

A 'Blockbuster' Small Group Strategy

by Brett Eastman

When was the last time you watched a movie at home with your family and a few friends? Did you call the church office to decide whose house you would go to? Did you ask your pastor who to invite?

Probably not!

If you are like most people, you just drove over to your local video store, checked out a movie, and called a friend or two. If that's the case for most Christians, then why do we go to so much trouble signing people up to get into small groups and matching them with a small group leader?

Do we not trust them to invite the "right" people? To turn on a DVD or VCR? Or do our church attendees and members not have any friends, family, neighbors or co-workers they would like to hang out with for a few weeks studying a DVD-driven Bible study?

I realize this may be a new idea, but ironically it better follows Jesus' model for forming his own small group community with the 12 disciples. First he spent time with a number of "Christ followers" getting to know them and discerning whether they would be the ones he "asked" to join his own group. Then the Bible says he prayed overnight to confirm if they were the ones, and then the next day he simply asked them to come with him.

The model followed a simple A-B-C plan to create your own community and to not do your life alone but to do life together in community with a few other friends and family.

Discover the ABCs of Jesus' small group strategy:

A – Ask God who he wants you or even is calling you to connect with. Reflect on the fact that this is not about a 40 Day journey but a simple but intentional step. God, from the model of the Trinity, to the way he modeled ministry through Jesus, showed us it was a healthy balance of alone to pray and meditate but also a clear call to not do ministry alone but to do ministry and life together!

Practically, a senior pastor delivers a message on community on a Sunday morning to set up the vision, asking everyone to follow Jesus' model of doing life together. Whether it's 40 Days of Purpose, 40 Days of Community, or any other curriculum series, the formula is the same.

The first approach is to say, "Think about your lists in life." An obvious one is your cell phone list. Ask them -- for the first time in the church's life -- to turn on their cell phones and look at their contact list. Have them scroll through and pick up a few names. What about their address list at home on the Christmas card list, sports team list, PTA list, neighborhood list, school list, on and on?

Take these lists and have your congregation consider who they would enjoy getting together with for just six weeks. Have them start a list right there in the service! After a moment of prayerful reflection, challenge them by asking, "Would you follow Jesus' model?" People respond out of obedience, out of a longing to belong, or a desire to help the pastor and their church reach out and extend the circle to a few others. Don't make this about the cause as much as about the "call to community."

B – Begin calling the names of the 3-5-8-12 names God gave you. The beauty of this model is that it's not a matter of if, it's a matter of *when* you are going to do it and *who* you're going to call. You've taken care of the if by saying you want to grow like Jesus did. That brings us to the question of when. If everybody's doing a campaign that kicks off in two weeks, you have two weeks to promote this on the weekend.

Trust me on this one, if you give them a message on the value of community from any message in your files, you will be amazed by what happens. Simply say, "All I'm asking you to do is be willing to call the names that God just gave you in the next 24 to 36 hours." You minimize the "ask" in order to maximize the response. Say to them, "Come on. You can put up with anyone for just six weeks -- many of you have spouses that have to live with you for a lifetime."

Challenge them to go home and call two or three people today! Most people will at least get one yes within 24 hours, and then they are committed. Remind them that these groups don't have to be big, they just need to begin with a man or woman of faith -- not seminary professors or pastors, just a few friends. The Scripture says "Where two or more are gathered (not 22 or even 12 like Jesus)."

Have them turn in names they write down on their pages, collect them, and then have the staff pray for them during the week. This will show you are in this with them. You can't ask them to do something you're not willing to do. When you have a day of fasting and prayer for those names, it will be one of the most emotional days your staff has ever had.

C – Check out the curriculum they can use for the six weeks series. Whether you do sermon alignment or not, still challenge them to pick up a sampler a (DVD/VCR and study guide) as they walk out of the service today. One church put the material in gift bags and had people come up front, like an altar call. In a church of 1,600, they handed out 220 DVD/study guide sampler kits. I went to this church the next weekend and trained over 250 hosts/leaders.

For those pastors and church leaders reading this, let me just say, "You can do this!" And it's possible to do it over the next few weeks. Any one of the Purpose Driven™ six-week curriculum series would work. I just suggest a sermon alignment either before Easter or after Easter.

You might want to use one of the ministry or evangelism series (Rick Warren's or Doing Life Together) before Easter to prepare your congregation for the after-Easter assimilation series. After Easter, I recommend any "open" curriculum series on fellowship, discipleship themes, or typical series like John Ortberg's or Phillip Yancy's six-session DVD series.

For those who want to focus on the Easter theme, the three week [Purpose Driven Passion](#) series would also be an excellent choice either before or after Easter along with the newly released [Experiencing Christ Together series](#) by Lifetogether.

My experience with this "blockbuster" idea is that more than 20% of adults will do this if the senior pastor or small group champion simply stands up and challenges the congregation to go for it. This can be done in the middle of a message and illustrated by a testimony or two.

What percentage of your adults do you think will respond to a call that came out of a message casting vision for whatever campaign using whatever series you are going to do? I have asked this question to senior pastors and church leaders for almost a year, the number is always between 50% and 75%.

If you do a good job casting Jesus' vision and talk about the value of community, the benefits of community you will be amazed.

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