

Connecting Strategies for your church to get 120% connected

Before I share four current learnings we have had here at Saddleback Church in the last couple of years on connecting people, let me give you a bit of background. In the book [Small Groups With Purpose](#) (SGWP), I explain probably our two most effective strategies for connecting people at Saddleback Church over the last 15 years. Since 1997 we have taken our connection percentage from 30% to 120%. Yup, we have more people in small groups than attend the weekend service!

In chapter 16, I explain in detail the Connection Strategy we used from 1997 to 2002, primarily taking attendees and helping them raise a leader and find community. From 2002 to present we have been using our Campaign Strategy (chapter 17) to mobilize attendees to reach their friends to start groups. This strategy using out HOST concept took us from 70% connected to where we are now. If you are not familiar with these strategies or what a HOST is, I would highly recommend taking what we have learned and adapting it to your culture.

Here are 4 learnings we have had over the last couple of years:

1. **YOU GOT TO HAVE LEADERS!** Every year we gather our small group leaders for appreciation, vision and recruitment. We call this rally a Small Group Host Gatherings (SGHG). Although very effective, last year we changed the terminology to cast the net wider. You see at a SGHG we always have a recruitment component to pull in the next wave of leaders. This however, relies on the HOST ability to recruit. Now we have an event called Vision Night. We do it Wednesday, Thursday and Friday night...pick one to go to. We cast the net from our weekend services. Pastor Rick Warren our Senior Pastor, asks for everyone to come. At the Vision Nights we appreciate the small group leaders, Rick casts vision for where we are going and he then recruits new HOSTs for our upcoming Campaign. Instead of having 1 night of a SGHG, we now have 3 nights of Vision Nights with better results getting new leaders (HOSTs). Remember, without leaders, you can't connect!
2. **ANSWER THE KID QUESTION!** The number one barrier to get young couples connect is childcare. Hands down, it is the biggest obstacles for families with elementary age and below children. At Saddleback we have KSG, which is Kids Small Groups. They target kids 3rd grade to 6th grade kids helping them to experience community. They meet Tuesdays or Wednesdays after school or Wednesday nights. Since we don't have a mid week service, we are aligning and centralizing young couples (kids birth to 6th grade) who want community with our KSG on Wednesday nights and offering childcare for kids birth to 2nd grade. The adults meet in the Worship Center around tables using a DVD curriculum together. This way adults get their small group and kids get their small group!
3. **THINK ORGANIC NOT CENTRALIZE SUPPORT!** What took the HOST concept to a new level in our Campaign Strategy was getting out of the match maker business. Instead of asking people to join a group, get people to ask a couple of their friends they already have to do the group with them. By putting the monkey on their back, you get 2 friends and start a group, it takes care of a

number of issues. First, they are their friends, so the stick rate for the group is huge. They don't mind meeting because they are their friends. Your group retention will rise! It also answers the frequency question, since they are their friends, they don't care if they are meeting in summer, fall, winter or spring—they are meeting together anyhow, you are just giving them purpose! A third issue it help you mobilize non believers to start groups. Who are their friends? More non believers! Your best evangelists can be an open non believer! Now you need a process or pathway to move them along (chapter 12 in SGWP) so they don't stay non believers!

4. TAKE SERMON GUIDES VIDEO! I learned this idea from a small church in Florida. Since July of 1999 we have had volunteers attend our first service and write a small group discussion guide that small groups can use. We call it "Talk It Over". We would have about 300 groups on average use this tool for a group curriculum. A number of months back we stepped it up to make it more user friendly for existing and new groups to use. Now we not only have volunteers write the guides as always, but now we have people design a video clip to go along with it. Over 1,200 groups are now using this tool. You can check it out at www.saddleback.com/talkitover. Imagine how simple for a person to start a group where all the need to do is attend the weekend service and watch the recap and discuss?
5. EMBRACE THE INTERNET! You want to connect people? Don't see the internet as you enemy! Next month I am spending the whole article sharing our learnings and pathway on the Internet and Technology.

I hope these ideas and what we shared in SGWP helps your church connect 120% of the people in your congregation!