

HOW TO IDENTIFY AND DEVELOP YOUR APPRENTICE

We know it can be daunting to think about not only developing a potential leader, but identifying who that potential leader could be. We hope that this resource will serve as a guide as you prayerfully seek an apprentice leader for your group.

If you've been around West Ridge long enough and have been part of our groups ministry, you know that we've talked about the importance of investing in an apprentice. However, you may be asking yourself, "where do I even begin?" In this resource we hope to help you understand the following:

- Why apprenticing is so crucial to the growth of our church.
- What we mean by apprenticing.
- How to identify your apprentice.
- How to develop your apprentice.

WHY DO WE APPRENTICE?

1. It's Biblical

Throughout the Scriptures we see examples of leaders apprenticing those who would follow in their footsteps. Moses apprenticed Joshua, Elijah apprenticed Elisha, and Paul apprenticed Timothy.

"And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others." 2 Timothy 2:2

The clearest example of apprenticing is that of Jesus and the twelve disciples. Jesus never did ministry alone — His disciples were always with him, watching, learning, and listening; He involved them in everything He did. He saw beyond His three years of public ministry and knew that He needed to invest in the people who would carry this ministry forward.

2. It's Strategic

Our mission as a church is to lead people to become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. Our strategy to accomplish this mission is through our groups. Life change happens best in the context of a group.

If we are to stay true to our mission and follow through with our strategy, then we *must* create space for more people to experience authentic community and spiritual growth. In

reality, the biggest barrier to group multiplication is a shortage of qualified group leaders.

Where are we going to find new group leaders? The answer is in our existing groups! They are sitting in our groups waiting to be developed into group leaders. The best way to transform a group member into a group leader is through apprenticing.

3. It's Practical

Apprenticing is the only effective way to equip leaders in a large-scale, relational, volunteer-driven organization. Not only does apprenticing develop the future leader, it also grows the leader who is apprenticing. When you take the time to teach someone what you know, it allows you to take stock of just what it is you *actually* know. The process gives you incentive to organize your knowledge and put it down on paper, which forces you to solidify it in your mind. As you begin to entrust responsibility to your apprentices and they bring their knowledge, talent, and experience to bear upon what you've shared with them, they will find new and better ways to lead. This will give you the opportunity to learn from them and expand your own knowledge and skills.

WHAT IS AN APPRENTICE?

In the context of a small group, an apprentice is a **leader-in-training**. Apprenticing is the practice of involving people in ministry for the purpose of training them to take your place.

An apprentice is **not** someone who has it all together, and an apprentice is **not** merely an assistant to the group leader. It is someone who has caught the vision of what groups are all about. **A leader and shepherd-in-training.**

THE PROCESS

For the group leader, the apprenticeship process should last the entire life cycle of the group. Practically speaking, we can divide this process into three phases: *observation, preparation, and multiplication*.

Phase 1: *Observation*

During the observation phase, which corresponds roughly with the first third of the group's life cycle, much of your focus will be on creating an environment where your group members experience authentic, Christ-centered community. You will want to be intentional about observing your group members with an eye for identifying your apprentice.

HOW DO I IDENTIFY MY APPRENTICE?

In looking for a potential apprentice, it is important to remember that you are *not* looking for someone who can lead your group tomorrow. You are looking for a teachable group member who has the potential to be a great group leader in the future. Below are some key points when choosing your apprentice:

- It is important that this person/couple has a personal relationship with Jesus.
- Is this couple worth following? Can they model what it looks like to be in a growing relationship with Jesus Christ?
- Has this person displayed leadership skills (i.e. facilitating discussions, providing care, planning socials, etc.) in your group?
- Is your potential apprentice a partner of West Ridge, or will he/she need to complete the Next Steps course? Are they committed to the mission and strategy of the church?
- Have you been able to connect relationally with your potential apprentice?
- Have you seen this person connect with other members of your group?

HOW DO I DEVELOP MY APPRENTICE?

Once you have identified your apprentice, consider some “best practices” that can help you develop them effectively.

- Recruiting
- Modeling
- Involving
- Connecting

We know that no two apprenticeships will look the same because everyone is unique. There is not a magic formula for developing an apprentice, and naturally you will want to tailor your approach to fit your personality and that of your apprentice. The tips and strategies that are in this document can help guide you through the process.

Phase 2: Preparation

Most of the development your apprentice will receive during the group life cycle will happen during the preparation phase. While you should be modeling group leadership and involving others in the group throughout the group’s life, during the preparation phase you will shift your focus to specifically involving your apprentice and intentionally modeling specific attitudes and skills. This shift in focus begins with recruiting your apprentice.

RECRUITING

How is recruiting part of development? Doesn’t the development process begin after you’ve identified and recruited your apprentice? Actually, how you recruit your apprentice can set the tone for the rest of the development period.

Why did Matthew follow Jesus? Because Jesus invited him to. Jesus didn’t ask for volunteers to be his disciples — he picked them. He made a general call for people to believe in and follow him, but he handpicked the men who would lead the way.

The act of inviting people to leadership, if done well, can communicate that they are valued and respected. Consider the following invitations to leadership:

“Our Groups Coach said I need to have an apprentice, so I put your name down. You’d kinda be like the assistant group leader, that cool with you?”

Versus:

“I can really see you and your spouse leading a new group. I think you bring a lot to the table and I can tell that you really believe in discipleship through small groups. So, I’d like you to consider being my apprentice leader to prepare you to lead a group in the future.”

The invitation is also your first opportunity to cast vision for what apprenticing and group leadership is all about. Share the passion you have for your role as the leader. Share with them why you think their gifts are well suited for the role. Most potential apprentices are going to have some reservations about becoming a group leader; changes are they don’t feel qualified to lead a group. Your invitation is an opportunity to address their concerns, while also building them up. It also provides a natural segue into communicating the expectations for both group leaders and apprentices.

