

## **Groups Struggle to Reach Their Potential without Effective Leader Coaching**

### **By Bob Young**

A key to developing an effective small group program is to make continued coaching available to the group leaders. Group leaders do not automatically know what to do—how to lead a group, how to encourage and motivate, how to delegate, or even how to study the Bible in a small group setting.

I enjoyed the movie, *Chariots of Fire*. The movie tells the story of two Olympic runners, Eric Liddell and Harold Abrahams, and their quest to win gold medals in the 1924 Paris Olympics. Both were intense and fiercely competitive. An interesting backstory is the role of their coaches. Harold Abrahams hired the famed coach, Sam Mussabini, to make him run faster. Mussabini had to keep an eye on Abram's volatile emotions as well as the physical aspect of training. Liddell's coach, Sammy McGrath, was a family friend and used a personal, friendship coaching style to improve Liddell's running. McGrath had to help Liddell balance his training with his commitment to serving Jesus and using his running for the glory of God rather than personal fame. Both Liddell and Abrahams won gold medals in the Paris Olympics. Their stories emphasize the importance of coaching—and the importance of good coaching.

In the renewal of the small groups program in my ministry in Fort Gibson, OK, an important decision was that receiving coaching and training would be an expectation for every small group leader. All leaders were expected to attend the training session, normally on Wednesday night before their group met. The result was that small group participation was near 100% in the congregation, and small group attendance often exceeded Sunday night attendance (which was about 75% of Sunday morning attendance at that time).

### **Coaching is biblical**

The Bible tells us about the effectiveness of coaching. Great men and women of God were developed through coaching. Jethro coached Moses in the wilderness (Exodus 18). He encouraged Moses but also pointed out his shortcomings and problems. He helped Moses organize the nation Israel into groups of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens.

Moses coached Joshua. Joshua coached Israel's elders, but they failed to continue the process by coaching another generation. Naomi coached Ruth. Samuel coached David. Elijah coached Elisha to replace him as Israel's prophet. Mordecai coached Esther.

Barnabas coached Paul through encouragement and teaching (Acts 12-13). Paul coached Timothy and Titus. Timothy was instructed to coach others. Not to mention that Jesus coached a dozen followers while he worked with three in an "inner circle."

Coaching is a good work to describe the one-on-one relationships we see in the Bible. Jesus used the concept of discipleship in the context of a group, but the one-on-one interactions of Scripture are best understood through the lens of coaching. In coaching, the idea is to come alongside another to offer encouragement and another perspective.

### **Coaching is powerful**

One role of leaders can be compared to coaching or mentoring. Leaders are to prepare God's people for works of ministry (Eph. 4:12). As such, leaders have an "ad-ministrative" responsibility, to help others find their own ministries. One of the best ways to help others serve is through coaching and mentoring.

Much of the work I currently do in the mission field is done through mentoring and coaching, often from a distance. Personal relationship is maintained through making visits at least annually to the field, but most of the work is done by Skype, phone calls, emails, messaging as I make suggestions, counsel, and answer questions. Coaching is one way to pour oneself into many others at the same time. Coaching demonstrates the uniqueness of Christian love—selfless, exalting others, putting others ahead of self, looking out for others, pouring one's life into others. This love says that I am not about establishing myself but about emptying myself into others—finding my life by losing it.

### **Coaching is essential in successful small group efforts**

David Cho, the father of the modern cell church movement said, "The most important role in cell ministry is that of leader coach." Cho realized that cell leaders needed coaches who could come along side to encourage, develop, care, and strategize. Leaders without coaches, those who are left to fend for themselves, most often fail.

Jim Egli conducted research of 3000 cell leaders in 20 countries and concluded, "Quality coaching of cell leaders was the most important factor in establishing a successful cell system." Egli looked at a number of factors but concluded that coaching was the most important.

*Study and pray about these three ideas. Pray about the small groups effort at your church. My suggestion: do not attempt small groups with making required coaching a part of the effort.*