

SKILL 7: HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR GROUP DYNAMICS

1. Improve group dynamics by increasing group connectedness, unity, and relationships thru:

- Play together: Fun social activities; play sports together; do a mystery dinner together
- Spend time together: Invite ones over for dinner; go out with another couple for dinner and movie; go to park; go to concert; watch a video and pizza together
- Pray together.
- Worship together: Sing song or listen to music together in group; attend weekend service together and sit together; take communion together
- Work together: Do a missions or community service project together; help each other with home projects; serve together at church
- Care for one another: Call and wish ones happy birthday or anniversary or child's birthday; go visit one in hospital; take meal over for one who just lost a loved one, etc.

Some suggestions for Relationship Building Exercises:

He is Able Celebration: have each member bring a physical item that represents how God has proven Himself to them in their life experience and share their story

Remember When: Tell your "remember when" stories like: remember when first came in contact with Christian, church, Christ, faith crisis

Two Truths and One Lie: each member writes down on piece of paper two truths about themselves and one lie. Then have each read theirs and group must guess which one is lie and person must explain. Variation: place papers in hats and not only guess the lie but which person it is.

What I like about you: Have each person write what they admire, appreciate, or like about everyone else in the group. Pass these to each member and allow them to read on their own time for encouragement.

Boomerang: write down several questions like: "What was your most embarrassing moment?"; "What's your most favorite memory and why?"; "Have you ever been caught speeding and did you get off?"; "If you won a million dollars what would be the first thing that you would spend on yourself and why?"; etc. Make sure there are at least two to three times as many questions as there are people. Also write on pieces of paper "Pass to Right"; "Pass to Left" and "Boomerang" and place them all in a hat. Pass the hat in a circle until everyone has drawn all the pieces of papers out of hat. First designated person can direct the drawn question to anyone. Everyone has a right to "pass" on any question they feel too embarrassed to answer. If you pulled a "Pass to Right"; "Pass to Left" and "Boomerang", you can use it or choose to answer the question and save them for later questions. Go around until all questions have been asked.

Who am I? During the week before your meeting collect one unknown fact about each member. Then share the fact and have the group guess who it is. Then have that person share their unknown fact.

Life timeline: Get a roll of large paper (2-3 feet wide x several yards long) at Michaels or Walmart or Target. Take turns each week, having a member draw a timeline of their life during the week and sharing it at the next meeting. You may want to do the first one to give an example. Share major points of importance and value in your life.

Three key possessions: Ask the group to share what 3 things would they first take out of house in case of fire and why

What I'm feeling like now: Using the many faces of emotions; ask each member to identify which face they relate with right now in life and why.

Hot Seat: Put a seat out in front of everyone. Have each person sit in the chair and draw a question out of a hat. Questions could be:
"What's your favorite movie, food, place, memory, etc, and why?"
"Lately I am becoming like _____"
"The feeling that best describes how I am feeling right now is _____"
"If there were one person I would like to spend the day with it would be _____"; etc.

Then allow the group to ask follow up questions

Self Portrait: Have each member take a crayon or marker and draw a self portrait on piece of paper. Then have each explain their portrait.

Three or Four on a couch: You have to have at least 3-4 males and 3-4 females. Sit in circle, male-female-male-female, etc. Leave one chair open and designate a couch or three/four chairs as the winner's circle. You must decide whether 3 or 4 in a row will win the game. The object of the game is to get 3 or 4 males or 3 or 4 females in a row sitting in the winners circle. Here's how it is played. Place names of each member in a hat. Pass the hat and have each draw one. The person sitting to the right of the empty chair goes first. They call a name of someone in the group other than the name he or she drew from the hat. The person with the name that was called on their paper must get up and go sit in the empty chair and exchange papers with the person who called that name. Now everyone knows the name on the paper of the person who called that name. The person sitting to the right of the new empty chair now calls out another name and so on. With memorization you can manipulate calling out of names to move opponents off the winners circle and your players unto the winner's circle.

Scavenger hunt: Make a list of items to be collected and divide into teams and do a hunt. Get back together at a designated time and share. Variation: Take a digital or instant camera and do a picture scavenger hunt where group must have its picture taken with certain objects like with police officer; in a phone booth, etc. Can also do a video, audio or combination scavenger hunt.

Video Share: Have each member or couple shoot a video entitled "A day in the life of _____" and share it with the group.

It's a wonderful life": Contact 2 or three friends or family members of each group member and ask them to write what life would be like without that person. When group is together play a short clip from "It's a Wonderful Life" and then read the writings for each member.

2. Improve group dynamics by understanding each member better:

Their personalities

Are they introvert or extrovert?

Does extensive interaction with people drain or energize you?

