

The Time is Now: You've Got to Identify New Leaders

Part 1 of a 3-part series on Identifying, Inviting, and Investing in New Leaders

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Now more than ever, we need more people to step up and accept the challenge to facilitate and lead small groups. With the CDC recommending smaller gatherings, we want to help you actively pursue these yet-to-be-called leaders.

So, what should you be looking for?

First, look for the usual suspects.

In our study that led to our forthcoming book *Leading Small Groups That Thrive*, groups pastors identified these top five qualifications for small group leaders:

1. *Personal integrity*— a consistent and uncompromising adherence to biblical, moral, and ethical values.
2. *Teachability*— a willingness to continually learn and refine skill sets.
3. *Personal spiritual maturity*— the ongoing pursuit of God and Christlikeness.
4. *Availability*— freedom to engage because of time and mental and physical resources.
5. *Transparency*— thoughts, feelings, and motives that are easily perceived by others.

As you think about people in your circle, who exhibits these traits?

Second, look for people who have been great group members themselves.

In that same study, the leaders of the most effective groups look for the following kinds of group members when they think about sharing leadership. They went to recruit for greater leadership members who:

1. Regularly participated in discussions and looked for life applications in discussions.
2. Willingly and honestly spoke about their struggles.
3. Fully engaged in the group and leaned into their own growth.

4. Expressed a willingness to serve.
5. Demonstrated their commitment to care for other group members.

Who are the great group members in your midst? Perhaps it's time to tap them on the shoulder and ask them to lead a group of their own.

Third, notice natural gatherers.

You know a natural gatherer when you see one; they're the people other people flock to or gravitate toward. You can see people respond positively to their invitation to connect.

They know how to gather and connect with other people. So, who around you is a natural gatherer?

Fourth, consider people who aren't already plugged into a group.

There are some folks who would be great group leaders who are not in a group. In fact, quite a few of the group leaders we surveyed indicated they led a group without having any other previous group experience.

Who do you know who is not currently plugged into a group but exhibits the characteristics noted above?

Lastly, be careful about people who perhaps are too eager to lead.

Ever found yourself in that awkward situation when people who really want to be leaders don't exhibit the traits above? We encourage you to do the following with these folks:

1. Have an honest conversation with them. Affirm their desire. The desire to lead is a noble one. Kindly, graciously, and honestly share with them what you see.
2. Work with them to help them grow in areas of insecurity and weakness.
3. Give them small roles in which they can demonstrate leadership, and coach them as they do.

Your willingness to engage a loving but candid conversation just might be the nudge they need to take their own growth seriously and devote time and attention to it.

So, look around you and see who God brings to your heart and mind. And then, think about how you might tap their shoulder, and invite them into greater leadership. Our next article will give insights on how to do that well.

Identify, Then Invite: Giving Potential Leaders Opportunity

Part 2 of a 3-part series on Identifying, Inviting, and Investing in New Leaders

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Let's say you've identified some potential new small group leaders and gotten excited about moving forward with them on board. Now what? There is great power in being asked. This is what Jesus did with the disciples—and it's what you can do with others. Certainly, there's an art to inviting potential group leaders into more engagement, but don't overthink the obvious: just extending an invitation makes a profound impact. Chances are good you have a number of potential group leaders waiting to be invited or who would be honored to be invited into more leadership in this season.

Here are several ideas about how to invite potential leaders to join you in leading groups:

First, affirm specific giftings you see in others.

The process of raising up new leaders is often begun simply by edifying others. One leader in our study shared that there wasn't a particular moment, but rather many small discussions over weeks and months where he affirmed one couple's gift of hospitality. "Generally, when I edify their gifts, they usually come back and kind of pitch the idea of taking

something on. And I'll ask, 'What could that look like for you?' which often includes them telling me about their timing, their fears, and other things they've been thinking about."

Consider inviting someone to lunch or coffee, then sharing what you see in them and your vision for their next step in leadership. There's something special about being called out and told what someone sees in you—especially when it is positive. Take the time and energy to affirm others' giftings and strengths to start the process of inviting.

Second, invite potential leaders to try out leadership.

In almost every existing group, there's someone waiting in the wings, just waiting for an invitation to step forward. Ask those folks to lead a part of your programs and gatherings before the next small group session begins. Ask potential leaders to lead prayer on a Zoom call, facilitate a sermon discussion, or help to coordinate your late summer gatherings. Help them understand that leadership isn't a title, but an action. Then, allow them room for error and growth as they test their wings. Giving potential leaders bite-size portions of leadership both encourages and equips them for more leadership in the future.

Third, invite potential leaders to help you develop a compelling direction for your next session of small groups. Involving others in clarifying the direction of your ministry can reap huge rewards, as it creates buy-in and ownership. Ask potential leaders to chime in on what your people and groups need and what you should do next as a ministry. Inviting people to speak into the direction and approach of your groups this fall is a great way for them to engage and step further into leadership.

