



Sustaining small groups after 40 Days of Purpose

by Steve Gladen

More than 23,000 churches have taken their people through [40 Days of Purpose](#) with the same consistent result: Across the board, the church's small group ministry mushrooms after the study. Some churches jump from having a few groups to having many. One church had zero small groups before *40 Days of Purpose*, but more than 100 afterward. Clearly, God uses "40 Days" to get people excited about him and learning about him in a small group.

So what can you do to capitalize on this momentum? If you want to make your small group ministry a force that strengthens the purposes in your church and a strategic arm that helps your church grow, seven things must be present. The key word is **SUSTAIN**:

S = Secure a community leader for each of your small group leaders. Even leaders need to be cared for. We can't have healthy ministries if we're off on our own. We're too vulnerable to temptation and the enemy. We're unprotected from life's wolves and snares – and that's dangerous. So it's important that each person leading one of your groups has someone to go to, someone who cares. Jesus never sent anyone out alone, but always in pairs. Your leaders should never be alone!

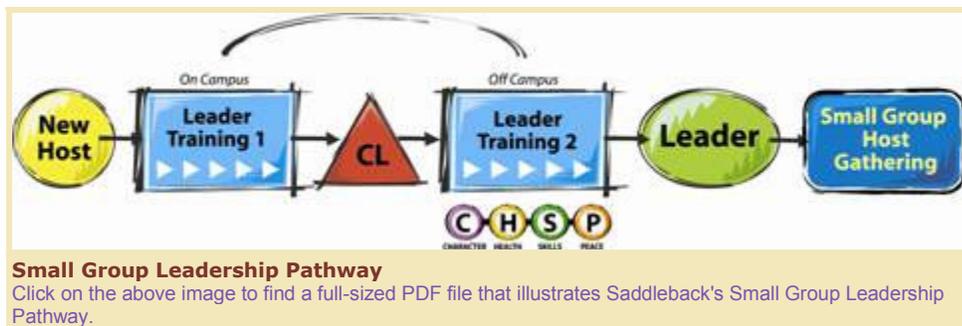
These connections should happen as naturally or organically as possible. The community leader may be someone the small group leader already knows, or it may be someone you connect them with.

U = Understand the commitment. Your leaders need to understand the commitment they're making and what the next step is for them. They started out as hosts and that word is another acronym. H.O.S.T. stands for **H**ave a heart for people, **O**pen your home, **S**erve a snack, and **T**urn on the video or DVD. Provide the appropriate next steps for each of your small group leaders that helps prepare them to lead their group more effectively. Their success builds their confidence and willingness to take a greater risk in ministry next time.

Even as you're helping your small group leaders understand the commitment, be sure to lead with vision, not need. Leading with a need can prompt people to lead out of guilt, but leading with a vision of what God wants to do through ministry will compel people to take that next step. So, explain to your leaders what your vision is and what you hope to accomplish. At [Saddleback Church](#), we do that through our Small Group Leadership Development Pathway.

S = Seek to have healthy and balanced groups. Everyone benefits when the group is healthy and balanced. So educate your leaders and give them the big picture. A tool we use at Saddleback is the health assessment and health planner. This assessment – which can be done by individuals or by the small group as a whole – determines how balanced the five purposes are in our lives.

For more information on building the small group ministry in your church, check out the four-CD set, [Building Healthy Small Groups in Your Church](#) by Steve Gladen and Lance Witt. You can also find other helpful tools – including information on three-month small group coaching program – on Purpose Driven Ministry's [small group page](#).



T = Teach your leaders what's ahead on the journey with their small group. Give them the picture in broad, sweeping strokes. They don't have to know every step or all the specific details. Explain that in the beginning, groups naturally focus on fellowship to build relationships. Prepare them for the fact that they'll have to work hard on ministry, evangelism, and worship in order to keep the group balanced. Introduce the small group curriculum planner you'll be using so they know what's coming. And teach your leaders that true community always balances the tension of "fellowship" and "evangelism." If the leader catches this vision, the group won't become exclusive.

A = Acquire a future host and share group ownership. Jesus always sent out his disciples in pairs. Encourage your leaders to identify a group member who could be their partner. Each leader needs someone in the group to share the anxiety, joys, pitfalls, and blessings of the group's life together. Have them choose someone whom they would enjoy partnering with, someone who wants to help shape the small group.

I = Initiate small group gatherings. Small group leaders need to be reminded that they are part of a whole network of small groups. At Saddleback, we offer those reminders in the form of small group host gatherings in January and July. We gather together all of our small group leaders for a time of vision, motivation, testimonies, giveaways, breakouts, etc. During these rallies, we fellowship together, worship together, and re-cast the vision of small group ministry.

N = Never stop listening, learning, and leading. A key to constant enthusiasm is to be constantly

learning. Help your leaders be committed and regular students of God's word. Provide CDs and articles on leadership as well as information about seminars and conferences. Give them opportunities to learn from each other – to hear what other groups are planning, to see what's working in other groups, and to learn what problems other groups are facing so they realize that their group is not the only one having those problems.

Leadership Resources

Looking for materials to help your small group leaders develop important leadership skills? Try Rick Warren's series [Developing Your Leadership](#). It's a great tool that Warren himself used to train his lay leaders at Saddleback Church.

Applied together, these steps will strengthen your leaders, maintain momentum in your small groups, and fortify your ministry so that you can make the greatest possible contribution to God's kingdom.

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