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How to be a People-Reaching Group

By Dave Earley

From the *Pocket Guide to Leading a Small Group*

Any small group that possesses a passion for reaching people for Christ will be successful if they follow a few basic practices. For example, the group my family led for a few years started with a handful of youth and eventually grew to over 50 high school students meeting in one house (in six groups) and another fifteen students meeting at a second home. The best thing about this is that over twenty unchurched young people found Jesus as a result of our small groups. It was one of the most fulfilling and fun groups I ever led.

In the years since that time, I have stuck to these basic practices with every small group I've lead and coached, including many adult groups. You might be thinking it grew because members of the group were students, but that's not the case. We were effective because we intentionally practiced ten keys that allowed us to reach people for Christ.

The fringe benefit is that the students who helped lead the group grew as a result.

1. Faith

We believed that God wanted people saved more than we did. Therefore, all we had to do was cooperate with Him. We developed a strong expectation that if we invited people, they would come. We also decided that if we shared the gospel, they would respond. Of course, not every member of the group did these things, but enough responded to cause us to believe that God honored our efforts.

2. Prayer

Evangelism is a spiritual war that is best fought on one's knees. As long as we were *consistently* praying that God would save souls, He did! Before events where the gospel was to be presented, we intensified our prayers and God always granted a harvest.

3. Love

Evangelism is a relational process involving three successive victories: First, we won people to ourselves. Second, we won people to our group. Third, we won people to Christ. Lots of believers wonder why they cannot win people to Christ and it's because they don't win them as a true friend first.

4. Invitation

If you invite them, they might come. But if you don't invite them, they'll probably never come. Unsaved people rarely just drop into a group on their own. A vast majority of the time, one or more members of the group made the effort to invite them.

5. T.E.A.M. (Together Everyone Accomplishes More)

It's corny, but true! Periodically, we would ask various group members to share how they came to our group. With only a few exceptions, each person shared how they were invited by *four or five group members* before they decided to give it a try.

6. Gospel

Never underestimate the power of the gospel. Every four to six weeks we would share the story of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus for our sins. We would also share that you can be saved by admitting your sins, believing on Christ for salvation, calling on his name to save you, and committing your life to him. Without exception, people responded.

7. Process

Evangelism is a process leading to an event. Few people are ready to give their lives to God the first time they are invited to group. I taught my small group members to be patient, helping them understand it takes weeks, months, and even years of inviting, praying, loving, and hearing the Word before the soil is ready to yield a harvest.

8. Party

Never underestimate the power of a party to draw a crowd! Every two months, we planned social gatherings. Amongst ourselves we jokingly called them “sinner dinners.” We found that we could double our attendance and get non-churched students to come to our house if the kids invited them to a “party.” We have found if we have a theme (“Squirt Gun Wars,” “I Hate Winter,” “Halloween Bonfire,” and “Fifties Night” are always hits), grill some hot dogs, and play a few corny games, we’ll have a crowd. They will have a blast and will listen intently to a few of their friends share their story of how they came to a personal relationship with Jesus. We have had as many as eighty-nine kids show up and as many as a dozen make salvation decisions for Christ—all because we had a party. Adults enjoy parties too. You’d be surprised how many of your group’s friends will come to a game night or get together to watch a movie. Just remember that guests love to contribute, so ask them to bring something tasty with them and they’ll instantly feel at home at the gathering.

9. Testimony

One of the easiest ways to gain attention, sustain interest, and preach the gospel without being “preachy” in your small group meetings is to have someone share how they came to Christ. It is wise to have a testimony that somewhat mirrors the people you hope to reach. For example, if you are inviting unsaved husbands to your group have a former unsaved husband share how he came to Christ.

10. Celebration

In Luke 15, we find three stories of some lost being found—a lost sheep (vv. 1-7), a lost coin (vv. 8-10), and a lost son (vv. 11-31). In each case, the event was marked by a celebration. Maybe God would give us more opportunities to win the lost if we truly rejoiced when one was found. In my small groups, the celebration was as simple as cheering for and hugging the new believer or as big as a full-blown party. How you celebrate is not as important as the fact that you celebrate.

Action Point:

Pick a few of these practices to become a people-reaching group. Then start incorporating them into your group until people are consistently coming to Christ.