



Taking Your Group to the Next Level Speaker Notes (Draft)

I. Introduction

a. Setting the Tension

The Next Level. Doesn't that idea hold incredible power over us? When playing Rock Band – there's the allure of getting to that next level, of moving up from medium to hard to expert. When thinking about our careers – getting the promotion, having an actual office, finally getting the title of Vice President, or achieving that extra week of vacation. Let's consider life in general. As a single, we want to be dating... once we're dating, we want to take it to the next level... we want to get engaged! And once we're engaged we want to be married. As a married couple we want to be dating again...er ... I mean to have kids. Once we have kids we want the kids out of the house and once they're out of the house...and on and on...Getting to the next level is how we are wired.

And for most of you as group leaders, it's the same thing. We don't want to settle. Not really. Even for those of us who have spent seasons going through the motions as leaders, we really don't want those we lead to feel like they are settling. We want our groups to move forward...to take it to the next level.

The question is, then, how do we do it? How do we get them to the next level? Before we can get to the how and the what, let's begin with the Why. Why is this even important?

b. Why getting to the next level is Important:

What we are talking about today is important because a great group experience can have impact through several "generations" of groups and leaders. We have all seen this happen – both in groups and outside of group world:

Illus option 1: Personal Group experience showing the impact a great group can have on the lives of many who were never in that group.

Illus option 2: Personal leadership/business experience showing the domino impact of a great leader and/or great environment



c. Preview of where we are going

Over the next few minutes we are going to talk about some of the key elements regarding this idea of taking your group to the next level. We'll start by discussing how to build a foundation of growth and one of your specific roles as the leader. Then we will move on to some steps we can take as we focus on transition from a "me" group to a "we" group. Finally, we'll talk through being generous with our gifts and talents outside of our group relationships and the role that plays in creating a next level group.

II. Know where you are starting

Every group starts at a different place b/c every group is a unique combination of backgrounds, personalities and spiritual maturities. And, every group has a unique combination of gifts, hopes, goals and needs. Before you can really move forward as a group it is critical to take the time to identify where your group is starting.

Illus Option 1: For example if I were to ask you to tell me how to get to Disney World (or Destin or Miami or wherever)... an easy answer would be to take I-75 south for about 375 miles and then take Exit 328, etc. Another easy answer would be to take the connector through downtown to I-85 S. Take the Hartsfield exit and get on a plane to Orlando. There is nothing wrong with these answers, but they all assume you are starting in Atlanta. But... if you were in Nashville or Boston, these directions would be meaningless.

Illus Option 2: None of us would buy a 1967 corvette with the expressed goal of towing a uhaul trailer around Atlanta. No. You would buy a 1967 corvette b/c it is a legend and b/c you want to just maybe drive really fast on 400. Likewise, you wouldn't buy a Ford F150 just so you could cruise 400. You would buy it so that you can haul things around. It doesn't mean that one car is better than the other - though most would argue that the 67 Corvette is...But you get my point. You have to know what you are starting with before you determine how fast you go or to some degree even where you are going.

As you begin to think through where your group members are, here are some categories to think through:

- a. Emotionally:** What is going on in life? What has the last 9-12 months looked like for each person? What is driving them right now? What are they praying about? What's going on relationally?



- b. **Spiritually:** Are they praying? Is there a desire to know God better? Did they grow up in church? What do they believe about Jesus? About God?
- c. **Background:** Is there a faith background? What was their life like growing up? What are some of defining experiences?
- d. **Expectations:** Pretty much everyone is looking for something different from the group. Some people are looking for “their group.” Other people are just looking for a Bible Study - 2 hours a week, that’s it. Some are looking for accountability. Others have no idea what they are looking for, they’re just along for the ride.
- e. **Self Awareness:** And by the way, it is most important for you to know this information about yourself. Don’t cheat the process and only focus on your group members.

Application 1: Spend 1 on 1 time. I know this is hard and time consuming. And I confess that I have not always done this. However, I can tell you that the leaders who make this a priority always benefit in a big way. *(Personal story would be good here if there is time)*

Application 2: Most groups spend some time at the beginning of the life of their group to ask, “what do you want from this group? What kind of expectations do you have?” But we rarely pick that conversation back up once the group gets going. So naturally when you feel like you’re group is starting to settle... or have hit some kind of plateau, why not spend a night talking about what are some next steps, next level for this group. This could include having everyone write down their goals, fears, etc. on an index card. Where do they want to be in a year, in 18 months, in 2 years? This is great way to benchmark where your group members are at any given time. The key is to hold onto these and come back to them 6, 12 or - 18 months later.

