most of all SMILE



Experience for yourself

Pair off with someone you didn't come with and take turns talking to your partner with your back to them.

Speak with and without a smile and see if your partner can tell the difference.

Remember a SMILE can be seen over the phone

Visiting a Home



- Make an appointment first.
- Don't stay too long.
- Warmly welcome them to church or the area
- Invite them to your next gathering.
- Try to answer any questions they have about the Church or your group. Share the goals and purpose of cell groups with those interested in joining your group.
- Let them tell their story.

Cell Groups Are For Life

- Take something to give whenever possible. i.e. flowers, baking, chocolates or fruit.
- Before you leave offer to pray. Pray for any needs they may have mentioned. Ask God's blessing on them and their home.

**After visiting a person referred by the Church,
please report the outcome.**

The Role of the Host/Hostess¹

1. Meet people at the door and welcome them.
2. Be genuinely interested in each guest; welcome them with a friendly smile.
3. Set up simple refreshments *before* the gathering time in order to greet the guests.
4. Arrange chairs in cooperation with the leader.
5. Introduce guests to others in the group. You have a major role in setting an atmosphere of love and acceptance.
6. Wait until guests have left before cleaning up and rearranging furniture.

Helpful Hints

It is important to try and have group activities completed by 9:00-9:30pm at the latest. This allows members who start work early to get home at a reasonable time.

¹ Adapted from Dr Ralph W. Neighbour, Jr.

- Start and finish on time
- By 9.30pm everyone should have vacated the host home



I have visited groups who were having such a good time that they all stayed really late.

While this may happen occasionally please don't make it a habit.

Group members may have had good time but next week when it's time to go to their cell group they think... "I'm a bit tired tonight and I've got an early start at work"...and then they don't come.

- You may need to digress from the cell group program occasionally, but this should only be *occasionally*.
- There should be some form of contribution towards refreshment expenses i.e. Milk, tea, coffee, sugar and cookies. *(This is not necessary if group members take turns in hosting the group)*

Monthly Social and Reach-Out Events

During social or reach-out events, leaders need to mix with the whole group. Try not to let your time be monopolized by one person. You can learn a lot about prospective group members and their needs during these important times.

Each month your group hosts a social and/or reach-out event. i.e. BBQ, ten pin bowling, swimming, picnic, special meal, bush walk, special holiday event, birthday, neighborhood activity, kids fun event etc.

Cell Groups Are For Life

These events are great fun for the group and an excellent opportunity to invite neighbors, friends from work, students or the unchurched spouse of group members.

Remember to really pray for those you are going to invite (*prayer triplets etc*). Prayer makes a real difference to the effectiveness of these events.

Social events should always be used as opportunities to invite new people into the life of the group.

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