

Community Group Leadership

Introduction

Does the thought of leading a community group make you nervous? You're not alone. Like most people, you might be carrying a confusing and contradictory tangle of ideas about leadership that swirl in the culture at large. As a result, you might think to yourself: "I'm not a leader. I've never said yes to leading because leaders should be charismatic and outgoing and always know what to do. On top of all that, to lead in the local church you need to be armed with ready-made answers to every conceivable biblical topic."

Or, like many other people, you might be carrying bad memories of what it felt like to lead in other times and places. You might think to yourself: "My experience of leadership has always been lonely and exhausting, but I keep getting sucked back in because nobody else will step up."

If you can relate to any of that, good news! Community group leadership is easier than you think. Our community group leaders don't have all the answers, and they don't mind saying "I don't know, but I'll get back to you," because they know their pastors and hub leaders will help them find the answers they need. Our community group leaders have wildly diverse personality types and talents, and they have been relieved to discover they don't have to lead alone.

If you are willing, set aside your preconceptions, assumptions, and fears about leadership for a moment, and see if the following five commitments (the *real* requirements for leading a community group) don't stir something in your heart. After working through them, we hope you'll see that what's being asked of you is both easier and harder than you might think.

Easier because at Frontline character and commitment always trump charisma and copious knowledge. *Harder* because refusing to lead alone, asking for help, saying "I don't know," listening more than we talk, and patiently walking alongside others are not behaviors any of us have seen modeled enough. Our community group leaders are normal people, just like you, who quietly and patiently walk alongside, listen to, pray for, and follow up with others—and they do all of those things for people *with* people, as a team.

Five commitments

The "job description" of a Frontline community group leader consists of five commitments:

1. A commitment to co-labor.
2. A commitment to communicate.
3. A commitment to pursue.
4. A commitment to mature.
5. A commitment to champion.

Let's consider each in turn...



1. A commitment to co-labor

Most people assume leadership is inherently lonely, but lonely leadership is not Christian leadership. Scripture describes being saved out of the world as simultaneously being saved into a family and a body. In order to build each other up, *all* of us have been given spiritual gifts, but none of us have been given *all* the gifts. Because Jesus has designed the Church to function interdependently, we are committed to team ministry at Frontline. When leaders feel weary, overwhelmed, and lonely, they tend to think “It’ll be easier if I just do it myself.”

Counter-intuitively, a large part of leadership is learning to ask for help, give up control, and share the load. We might go faster alone, but we’ll go farther together. Team ministry moves far slower, but it’s also far more sustainable.

Ask for help. Identify others’ gifting and energy in the areas of planning, hosting, communication, and facilitation, and invite other people in. Give up control in order to gain help. Don’t get discouraged when their help doesn’t meet your standards the first time around. Gently and calmly give them direct and immediate feedback, and watch them grow in using their gifts to support you and bless the group.

Healthy community group leaders aren’t Lone Rangers who do everything themselves. Instead, they constantly think and preach “team,” and work alongside others to help their group grow in maturity. Rather than taking on every role within their group, they delegate tasks and call others to relate to the group like owners, not renters. They also welcome rather than resist coaching, advice, and soul care from their hub leaders.

A commitment to co-labor might look like...

- ...making a list of everything that’s needed for your group to be healthy and run smoothly, and asking yourself who might be good at stewarding each of those tasks (creating and communicating the group calendar, planning the family meals, hosting, facilitating a d-group, planning and coordinating a missional gathering, setting up a meal calendar for a new mom, leading a service project for an elderly group member, etc.).
- ...prayerfully reading through *Apprenticeship Demystified* in order to strengthen your ability to identify, invite, and develop others.
- ...identifying and recruiting another person or couple to apprentice.



2. A commitment to communicate

Communication is a key part of co-laboring. Lone Ranger leaders don't tend to be great communicators. Your group members will feel cared for and led well whenever you proactively develop and communicate the plan for the upcoming month(s). Share the load of planning and communication to ensure it happens consistently. Just because you are responsible to make sure everything gets done *doesn't* mean you should do everything.

Communication isn't just for logistics—it's also for relationship. One of the biggest keys to success as a community group leader is working to slowly build a relationship of trust over time with your hub leader. As you get more comfortable with them, you can let them know more and more about what you're thinking and feeling. In turn they can encourage you and pray for you in increasingly thoughtful ways. Can you name what you are afraid of? What you are avoiding? Share with your hub leader—it will lighten you. “We name things to tame things.”

A commitment to communicate might look like...

