

Leader Care: Practical Principles

Over the years a number of time-tested group principles have emerged. They present us with very useful generalizations (*not rules*) about group members. Your group may differ from these findings, and that is okay. Remember, your group and its members are unique. Yet, having the following generalizations in mind can help you in understanding, planning for, and ministering to your group.

Principle 1: People join groups in order to satisfy some individual need. A person's primary motivation for small group membership is usually self-centered.

Principle 2: A person will remain in (or join in) a small group if they find the group's goals and activities attractive and rewarding. People base their participation on personal standards.

Principle 3: People sometimes prefer to participate in groups where other members are similar in age, lifestyle, attitudes, personality, economic status, perceived ability, and/or needs. It pays to find out where they relate.

Principle 4: Total overall participation in a small group decreases with increasing group size. The larger the group, the less its individual members participate in the discussion, activities, and so on. There simply isn't as much time per individual to share, and it's easier for people to choose not to express their opinions or thoughts.

Principle 5: Group members usually evaluate small groups more positively than larger groups.

Principle 6: The smaller the group, the greater the opportunity and ownership of shared leadership. Increasing group size increases the probability of a focused leader rather than shared leadership.

Principle 7: The physical setting in which the group meets affects member's attitudes and actions, and consequently, helps determine group process. The meeting place will either positively or negatively influence member's participation in the group.

Principle 8: A more socially and personally adjusted group member contributes to effective group functioning, while an unconventional or anxious member inhibits group functioning. A person's level of social and psychological adjustment directly affects the group process.

Principle 9: Individuals who have been Christians a long time contribute no more to the success of the group process than do new believers (but long-time Christians may have an indirect effect on other dimensions).

Principle 10: The spiritually sensitive group member contributes to the functioning of the group, while those claiming or projecting spiritual superiority inhibit group functioning. "Super saints" tend to cause dysfunctional groups.

Principle 11: Members are more highly motivated and perform more efficiently when the group possesses clear goals and an understanding of what must be done to accomplish the goals. Knowing why the group exists and how it achieves purposes stimulates higher levels of participation.

Principle 12: Interpersonal relations are generally more positive in situations where goals are mutually derived and accepted. Shared ownership of goals builds positive interaction among the members.

Principle 13: Group performance is facilitated to the extent that members can freely communicate their feelings of satisfaction with the group's progress toward goals. Successful groups talk about and assess their goal achievement.

Principle 14: Groups whose members are heterogeneous with respect to sex and personality types are more conforming and perform more effectively than groups that are homogeneous with respect to these characteristics. The opposite is true for age. Diversity among the members in some areas is helpful to the group's success.

Principle 15: A high-status group member (such as a pastor) both initiates and receives more communications and may deviate from group norms without being sanctioned if he contributes to the group's goals. Deference usually is afforded to group members who are perceived as important by the other members.

Principle 16: Greater conformity with group norms occurs in groups with decentralized leadership. When the group members share the responsibility for leadership, it promotes compliance with group norms.

* How to Lead Small Groups by Neal F. McBride, Navpress, 1990, pp. 57-58