Fourth, recognize your limitations as a ministry, and invite potential leaders to help you overcome them. Asking for help is a great leadership trait. Communicating your limitations creates space for potential leaders to step into that gap. As a result, your ministry will be better off, and you'll feel less pressure to succeed even in your weak spots.

Potential leaders have fresh eyes to see what is working and what is missing. Engage some casual conversation with current members who have leadership potential about what your groups ministry is doing well and what needs change or innovation. Current leaders may not see these things as clearly, but current members who are potential leaders can identify gaps and then may be more willing to step into them. They can immediately contribute and expand the breadth and/or depth of your ministry through your recognition of the ministry's limitations.

Finally, ensure that you want leadership *for* your new leaders, and not just *from* them. No matter what strategies you use to invite new people into leadership, make sure your heart is in the right place. Recruiting and raising up new leaders isn't about you or reducing your workload. Instead, it's about recognizing and equipping potential leaders to step further into their unique callings, expand their influence, and be used to further God's kingdom. In short, want leadership *for* them, not just *from* them.

Once you have invited individuals to step into more leadership, your next move is to invest in those who respond to your invitation to leadership.

Our next and final article in this 3-article series will expand on the final step of the process: *Invest*.

Invest: Pouring into Emerging Leaders

Part 3 of a 3-part series on Identifying, Inviting, and Investing in New Leader

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Now that you've identified and invited potential candidates to engage and develop their leadership, your next step is to intentionally invest in them. It's time to make the dream a reality.

Here are some ideas:

First, invest individually as a mentor and/or discipler.

Sadly, our research indicated that fewer than 50% of group members are being actively disciplined. Imagine the potential for spiritual growth and development that could occur if you poured your life into a few people! If you are leading a group, take the extra time to personally disciple potential leaders. And if you're leading a ministry, spend consistent time, perhaps even weekly, with those you've identified with greater leadership potential, helping them develop spiritual habits and provide a safe place for them to practice disciple-making behaviors.

Second, invite potential leaders with you to your church leadership development events, and get your potential leaders signed up for your email and video leadership development.

Doing so will serve an acculturation function by helping these future leaders learn what group leadership entails and give them a head start on cultivating the necessary skills they'll need to lead an effective group. Here are a few places to start:

1. Encourage your potential leaders to sign up for weekly leadership email resources.
2. Add your potential leaders to your small group leaders email list. Then, send them a special note to welcome them to the list and explain why you've added them to your list.
3. Invite and welcome them to your fall small groups kickoff or leadership event.

Third, draw emerging leaders into leadership functions in your existing groups.

Consider what new leaders can take on, then give it to them, and coach along the way. The five steps laid out by Dave Ferguson and Warren Bird in *Hero Maker* offer a fantastic guide to help what they call an "apprentice leader" progress from observing to helping to owning more and more leadership in the group:

1. **I do. You watch. We talk.** Apprentice leaders pay attention to how the leader leads, then they get together to debrief. What worked? What didn't? How can group meetings get better?
2. **I do. You help. We talk.** The apprentice leads particular tasks, such as prayer time or an icebreaker, then debriefs with the leader. The leader can ask the same kinds of questions as before, but also ask how the apprentice felt taking that step of leadership.
3. **You do. I help. We talk.** At this point, the apprentice's portion of leadership crosses the 50% threshold, and he or she takes on more than the initial leader. Since the apprentice has seen it done many times before, he's ready for the additional leadership. Once again, the apprentice and leader debrief and talk about where the apprentice excelled and how he or she can continually improve.
4. **You do. I watch. We talk.** The temptation here for the original leader is to take off and leave the group in the hands of the new leader. Resist that urge. The apprentice leads, the mentor observes and coaches. Then, they talk about whether the apprentice wants to take over the current group or start a new one, and what the original leader will now do.
5. **You do. Someone else watches.** The process of leadership development comes full circle. The apprentice now seeks an apprentice for themselves, and the process repeats itself. The mentor continues to coach and support and raises up additional apprentices. This process begins to unleash the exponential nature of leadership investment.

Finally, laser focus your biggest commodity, time.

Your biggest leadership impact is choosing a few individuals from within your group and spending more time with them outside your group gatherings with the sole intent of helping them recognize their leadership. Don't overthink this but think about how to best utilize your time. Here are three quick suggestions

1. **Invest in a weekly gathering.** Focus this time on helping your leaders develop their spiritual habits of word intake, prayer intake, being on

mission with neighbors, and strategic conversations about genuine evangelism

2. **Invest in a daily interaction.** Figure out the best ways to daily connect with your leaders. If you miss a day, no worries. Just keep texting, calling, emailing, and finding ways to interact with your leaders.
3. **Invest in moment-by-moment prayer.** Whenever and however you do this, praying consistently for your leaders is more powerful than you think. That's it. IDENTIFY INVITE INVEST. These are the three "I's" for raising up new leaders.

A few final tips. This is a process that can and should be replicated many times over. Often, placing tentative deadlines on your calendar for moving forward with each of these steps will provide the necessary accountability to get started. So, go ahead, identify, invite, and begin investing in potential leaders—and you will continue to expand and sustain the influence you have as a leader.