



Yes! You Are Qualified to Lead a Small Group

Three basic requirements for small-group leaders

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Since healthy small-group leadership is so strategic in the life of a church, no one wants to end up in a laissez-faire style group led by an unprepared leader. It's such a wasted opportunity! If you are directing a small-group ministry, you want to create an atmosphere where people recognize that it is a privilege to be asked to lead. Unfortunately, many potential small-group leaders don't believe they're qualified.

In anticipation of this response, it is helpful to look at basic requirements for being a small-group leader. No seminary degrees necessary here!

1. Involved church member

Church membership (or something equivalent) is many times the first requirement. In some cases, agreement with the statement of faith is sufficient. In my experience at our church where fifty percent of the congregation transitions at least every two years, many experienced and gifted small-group leaders don't become members for their short period of time in the area. Through interviews, testimonies, and getting to know an individual, we decide whether we feel confident in inviting the person into leadership.

Secondly, any potential small-group leader should have experience as a participant in a small group. When a person expresses an interest in small-group leadership, I want to hear about their small-group experiences in the past. If a potential leader has not experienced a small group, it is always wise to suggest joining a group as a participant before pursuing the leadership role.

2. Understands biblical principles and desires to grow and learn

Each leader must have a good grasp of the Gospel message. Finding time on a daily basis to read and reflect on God's Word is essential. As leaders, we look to grow spiritually along with our group. Seeking God's will through personal prayer and study is critical for the journey to spiritual maturity. Being a humble, caring, relational person, with the desire to grow spiritually and in service to others, is a mark of biblical leadership.

Part of the growing and learning process is recognizing and accepting our strengths and weaknesses. Remember Moses' situation as he tried to hear and solve everyone's problems. God uses each of us in our diversity. Through various God-given gifts or acquired skills, we can minister in different ways. Knowing where we are strong allows us to excel in particular areas. It

doesn't mean we do everything ourselves; instead, delegation, modeling, and encouragement are essential for leader development.

Knowing our weaknesses prevents us from trying to do everything ourselves. It is far wiser to delegate responsibilities to others who seem to be more efficient in particular areas. We cannot do all and be all as leaders of a small group, and it isn't healthy to try. The excitement of diversity reinforces the fact that we are part of the body of Christ, each one contributing to the small-group experience. Strive to be a servant leader and to know your strengths and weakness.

3. Understands the commitment

If a potential leader is participating in several ministries and leading a small group is just one more thing to do, he or she will need to stop and carefully evaluate whether the time is right to take on small-group leadership. You may suggest a potential leader seek spiritual discernment by praying through his or her schedule. When people do enter into small-group leadership, they must clear space in their schedules to be the caring shepherds their small-group members need.

Small-group leaders become strategic in the community life, and, therefore, the spiritual growth of the church. It's a huge privilege and responsibility that results in mixed emotions including great excitement, joy, frustration, anxiety, and empowerment. It is important that leaders understand the commitment they are making. They are responsible for planning the meetings, preparing the lessons, and (very critical to the health and purpose of the group) caring for those who attend.

Leaders also need to know to whom they are responsible. Be sure potential leaders know who they will need to check in with, and that they must be team players. Additionally, leaders are responsible to God for what he is entrusting to them. It's a good reminder that we do everything to glorify Him, not ourselves. We do this in his power and for his sake.

Remind leaders, too, that their commitment will involve additional meetings for encouragement and accountability. Explain that these are important coaching and learning times and should not be ignored. They will also need to commit to personal spiritual growth as they model Christ to their group members. Through prayer, personal study, and preparation, group leaders will show their excitement for God's Word.

A Few Reminders

In building a caring spiritual community, three things are essential: knowing and being known, loving and being loved, and serving and being served. Leaders must identify with group members and be one of them as they journey together in spiritual renewal. Leaders should also be able to ask for help when they need it, be able to say "I don't know," be good listeners, be available, and be open to continually learn new skills for leading and preparing with excellence. Even so, we can learn all the skills necessary for leading a group, but if we don't lead with authentic Christian character, our influence in leading others in God's agenda, to be imitators of God, becomes ineffective.

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