

Stages of D-Group Maturity



****The following is an excerpt from one of my discipleship professor's books****

Have you ever taken the time to look and marvel at the beauty of a butterfly? Every now and then one will fly by and I will say to myself, "That is beautiful!" In order for that butterfly to become amazing, it must go through four different stages of maturity called metamorphosis. The first stage is the egg. The second stage is called the caterpillar, larva, or the nutritive stage. The third stage is called the pupal stage, and it is a time of great transition. This is a time when the caterpillar rests and changes dramatically inside a cocoon. The final stage is the adult or reproductive stage. This stage is where the ugly, slow, cumbersome caterpillar develops wings and flies away as a beautiful butterfly, pollinating flowers and reproducing itself.

If you have been a group leader for any length of time, you'll see some of the similarities between the development of a butterfly and the metamorphosis of an ordinary small group. Hopefully, the group will develop to the point where it reproduces itself many times over. This transition — whenever it occurs — is equally awe-inspiring.

Every group goes through stages. The stages are either healthy or they are unhealthy. In any case, it is helpful to recognize and respond to the common signs found in each stage.

A mentor of mine became a small group leader when he was young and wanted someone to disciple. So he prayed that God would give him someone. Two weeks later someone approached him about being discipled. They met in the dorm common room. He loved it so much he asked God for another. Two weeks later someone said they had overheard their conversations and wanted to be part of it. Again he asked God for another disciple. Two weeks later a roommate from one of the three asked to join. Eventually there were five, they all said the group changed their lives, and the next semester they each started their own group.

1. The Formation Stage

This is the initial stage for the group and lasts approximately two months. During this period, group members are getting to know one another and the members do not yet consider this group to be "my group." During this stage, it's important that the leader sets the tone and clearly explains the goals and mission of the group so the members can band together and achieve the goals.

2. The Exploration Stage

This stage is where the members begin to see what group life is about. At this phase of group life, it's common for members to question the leader (and the leadership team) regarding the group's purpose. This stage typically lasts two to four months. During this time, the wise leader will reiterate the mission of the group to show his or her desire to lead the group into achieving something big for God.

3. The Execution Stage

During the third stage, the group is healthy and is interested in becoming and doing what the leader and the leadership team has been casting a vision to do. This is the "achievement stage" which occurs during months five through nine. When a group moves into this stage, the members are busy serving one another, inviting unchurched friends to the group or parties and living in biblical community.

4. The Preparation Stage

The fourth stage, like the metamorphosis of the caterpillar, is a stage of rest. However, inside the group deep changes are taking place.

The group is now naturally growing and adding new people on a regular basis without a lot of extra work. The members are maturing spiritually and new leaders are being released to serve and care for the members and facilitate various parts of the meetings. This stage occurs during months ten through twelve.

5. The Multiplication Stage

This stage can also be called "birthing stage." As the name implies, this is a time when the group becomes two or more groups. Often, some pain accompanies this stage. However, the ultimate joy of re producing a new group outweighs the struggles of birth. This stage typically occurs during months twelve through eighteen in a healthy group. The primary leader invites a handful of members to start a new group, or one of the new leaders leaves the cocoon with others and a new group is formed.

The stages above describe a small group where the members rally around the goals of the group and the leader is strong, yet loving and sensitive. The leader of this group, like the butterfly, understands how important reproduction is for the survival of the species and works hard to raise up other leaders from within the group.

6. The Distortion Stage

Unfortunately, there is one more stage of small group life that will happen to groups that do not grow and develop leaders within eighteen to twenty-four months. After this much time together, a group loses its momentum and the vision to multiply. If the group has been together for two years, it is in danger of dying and needs immediate attention to refocus the efforts toward growth and multiplication.

The action points in this chapter are especially important. Take time right now to ponder each question and work with your coach and group to move to the next level. As you answer the questions, remember that healthy groups that multiply are as beautiful as any butterfly that you will ever see!

Actions Points and Questions to Consider:

1. What stage is your group in right now? How long has it been in that stage? Write your answers below:
2. What do you think your group needs to move to the next stage?
3. In what ways are you developing your members to lead a group of their own one day?
4. When do you see your current group multiplying?