You can also do this somewhat anonymously by having the members seal their thoughts in an envelope.

Or you can have each group member list all of their fears, concerns and questions on note cards – 1 per card. Collect and then read them anonymously. The group will be surprised to learn how similar their fears, concerns and questions are. This could help to lead to an environment of greater authenticity.



III. **Cast Vision for what could and should be**

Ok, once we know our starting point, then we can more accurately cast vision for where we are going to go. If your group has been meeting for a while, you may be tempted to check out for the next few moments. I'm going to ask you not to – b/c vision casting is something that is important in every season of your group. With all of that having been said, here are some key things to think about as you cast vision:

a. If you don't know where you are going it's hard to get there

Meandering is a great way to enjoy a Sunday afternoon drive through N. GA or maybe even to experience a walk on the beach or an amusement park. But it is not relevant for a productive group experience. As a leader you have to know where you are going and you have to be able to communicate it to your group.

Cast specific vision for the group – where we are going, what we will be doing, what our purpose is. The covenant is your friend in this respect. It is a great way to cast vision for the values of the group.

b. Be Real

From the beginning, let your group know that there will be difficult moments. Let them know that there will be weeks when going to group will be inconvenient and burdensome. Let them know that you know that this will happen, b/c you feel the same ways sometime. That is being real and acknowledgement at the beginning will keep them coming back when those tough times happen. They need to know that the effort is worth it.

c. Be willing to lead your group members past their own expectations

Stretch them. Some people in your group can be and do more than they can see. Some people in your group may be willing to settle for social relationships rather than life change. Don't be afraid to raise those expectations. Incidentally this is one of the greatest privileges of leadership – the opportunity to open someone's eyes to their own potential. Don't miss it. Don't be afraid to lead.

d. Wash. Rinse. Repeat

Vision leaks, so you will need to have a cadence around casting vision. Maybe it's at the start of every study or once a quarter or when you can tell that people are getting tired. Keep the end game in front of your group members – keep reminding them that we do life together b/c life change happens best in group. Keep reminding them that it is only by being real and opening yourself up to accountability that you will grow.



e. **Be fluid**

Don't be married to your original vision. It's ok if it changes as your group changes. Just be intentional.

Application 1: Write down a goal for the group as a whole: Relationally, Studies to cover, Service projects to complete, etc. Find another leader or even your director to act as your Chairman of the Board – someone you are accountable to for completing your plan.

Then write down an individual goal for everyone in your group. Depending on circumstances, you may want to share the goal at the right time or just use it to remind yourself of where you are leading that person.

Application 2: Spend one of your group nights having the group write out goals, dreams, hopes for the year. If you as a group spend some time on this, people are more likely to buy in. This goes back to one of the applications we mentioned earlier. The more you can continue to get the group's buyin on the development of the small group the better. Because ultimately, we want to move our groups from a me-to-we mentality. Incorporate groups decisions... see what your group members are thinking. You'd be surprised at how often group members may want to pray more or do more service projects together or study the Bible more intentionally.

Application 3: Leverage the Covenant. This is a great, intentional way to cast vision for group values and the logistics of your group.

IV. **Model the Way**

The most important thing you can do for your group is to be spiritually healthy. We touched on this earlier when we talked about self-awareness. However, we are now talking about taking self-awareness one step further – and acting on it.

Illustration Option 1: Much like the instructions the flight attendant gives in case of an emergency when you are traveling with someone else for whom you are responsible: Take care of yourself first. This really is not an option.

- a. **Focus on your own Spiritual Growth.** This is the Lake Lanier effect. If all you do is pour yourself out into others – not doing anything to make sure you are being poured into, then you will eventually have nothing left to give. Your group members know when you are going through the motions. They know when you have nothing left to give.



And they want you to in a place of spiritual growth. Make this happen –whatever it takes.

- b. **Accountability.** Who in your life has the right to ask you the hard questions? A typical dynamic in a group is that the leader often times gets a free pass – everyone assumes that the leader has her act together. Clearly, we know that isn't true. Be proactive and seek out that accountability. James 5:16
- c. **Authenticity.** You have to be real. This is the only way that the guys in your group will know how to deal with sin. It's ok for you not to be "perfect." It's ok for you to be wrestling with stuff. It's not ok for you not to share it. How else and in what other context will your group members learn how to work through struggles, emotional hurt, tough times at work, etc? You may be tempted to only share past struggles. Don't sell yourself short by stopping there. By sharing your current struggles and temptations you will be the most effective at fostering an environment of authenticity.

