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Directing Your Small Group Ministry

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by Steve Gladen

What's your role as the Small Group Point Person?

When you read the Book of James see a great analogy of the tongue as the rudder in James 3:4-5a. Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. It is amazing that such a part of the ship can steer the rest of the ship. Your tongue, which is a small part of your body, can do the same thing. James helps us understand that although the tongue is a small part of the body, it can do extreme good or bad. A rudder on a ship, which is a small part of the whole vessel, can do extreme good or bad.

In the same way, as I have talked with many Small Group Point People across the country, the role of the Small Group Point Person is like a rudder. It can seem like a small position of the church. Like the rudder, small groups are often "under water" and not seen. The weekend pastors are easily seen, the Sunday school teachers are easily seen; but small groups, which are decentralized and spread across a geographical area, are often not noticed or easily seen. Many wonder what the purpose of small groups is, which turns into wondering about your purpose. The rudder is hidden in the back of the ship. Its strategic value is not always seen or recognized. So how do you, as the Point Person, help the Small Group Ministry to be seen as strategic and valuable as the rudder of a ship?

Let me use the acrostic of rudder as help lay out your role in the church.

Relational equity. Probably your most important role is to build relationships with the Lead Pastor, staff, church leadership and people in the congregation. At Saddleback I use the term weave the building—in essence weave relationships. Each day I try to walk the building a couple times a day to meet people and see staff in their environment. When I was in a smaller church, this was easier. In a large church, you need to be intentional in making this happen. So, knowing the church leadership is where I would "weave" relationships. A common overlooked area is connecting with the Lead Pastor. You may or may not report to the Lead Pastor, but that doesn't mean you can't have coffee together, invite them over to your house and build the relationship. Relational equity is the currency of the church. When I first came on staff at Saddleback, I thought if I just had the positional authority, that would get things done for the small group team. Then once I got to a place where I had positional authority, I realized that position

was not as important as relational equity. The more relational equity you build with people, the more they will learn your heart and understand you. This is especially critical when you need something done quickly and you don't have the time for people to know your heart.

Understand who and what. Who are the voices of the people the Lead Pastor trusts? You may not be able to influence your Lead pastor, but who are the people he trusts that could speak on your behalf? Understand the people who influence your pastor and the church. The "what" is the power of the question. When you ask a question, it is just that, a question. You are not stating anything nor are you pushing an agenda. A question shows you are trying to learn or get advice. A great question to make sure you are all on the same page is "What are we trying to produce?" "What does a follower of Christ look and act like?" Once you are in one accord on those questions, then you can start asking what will get you there.

Drift manager. There are a couple areas to be looking at for "drift". One is your team around you. Whether your team is paid or composed of volunteers, you need to be asking a great Druckerism questions; "What's business?" and "How business?" Focus on simplicity with your goals and what you are trying to do. If you can't write your goal on a napkin, it's too complex. Another area is church cultural and the changes that are always happening. In my 13 years at Saddleback I have seen drift happen from time to time within the small group culture. Know it is going to happening and be prepared. You need to be a voice that helps the leadership know drift is happening. If you haven't read the book Good to Great in God's Eyes: 10 Practices Great Christians Have in Common by Jim Collins, it is a must read. In the church we love to start programs, and many are good programs; but we hate to stop programs until they are dead and stinky. Healthy churches, and wise leaders, focus on the "great" and don't let the "good" distract the focus.

Determine next steps. Three primary areas for next steps are future waves, team members, and the Small Group Ministry plans. What are the future waves that you are praying for and dreaming the Lord to provide? If you aren't vision casting, thinking and dreaming about what is next, no one will. Two future waves we have been working and dreaming on are Workplace Groups and Online Groups. We are praying every member of Saddleback will give us one lunch hour a week for Kingdom work and we are dreaming of having an Online Group in every corner of cyberspace!

Who are your future team members? Three years from now who will be working alongside of you? Trust me on this one – whether they are volunteers or paid, you need to be planting seeds now for the harvest years down the road. When I meet people, I know it isn't by accident, so I what to be in tune to why the Lord put this person across my path.

What are the immediate (by this I mean 3, 6, 9 and 12 months ahead) next steps your Small Group Ministry? Do you have a plan? Ecclesiastes 5:7 in the Living Bible says "dreaming instead of doing is foolishness". It takes both, dreaming and doing. On my board is a phrase, Vision without

implementation equals hallucination. I know too many people hallucinating about their ministry. Know where you want to go. Know where you are taking your sheep. The Shepherd picks the next pasture, not the sheep. If you don't lead them to the next pasture, out of hunger they will drift and get picked off by the enemy. Be a leader. Lead! Lead with heart (John 10), compassion (Luke 19:41) and motivation (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Exchange ideas. Pastor Rick has taught me that "leaders are learners". When you gather with other Small Group Point People through networking, conferences or social media, to exchange ideas, dreams, stories and prayers—something happens in you. The community you promote happens when you are in these types of environments. That's why I started the Small Group Network (www.smallgroupnetwork.com) in 2006, so nobody stands alone doing ministry. I would encourage you to check out this free network of people doing the work of the ministry in the trenches.

Replenish your soul. You need to guard your soul. Nobody wakes up one morning and decides to have an affair, take money from the church or any other sin for that matter. It happens slowly. So slow, you don't even know it is happening. You don't get into a spiritual hole with a backhoe, but with a spoon. A little spoon here, and a little spoonful there. Not too long ago I read an excerpt from Craig Groeschel's book, Confessions of a Pastor: Adventures in Dropping the Pose and Getting Real with God that has stuck with me. So many of us let the work of God in us get destroyed by the work for God. Have a quiet time. Make sure you take a Sabbath. Guard your soul. This is why we have an article in this newsletter every month called Soul Searchin. We want your soul replenished. See my friend Lance Witt's ministry at www.replenish.com. As a leader, it is even more important that you take time to nurture and replenish your soul, for you are not only caring for your soul, you are modeling behavior for those you lead. You are the rudder of your Small Group Ministry.

Make sure you are steering the ship in the right direction….