

NAVIGATING DIFFERENT GROUP DYNAMICS

INCONSISTENT ATTENDANCE: How do you handle the people who don't attend?

This can be an individual or couple who rarely shows up, or if they come, they come inconsistently.

- *Communicate! Make it a regular thing to text, email and call, whatever works best for the individual or couple.*
- *We all get busy, remember to be grace-filled and send a reminder. Review the covenant on your first night.*
- *Reach out and find out what's going on, maybe it's work for health. Sometimes people just quit/ But do your best to care for your group, regardless of their attendance.*

DOMINATOR: What do you do with the person who talks too much?

Interrupter, this person won't let others talk, always has the answer or take the group off topic.

- *Call others out, thank the dominator and by name, ask others to share.*
- *Sit next to them eye contact gives them permission to talk.*
- *Lovingly pull them aside and graciously address it.*

OPINIONATOR: How do you handle the person who always has an opinion?

This can be the persistent politician, constant complainer or the thwarted theologian.

- *Refresh or remind everyone of the non-negotiables/values that all agreed to in the group covenant.*
- *Never allow politics or ideologies to become the focus of any discussion. All it does is isolate people who think differently.*
- *Discussions about theology can be great, but we can have differing theology but still agree on the essentials of what we believe (salvation). Always bring any differing of opinions back to where we agree and move on.*
- *For any of the examples above, lovingly pull them aside and graciously address it.*

NINJA: How do you get the quiet ones to talk?

The person who sits quietly, is introverted or they don't speak often. When they do share, it's typically because they have something helpful to add to the dialogue.

- *Once in a while, after the group has been meeting for 2-4 weeks, directly ask for their thoughts.*
- *Play an icebreaker with the whole group with the idea that everyone will be a part of it.*
- *Outside of the group, ask them how they are doing & build a one on one relationship with them.*

SPY: How can you help everyone in the group develop a value of vulnerability?

Someone who isn't being vulnerable in the group, maybe they're "wearing a mask" or just never revealing how they are seeing God work in their life or sharing their struggles.

- *Always be aware of the environment you as the leader are creating. We can't force people to be a certain way or practice values they don't own yet.*
- *Start each quarter with discussing the 5 values (non-negotiables) with the goal of creating an environment where pursuing Jesus is first in everything is the goal. Gospel community will always be the result when this happens.*
- *Get to know this person outside the group and model vulnerability with them so they see what it looks like.*

AWKWARD SILENCE: How can you help the group be more dynamic and engaged with each other?

Dull moments happen in groups for all kinds of reasons.

- Remember the material (sermon discussion, bible study, book study, etc...) is a tool. It is not the goal to go through all the questions in the study. The goal is Jesus being first. Jesus often put people before teaching (feeding the 5000, Zacchaeus, etc...) If our goal is the study, it will feel more like a classroom than a Jesus-centered community.
- Once in a while, split up the group for some discussions (guys and ladies or pair up couples) to get to some deeper dialogue. It might help some of the ninjas engage in dialogue!

CONFLICT: What do you do when there is conflict in the group?

Where there are people, there will also be brokenness. Conflict can always take place.

- Address it, don't just ignore it or wait it out. Provide care for each person and address it in a graceful way.
- Pull them aside to mediate and encourage understanding and reconciliation; remember everyone is at a different place in the journey with Jesus.
- Reach out to your coach. They are there to support you and walk with you through situations like this.

HOW TO RESPOND TO "THAT PERSON" IN YOUR SMALL GROUP

We've all come into contact with them... "that person." The reality is that there are people in our groups who make things difficult for us as leaders. So let's address this elephant in the room: "that person" is the person who dominates conversation. The one who doesn't show up regularly without good reason. The one who pushes back on everything you say. The one who, when you're desiring a level of transparency, asks you weekly to pray for his great aunt Ruth's infected foot. The one who regularly makes theologically incorrect statements that you are left scrambling to clean up. The one who often texts the entire group at inconvenient hours, asking everyone to drop what they are doing for them. You know, that person. So as the group leader, how do we best respond to such a person? In the midst of our frustrations, let's remember one thing: They need Jesus, too.

I get it; they may be draining both you and the group. But for reasons that may deepen your dependence on Jesus, He has entrusted these people in your care. Let's look at three ways we can be faithful in our leadership:

1. Pray & Connect Face to Face

A heart that seeks to confront with care does so humbly and without any finger-pointing. How do we do this? First off, pray. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you the words to speak, the confidence to speak them, and God's grace to speak with. Read Matthew 18:15-16 for the how-to. Second, schedule a time to connect face to face. This conversation should never happen over email or on the phone.

This is hard, I know. It's hard for both those who hate confrontation and those who love it. If you hate confrontation, you need to take steps toward doing this. If you love confrontation, you need to back down and allow the Spirit to convict the heart of this person. But be sure to pray for a change in your heart before addressing this person and their heart.

When connecting with this person, don't immediately state what they are doing wrong, but ask them what they are learning, who they seem to be connecting with, and how they believe God is transforming them. Use language like, "It seems that _____," or, "I've noticed _____..."

You share a lot in our group time.

Solution: I appreciate hearing from you, but this oftentimes doesn't allow others to share.

You disagree with much of what I say in group.

Solution: Is there something I've done to upset you? Can we discuss this after group?

You haven't been to group much.

Solution: Is everything ok?

You seem closed off when it comes to sharing your heart.

Solution: Is there a specific reason or person that makes you feel uncomfortable sharing?

Sometimes you share things that aren't biblically accurate.

Solution: Would you be interested in being disciplined further?

2. Invest in Them, Even if It's Messy

Everyone, regardless of their potentially extreme neediness or annoyance, needs pointed to Jesus. You've been given this opportunity. It might mean spending more time with them, resourcing them, or connecting them with others who can better relate to them, all with the goal of their growing dependence on Jesus. You and I don't have what it takes to give them what they need. Jesus does though. Trust Jesus to give you what you need, that you would freely receive His grace and freely give it to this person.

3. Respond Like Jesus

I think it's as simple and profound as this. The words I think of when it comes to Jesus' response to the needy and difficult are the fruits of the Spirit. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control. He responded to the needy, the annoying, the difficult, in these ways. Ask Him to give you an extra measure of these in your responses to and in your walking alongside "that person".

It's easier to just put up with and ignore "that person". However, that doesn't help you grow as a leader, it doesn't bless your group, and it certainly doesn't help them grow. This isn't going to be easy, but it's going to be worth it. If "that" person is in your group, begin to ask the Lord how He is going to use you to pour into them. God bless you as you enter the "messy" and find yourself trusting in Jesus all the more!