



Effective Group Leadership

Strategies for Group Stages

We all want to be good leaders for our groups. And I have amazing news for you—Just the fact that you care about that at all means that you are a good leader already!

Did you hear that? Really let it soak in—**you are a good leader already!**

Now, all you need are some tools to help you be a *strategic* leader—one who knows what to anticipate with a group and how to respond in a way that helps the group grow, develop, and accomplish its goals. How you do that well depends on which stage of development your group is in.

Stages of Group Development

As psychologist Bruce Tuckman first proposed in 1965, groups go through predictable stages, and your role as a leader shifts as the stages progress. As a leader, you (wittingly or unwittingly) shape the norms of the group from the very get go.

The five stages are:

- Forming – the initial get-to-know-you phase
- Storming – members are working out the dynamics of how they want the group to function
- Norming – unity begins to form as the group comes to agreement about how it will function
- Performing – group smoothly and efficiently works toward its agreed upon goals
- Adjourning – group completes its purpose and it is time to move on, or needs to say goodbye for another reason (e.g., members moving away, etc.)

These stages are not necessarily linear, and the group may return to a given stage for a variety of reasons (e.g., adding a new member, a recent conflict in the group, a change to the group routine, etc.).

Below is more information about each stage and how you as a leader can strategically and effectively assist your group in navigating it.

Forming

- In this stage, the group is just starting; members are forming first impressions of one another
- Group members will usually be polite and try not to step on each other's toes
- The group will look to the leader for guidance and direction
- Strategic leadership at this stage includes:
 - Making connections with group members in advance so everyone already feels invested before day one
 - Being the one who establishes group expectations
 - Being available and responsive for questions from your group members
 - Modeling appropriate sharing in the group

Storming

- In this stage, the group is working out what they feel the group “should” or “ought” to do
 - Groups commonly “test the waters” to see how others will react to what or how they share
 - Sometimes conflict arises when group members do not see eye to eye
- The group will look to the leader to establish rules and norms around how the group interacts
- Strategic leadership at this stage includes:
 - LISTENING!!! From this point onward in your group, ideally your members should be talking more than you are
 - Using your comments to help shape the outcome of the storming phase—you should be focused on helping establish norms for how group discussion will work
 - Balancing offering support to members who need it with accomplishing the tasks of the discussion for the week
 - Being supportive and showing Christ-centered, unconditional positive regard to your members
 - If an issue arises with a specific member, it may be best to pull them aside and discuss it one-on-one, rather than calling them out in the group setting
- Periodically groups will “circle back” to storming when something in the group has shifted (e.g., adding a new member, a shift in leadership, making a schedule change, stressors affecting group members, etc.)

Norming

- The group begins to establish themselves as a cohesive unit
- At this point, if you have set things up well in the previous stages, the group will be well-functioning and everyone will know what to expect during each session
- Strategic leadership at this stage includes:
 - Continuing your emphasis on listening and encouraging interactions in the group
 - Drawing meaningful connections between the Bible study/discussion materials and members’ everyday lives
 - Members may need to be encouraged to push outside their comfort zones a little bit to accomplish this
 - Reflecting on ways in which growth can occur as a result of what is being revealed through the study’s Scripture readings or discussion points

Performing

- Individuals become less concerned with how they will be perceived and begin to be more real and genuine with one another
- Strategic leadership at this stage includes:
 - Asking deeper questions that encourage more application of the material to personal lives
 - Encouraging increased spiritual maturity in group members
 - Supporting group members as they reach out past their comfort zones with continued Christ-centered, unconditional positive regard

Adjourning

- At this stage, the group is finishing up and members are saying goodbye to one another
 - This is an important stage, even if the goodbye is not final (e.g., the members will reconvene after the summer)
- Strategic leadership at this stage includes:
 - Modeling how to say goodbye, including sharing what impact the group had on you personally and what you got out of the discussion and study you did together
 - Providing time for members to reflect on their experience and what lessons they will take from it moving forward
 - (*If applicable*) Helping the group form a discipleship-based plan for moving on and establishing new group(s)