For the most part, their understanding of what group leaders are supposed to be is governed by what they see you doing. If the two of you are gifted in different ways, and they don’t feel like they would be good at the things they see you do well, they may not think they are suited for group leadership. This is a great opportunity to discuss what a group leader is and what it isn’t. They may still be overwhelmed, but at least they know what is expected of them.

If you’ve taken this strategic view of recruitment, you will have begun the development process by:

- Affirming their value and leadership skills.
- Casting vision for both the group leader and apprentice role.
- Communicating what is expected of them as apprentices.

If they accept your invitation to leadership, they will be ready to embrace the rest of the development process.

MODELING

The apprentices’ understanding of what group leadership is all about is based largely on what they see you doing as their leader. This dynamic can be leveraged to build your apprentice’s group leadership skills if you are strategic and intentional about the way you lead. There are two critical elements to strategic modeling: demonstration and explanation.

Demonstration is fairly self-explanatory; it is simply showing them how to lead by watching you. Everything you do as a group leader — the way you lead discussions, how you demonstrate

authenticity, how often you interact with group members outside of the group meetings — all of this communications a lesson about group leadership. The key to effective demonstration is to think through what lesson you want to communicate and act accordingly. For example, it may be your natural tendency to allow discussion time to run long; but since you want to demonstrate the value of adhering to the guidelines you've set forth on how long discussion time should go at the beginning of your group, you make a conscious effort to wrap up the discussion time at 8:30, even though there are still two questions you didn't get to.

Explanation involves directly communicating with your apprentice about the principle you are modeling. For example, if you want to model a sensitive response to tough questions, you may want to say to your apprentice, "tomorrow night's discussion is probably going to provoke some emotional responses from Kelly, since she recently lost her stepmom who was not a Christian. I'd like you to listen to how I respond to her comments and questions, and you and I can talk later about why I responded the way I did." This helps your apprentice pay particular attention not only to what you do, but also your method or approach. It allows you to focus attention on a specific skill or principle that you are modeling. By making it a priority to talk about what was or will be modeled, you create opportunities for the apprentice to ask questions or provide feedback.

In order to put the demonstration/explanation strategy into practice, you'll need to know what it is you want to model. One way to do this is to spend some time thinking about what you've learned in your time as a group leader. Ask yourself what would be helpful for your apprentice to know or learn and how you might model it. Some great leadership skills you can model are:

Facilitating discussion — in particular, how you listen more than you talk; how to engage the introverts or rein in the over-talkers.

Investing in group members — spend extra relational time with your apprentices and pray both with them and for them.

INVOLVING

Simply modeling, even internal and strategic modeling, is not enough to prepare your apprentice for leading a group. In order to build both their competence and confidence, they will need to practice leading a group. They will need opportunities to put into practice what they have learned through your modeling. The best way to prepare them is to actively involve them in leading your group.

Start Small — Most groups provide several opportunities for your apprentices to take on leadership responsibilities. You can start by asking them to take the lead on a specific area such as: planning a social event, leading the discussion time, or leading the prayer time.

Build up — As they show they're ready, invite them to play an increased role in leading the group. You might give them the opportunity to lead the entire group meeting instead of just one part. Present them with the chance to direct the group through a key discussion like discussing next steps to planting a new group. You can also involve them in major decisions or conflict resolution, as appropriate.

Provide and invite feedback — As they take on responsibility, give them feedback on how they're doing. Be sure that you give more affirmation than criticism. Just as important as you giving them feedback, ask them to reciprocate. How did you do; what went well, and how could you have done it better?

Encourage training — Make sure your apprentices are invited to any training events. Encourage them to attend a group leader huddle with you. Not only will this provide practical training and vision for group leadership, but it will reassure them that our church is committed to supporting and training them.

For many group leaders, involving their apprentices can be challenging. They may feel a tremendous sense of ownership and responsibility for their groups, and they are hesitant to entrust that responsibility to someone else. One thing to keep in mind — success is not just a job well done or more people under your care. Success is another competent leader who is ready to take your place as a new group is planted.

Phase 3: *Planting*

The final phase of the apprenticeship process is the multiplication/planting phase. Since planning for multiplication means planning to plant two or more future groups, your apprentices will need to be on board and intimately involved with the planning. Set a date and be sure to pray through the decision with the entire group involved. Remember that we are a *sending* church! There is one more critical step in the apprenticeship process.

CONNECTING

Recruitment, modeling, and involvement are critical elements of apprenticeship process. Because the group leader is a key position, connecting the apprentice with church staff is crucial to the apprentice's preparation for group leadership. As soon as you have recruited your apprentice (which ideally would happen within the first 3 months of your group meetings), notify your Groups Director so that the apprentice can be invited into the leadership process.

The Groups Director is responsible for guiding your apprentices through the application process. You can help that process be smooth by being sure to introduce them to each other. There are several steps to approving a group leader, including:

1. Confirming that the apprentice is a partner of the church (has completed Next Steps)
2. Completing the group leader application and background check
3. Interview with a Group Director
4. Approving the applicant

Since some of these steps can take some time, the earlier you can connect the apprentice with the director, the better.

Finally, as your goal date of planting the new group approaches, follow up with both your director and your apprentice. Confirm that they are taking the necessary steps to move the apprentice toward group leadership and if there is anything you can do to help.

By making a commitment to identifying and developing an apprentice (replacing yourself), you are playing a significant role in raising up the next generation of leaders and ensuring there will always be a place for those who are needing to connect in a group.