

Extract from Developing Leaders Chapter 5 - Group dynamics

Section 2 (20 mins)

Growing yourself and others through participation and leadership

Creating Atmospheres of Growth

One of our challenges as leaders is to create atmospheres of growth. To create environments where people find it easy to 'have a go', to step out, and as a result be better equipped to discover and use their core gifts that have so often been buried or under-utilised through life.

So what creates these environments?

Many of us who are already leaders have travelled quite a distance in our own development but seldom take the opportunity to share in an open and vulnerable way what that has been like for us. So, as with many things, it starts with us sharing our experiences of growth honestly, including the ups and downs.

A culture of experimentation

Many people in our churches believe that they can't 'have a go' at something until they have got everything sorted. As leaders we are also used to hearing "I won't be able to help someone else until I have got my act together completely". Our theology sometimes does not help us here as we often view failure as sin because for so many the Christian life is about 'getting it right'. Trevor is regularly challenged by the words 'go and lo I am with you' from Matthew 28 - it's as we step out that we experience God with us. It's a well known fact that we seldom get things right the first time so we need to create opportunities for having a go. Small groups are of course great incubators for people in this respect.

A need for encouragement

We are constantly amazed at what a little positive encouragement can do. When did you last enable someone to step out of their comfort zone and try something new? It needs to be a regular part of our leadership rhythm to build people up through words of encouragement. A word of warning here in that it is essential to be genuine and specific, otherwise we come across as bland and insincere, giving away praise lightly.

Always looking for potential

Try playing a little scenario game. Every time you meet someone look for their untapped potential, what is it that God sees in them that is being overlooked? Some clues are to see what they get passionate or excited about; what brings them alive that is not yet being outworked in their life. What is in the embryonic stage of development that just needs fanning into flame?

Sorting the issues

For many there are good reasons why they don't want to step out and grow. Are we prepared to put the work in to build relationships and discover some of the obstacles to growth? Sometimes previous hurts and failures have not been dealt with well and we need to walk people through a healing process so they are willing to have another go.

Creating space for people

This is where small groups really come into their own. Trevor recalls the following: 'Recently in the group I attend I was down to lead the welcome and asked "what new skill would you like to learn?"' The answers were varied and in some cases quite surprising but even by verbalising them this just created the possibility that

they could happen. I even went on e-Bay to try for a woodworking lathe for one of the group (sadly I was outbid) but wouldn't it have been fun to have arrived at the group next week with a surprise present!

Questions for discussion

Divide the group into pairs and ask them to discuss together:

What has helped you grow as a Christian?