Do you think and plan things out or do you fly by the seat of your pants? Example, vacations.

Do you like to know what is going to happen or do you enjoy surprises?

Are you detailed or big pictured?

Organized or scattered?

Do you process things out and make lists of +/- or do you feel your way through intuitively?

Have the group answer these and discuss it.

Your job as leader is not to "peg" people into these personality types, rather be aware of these and deal with each sensitively and accurately as it pertains to group dynamics and maximize their strengths to add to the group dynamic.

Their learning styles

Visual Learners: respond to charts, diagrams, videos, word pictures, stories, parables; things that allow them to "picture" what is happening

Auditory Learners: respond well to sounds, verbal explanations, tapes, CD's, would rather listen to a story told than read a story

Kinesthetic Learners: respond to touch and feel, enjoy actions, outings, projects, learn by doing.

Your job as leader is to be aware of what each member's style is and accommodate their learning styles for maximum learning.

Their group roles

Can be a supportive role such as: information seeker, opinion seeker, initiator, elaborator, tension-reliever, reviewer, consensus seeker, encourager, standard bearer or,

Can be a destructive role such as: aggressor, rabbit chaser, recognition seeker, dominator, special-interest pleader, negativist, quibbler, practical joker

Your job as leader is not to “peg” people into these roles, rather be aware of these roles and tendencies and deal with each sensitively and accurately as it pertains to group dynamics and get behind why they are the way they are.

Their spiritual gifts

Do a spiritual gifts study together and allow each to take a spiritual gifts inventory. Allow each person to serve the group thru his or her giftedness.

3. Improve group dynamics by improving your facilitating skills by:

- Ask members to evaluate the sessions regularly. Ask for feedback. Try asking feedback from a different member for each meeting. Make adjustments to strengthen fellowship within the group. Use simple questions such as: What went well? What did you learn? What could be improved?
- Ask your Coach to attend a meeting and give you feedback
- Improve what you say:
 - a. Invite comments from the group
 - b. Empathize with people’s emotions
 - c. Explore their statements, seeking more information
 - d. Clarify what has been said
- Improve what you hear
 - a. Details of verbal communication: names, events, dates
 - b. Details of nonverbal communication: Facial expressions (frowns, smiles, smirks, rolling of eyes, etc.); tone of voice (sarcasm, anger, loudness, sadness, enthusiasm, hesitancy, fear, etc.); body movement and posture (crossed arms or legs, stiff and rigid or loose and flexible, sitting away from group, looking off into space, etc.)

c. Passive vs. Active Listening

Passive

Attitude: Rejecting and critical ("I'm not really interested")

Focus: Me-what I want to say ("What do I think?")

Response: This is what I've been thinking ("I think you should...")

Message: What you said isn't important ("I didn't really hear what you said")

Results: Frustration, anger ("I don't care")

Active

Attitude: Receptive and accepting ("I really want to hear you")

Focus: Other person-you think about what others are saying ("What does he mean?")

Response: Telling first what you have heard the other person say ("You think...You feel...")

Message: You heard both the feeling and the need in the message ("I heard what you said")

Results: Satisfaction, willing to compromise or tell more ("I care about what you said")

- Improve your conflict management
 - a. Use Avoidance for conflict if the issue is trivial; situation will take care of itself; it will save someone humiliation; time is limited. Don't use Avoidance if the issue is important; the problem will not resolve itself but will worsen; your credibility will be lost; there is another underlying issue to address
 - b. Use Competition for conflict if issue resolution outweighs the relationship; there is a clear threat or opposition to Biblical truth and or someone's credibility; parties involved are mature enough to engage in a mature way. Don't use Competition if relationship is more important than the issue; it appears to degenerate into personal attacks and personal win or lose, rather than remaining issue focused
 - c. Use Accommodation for conflict if you can fight battle later; it will save someone humiliation; time is limited. Don't use Accommodation if it will set an unwise precedent; it will produce a valuable learning moment

- d. Use Compromise for conflict if there is no simple solution; you've spent enough time on the issue and the issue is not worthy of further time investment to come up with a collaborative solution; you've reached an impasse and all can agree to disagree. Don't use Compromise if an optimal solution is possible; issue is worthy of seeking collaborative solution; it will set an unwise precedent.
- e. Use Collaboration for conflict if the issue and solution are very important; if the willingness to spend the time and resources for a collaborative solution is present; sufficient trust exists between parties. Don't use Collaboration if issue is not worthy of further time investment; the willingness to spend the time and resources are not present.

4. Improve group dynamics by improving your sensitivity to the Holy Spirit's direction

A group consensus may be the leading of the Spirit; a strong, unshakeable voice may be the leading of the Spirit; waiting may be the leading of the Spirit; application of God's word is Spirit's leading.