

Two Thanksgiving Icebreakers

1. Many Thanks

A creative twist on the traditional Thanksgiving question
by [Tami Rudkin](#) | posted 11/12/2005

Ask each group member the following question, filling in the blank with a different word (provided below) for each person as you go around the circle.

"When it comes to your _____ what is one thing you are thankful for?"

- spouse
- extended family
- church
- community
- neighbors
- small group
- job
- parents
- education

2. Thankful Thoughts

Group members receive a tangible expression of thanks from the rest of the group.
by [Tami Rudkin](#) | posted 11/12/2005

Give each person a piece of paper and have them write their first names in big letters at the top of the page. Then, have them pass the paper to the person on their right. Ask group members to write a word of thanks to the person whose name is on the paper. For example: "Jen, thank you for always being here on time," or, "Jason, thank you for praying for me on a regular basis."

After a minute or two, have each person pass the paper to the next group member on their right, and continue until each person gets their own paper back. At this point, group members can read them out loud or tuck them away to experience privately.

The Top 10 Mistakes Small-Group Leaders Make (Part 1)

Learn how to avoid and overcome them for the benefit of your group.

Randall Neighbour | posted 9/06/2010

Let me begin with a confession: I am the most qualified person to write this article, because I am guilty of every mistake covered here. If you don't believe me, ask my wife! Seriously, the mistakes I have made through the years help me see gaps in my spiritual walk and skill as a leader. Instead of trampling my self-esteem with guilt, I use mistakes as learning experiences. If I don't repeat them, I have learned something more valuable than any training class can offer.

Here's what I see as my primary task as a small-group leader: to help my group reach the lost and raise up new leaders, expanding the works of God's people. When this doesn't happen consistently, I know I'm making mistakes that will kill my group. That may sound overly dramatic to you, but it's painfully true. Small groups die all the time and it's usually due to one or more of the reasons discussed below.

Some time ago I asked 500 small-group leaders these three questions:

1. What's the biggest mistake you've made as a small-group leader?
2. How did you correct the problem or avoid making it a second time?
3. What have you learned from the experience, or how has it changed your leadership style?

Those who responded were very honest, and it took guts. Their answers have been condensed into the following list of ten—these are real mistakes made by real people, with real lessons learned. This list is by no means complete, but it touches on key issues that will make or break your ministry as a small-group leader.

1. "I operated passively without goals."

Leaders who "follow their nose" never gain any ground reaching the lost or developing leaders. They wander aimlessly without a plan of action to storm the gates of hell and set captives free. But as I visit with successful small-group leaders around the world, they all have common goals of reaching X number of people for Christ by a certain date and raising up enough leaders to pastor the new believers in new groups. This drives the leaders to invest time with their members, unsaved friends, and relatives attached to the group. The responsibility of meeting the goal is not completely shouldered by the leader, but he or she owns the goal and sets the example for the rest of the group.

These leaders are also accountable to their church leadership. Each week, they eagerly meet with their pastor or coach to find ways to meet or exceed the stated goal.

So, if you want to succeed as a leader, set realistic growth goals. Submit your goals to your leadership so you can be held accountable. Then get to work meeting those goals, removing all obstacles that get in your way. Remember: "Run as to win the prize."

2. "I released an untrained apprentice."

Years ago, I watched a small-group leader multiply his group and give half his members to his apprentice. As the weeks passed, I watched the new leader struggle in her role, losing member after member. They didn't feel loved by her, and she didn't know how to love them with servanthood. The original leader's mistake stemmed from not giving the responsibility of the original group to his apprentice *months* before the multiplication date. Although she facilitated the meeting a dozen times, she had very little servanthood experience. What she lacked was the daily interaction between a leader and members that refines the leader and builds a new team.