V. From 'Me' to 'We'

One of the most important characteristics of a "Next Level" community group is that it has transitioned from a "me" group to a "we group. What I mean by that, is that all of the group members have started thinking more about how they can invest in the group than what can they get out of the group. And, this thinking has to begin with you guys...the leaders.

- a. **Engage your group:** You are not alone.
Have you ever been a part of something and yet had nothing to do? No responsibility? No real voice? Do you remember how un-engaging that was? Do you remember how long you stayed involved? My guess is not very long. While I'll admit that it is often easier, initially, to just do everything yourself, the result of that approach is burnout for you and potential boredom for everyone else. Remember that part of our vision for you guys is that you replace yourself.

Once your group members have a purpose other than just showing up, they will feel ownership and will also get the benefit of ministering in both small and big ways to the other members of the group.

Application Option 1: Engage your group members by giving them responsibility and leveraging their gifts. Your goal should be that someone else is leading the group for the last season that you are together prior to multiplication (4-6 months). This will give someone



else a chance to lead with a safety net and will give you a breather so that you don't burn out.

b. Prioritize Relationships

With most of us being Type A's we can sometimes get so focused on finishing a study, getting through a meeting or getting a service project done that we totally miss out on the fact that in the end, it is relationships that make groups work. It is knowing that you belong and are cared about that opens the door for listening, learning and eventually life change. And if you are like me, this is frustrating b/c relationships can be a bit more difficult to measure than studies completed, prayers said, service projects completed or weekly attendance.

Idea 1: While prayer and discussion of curriculum are key elements of a community group, the driving force behind the group is the building of relationships. Relationships happen outside of the group. 2 hours in a week for a meeting. That leaves another 166 hours and it is in these 166 hours that group really happens.

Illus Option 1: Personal story of a guy you work with or were in a group with for a prolonged period of time. Finally after several months or even a year, you grab lunch one day or end up on a work trip and find that you have a lot in common and a true relationship forms....

Idea 2: Let me relieve some tension for you guys: You are not called to be best friends with everyone in your group, but you are called to care for everyone in your group.

Idea 3: Without authenticity, there is no real relationship. As a leader you must model authenticity to the rest of your group. We have touched on this before, but it is worthwhile to mention it again.

If you will focus on relationships in the ways mentioned above, you will see huge movement towards a "we" group. This happens naturally as friendships develop. Once true relationships have emerged, you can't help but to have more of a "we" focused group.

VI. Be generous

The most easily missed aspect of an outstanding group, is a group that is focused outside of itself. There are a lot of groups that build great internal relationships, that have great Bible studies throughout the year and that



have a foundation of authenticity. However, if the group does not get to the point where it is keeping its eyes focused on the opportunities to be generous with time, money and talents, then the group is settling for less than what it could be. Let's talk about this in two different ways:

Illus Option 1: TBD

a. As a group (again use the "Me to We" idea)

Depending on where your group is, a way to hammer home the idea of "it's not about us" is to start with periodic service. You can do this several ways through the church. However, don't feel obligated to only explore the options provided by the church (volunteering, Globalx, Inersect, Do.Justice, etc).

There are relational and spiritual benefits that go way beyond the actual service...

b. As individuals

Make it a part of your weekly meeting to share who you are praying for, who you are intentionally serving, how you are purposefully giving of your time. The goal for all of us is to get to the point where we actually love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Lofty goal, for sure. But cast vision and continue to encourage weekly until this becomes a part of the DNA of your group members.

When it comes time for your group to multiply, the impact of the group won't just be the 8-12 people in the group it will be the potentially dozens and maybe even hundreds of lives you have touched by keeping a focus outside of your circle.

VII. Conclusion

We have covered a lot this afternoon. Please know that we are not saying that any of this is easy. It's not. But it is important. So don't feel as if you have to try everything at once. Work on it a step at a time. And remember to leverage your group director as you lead your group. We are here to make reaching the next level as easy as possible.

So, now that I have done *a lot* of talking (probably too much, I know), we want to give you guys some time around your tables to work through some common group scenarios – time to perhaps apply some of what we have discussed and to introduce some ideas and practices that have been successful for you in the past.



Each table has been given a specific scenario. We want you guys to take the next 20-25 minutes to discuss the scenario and work through the given questions. At the end we'll come back together as a group and debrief the scenario – getting the best 2-3 ideas from each table.

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