If you're not transferring an increasing amount of leadership responsibility to your apprentice, you're setting them up for defeat. You'll also wound group members you dearly love when they multiply off with this new leader. Give your apprentice the reins of leadership a little at a time over the course of six months, and then back off and let them be the "senior leader." Your role then will be one of a consultant, and if you've trained them well, you will experience some rest as they lead the members.

The best way to view your apprentice is to see and treat them like a real small-group leader. Challenge them to serve the group members between meetings. Help them set up ministry visits to pray for members in their homes and join them. Spend an hour a week (or more) on your knees in prayer with them for the needs of the group. There's not much in leadership development that has to do with facilitating meetings. It's all about developing a servant's heart for others.

3. "I was leading as if I were the senior pastor."

The role of the small-group leader is often mistaken to be more than it should be. If you're making this mistake, the indicators are clear: You are worn out because you have taken on the whole load of pastoral care for each member. Your pastoral staff doesn't know what's going on with your members because they only hear about problems when it's too late to be supportive. You're riddled with guilt because you work a full-time job or raise a house full of kids and you just can't be a full-time minister.

Did that about cover how you feel right now? The best way to correct this mistake is to clearly understand your role. You are a faithful *under-shepherd*, caring for someone else's sheep. If they get sick or are attacked by wolves in the field, you help them to the best of your ability—and then you get help. The sheep entrusted to you do not belong to you, so you are obligated to find the senior shepherd (your pastor) or the ranch hand (your coach), who are both there to help. This news should set you free! Your role is to encourage, minister to, and love your members unconditionally. You're a vital part of the care-giving system of your church—not the whole system!

If you've been acting like the senior pastor, the best way to correct the problem is to ask your group and your pastoral staff to forgive you. Ask them to hold you accountable for a balanced ministry and take some of the load you're leaving behind. Small-group leadership should be a joy, not a burden.

4. "I pastored the wrong people."

There are four kinds of Christians with whom you will come into contact in your small group: 1) Your group members, 2) Somebody else's group members, 3) Church friends who refuse to join your group, and 4) Other church's members who show up at your meetings.

Shepherding the last three will not build your group and make it strong. When a group member from another group approaches me with a complaint about their group or leader, I do not take ownership of the problem. Assisting a runaway is an offense punishable by law! I promptly see them home; I don't let them wander off. If the issue can't be worked out in the group in which they are a member, he or she should visit with the coach or pastor above the group, not with other group leaders in the church.

When my church friends want the *benefits* of group life—counseling, ministry and support, just to name a few—but are unwilling to join a group, I am unable to give them much of my time. If they want a deeper relationship with me, I invite them to join my group! This way, we can minister to one another and they can catch the vision for living in community. The same thing applies for believers who want to join my small group and maintain a church membership elsewhere. If they want the benefits of biblical community my group offers, they should be giving my church (and my group members) 110 percent of their time and energy. This includes attending our weekend services, daily involvement in my group member's lives, reaching people for Christ the group has befriended, and discipling members or being disciplined by a member of the group.

5. "I made community the highest goal of my group."

This mistake is tough. It seems so right when you're doing it! And when the group fizzles, no one understands why. Small groups that focus on community, fellowship, and intimacy as the ultimate goal rarely see new believers in the group. God gave us community for a reason that transcends the "little corner of heaven" created in group life. If your group does not harness the power of biblical community to build the kingdom with new believers and new leaders, it will slowly die.

The best way to avoid this mistake is to pray for the lost in every small-group meeting. Also, schedule a time to meet and hang out with your member's lost friends and family. Make a personal goal to help your members help these loved ones find Christ and join your loving community. If you're stuck in the community phase of group life, you must show your members this is what the victorious Christian life is all about! When your members catch a fire for reaching the lost, they will finally understand why community is so important and why it was created.

Reminder: Read the rest of the Top 10 mistakes in [Part 2](#) of this article. —Randall Neighbour is author of [The Naked Truth About Small Group Ministry](#) (TOUCH, 2009). Article excerpted with permission from www.RandallNeighbour.com.