- ...sitting down with your leadership team to map out dates, times, and locations for family meals and discipleship groups for the next 60 to 90 days. Once you're done, have someone who's handy with that kind of thing lay it all out in a clean and clear format and send it out to the group.
- ...recruiting someone to send out week-of and day-of reminders to the group before each gathering, as well as choose the themes and coordinate the preparation for all family meals. Work through *Family Meal: Ideas, Tips, and Plans* and *Making Family Meal Meaningful* to learn more.
- ...recruiting someone to collect everyone's contact information (phone numbers, addresses, birthdays, names of children, etc.), and then re-distribute all the information back to the group. They can also set up a group text or email thread, as well as take the initiative to regularly update the group's communication channels whenever new members join the group. Ask them to alert you whenever a group member's birthday is approaching, as well as help you to facilitate a means of recognizing and celebrating that person.



3. A commitment to pursue

Community group leaders are not called to merely set out chips and salsa and keep the conversation going. Community group leaders are called to walk alongside other people as spiritual friends and fellow travelers. Your aim? To get to know them well enough to pray for them. Indeed, all forms of "pursuit" are simply variations on the theme of knowing people well enough to pray for them.

Only God is all-knowing, all-powerful, and everywhere-at-once. You won't be able to answer all their questions, you won't be able to fix all their problems, and you won't be able to be there for them all the time. But you can always listen, encourage, and pray. You can always ask thoughtful questions. You can always notice when they're absent, and let them know they were missed. You can always follow up after a meaningful conversation, ask how they're doing, and let them know they've been on your mind. In fact, the majority of your ministry as a community group leader will involve offering your peaceful, prayerful, non-anxious presence, and then following up.

A commitment to pursue might look like...

- ...taking a few moments after a meaningful conversation to stop and write down significant details before you forget them (names of family members, significant life events, etc.). The notes section of their contact card in your phone is a great spot that can be easily pulled up or added to in the future.
- ...setting a reminder in your calendar to pray for someone before a big test, as well as calling them afterwards to hear how it went. Or setting a reminder for yourself to call and pray for someone when you know they'll be on a business trip and struggling with loneliness or temptation.
- ...encouraging your group members to take the initiative to move towards others, and check-in, listen, pray, and otherwise be human with each other during unstructured time together. These habits are particularly helpful at the Family Meal.
- ...asking an appropriate, trusted person in your group to check in on someone who's been absent or has a need.



4. A commitment to mature

We don't necessarily invite people to consider community group leadership because they're brimming with leadership confidence. We invite them because they're brimming with character, and seem to possess a sense of calling to this unique ministry—the kind of calling that will keep them from bailing out the minute it gets hard. Competence can be coached on the job, but character and calling are prerequisites. That's the paradox of leadership—sometimes the people who feel the least qualified are the most qualified! Cockiness might keep someone from growing as a leader, but fear could keep them from ever becoming one in the first place—especially if they wrongly assume they have to be a Bible expert, trauma specialist, public speaker, or visionary thought leader (whatever that is). Character is a prerequisite for community group leadership, and perhaps the most unmistakable mark of character is humility—the kind of realistic view of ourselves that makes us teachable, receptive, and willing to grow.

Spiritual maturity is not a destination at which any of us have arrived, but a direction in which we're all headed. One sign that we are growing in maturity is if we can name—with help from our friends—at least one place where we sense an invitation from Jesus to grow and change.

- Jonathan is more likely to: hide flaws, avoid challenges, and view feedback as a personal attack.
- Kristen is more likely to: believe mistakes are part of learning, embrace challenges, and welcome feedback.

Would your friends or spouse (if applicable) say you're more like Jonathan or Kristen? Community group leadership requires being patient with yourself and being patient with your group. You can expect to make mistakes. What will matter most is how you respond. If you don't quit, or beat yourself up over every little mistake, you'll stop thinking less of yourself, and gradually start to think of yourself less. God will be faithful to lead you into an increasingly radical “extrospection,” where you naval gaze and nurse your failures less, and move towards others more. Paul describes this progression as “love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1 Tim 1:5).

This kind of humble receptivity is enabled and sustained only by genuine spiritual vitality—including regular rhythms of communing with God through Scripture and prayer. If that doesn't feel true of your present reality, there's no time like the present to begin cultivating new habits that will sustain you on the journey. You can find resources to help at [frontlinechurch/formation](https://frontlinechurch.com/formation). At Frontline, every ministry role is about your development into the likeness of Jesus before it's ever about what you can do for that ministry. We are committed to use ministry to get people done, rather than using people to get ministry done.

A commitment to mature might look like...

- ...fighting to regularly find your joy and comfort in the Lord, through Scripture, prayer, and fresh in-fillings of the Spirit's power.
- ...taking the initiative to ask for help on the front end, as well as asking for feedback—instead of actively avoiding it or merely bracing for it.
- ...learning to tell yourself a different story when you make mistakes, by actively naming how each mistake has created an opportunity for you to strengthen a weakness, deepen your character, or learn a new skill.



5. A commitment to champion

Every local church has its own way of doing things—the ministry practices through which they seek to live out the mission God has given them. Every local church must be a particular kind of church. And every member must agree on a particular kind of discipleship strategy, so that they can all head in the same direction with one heart and mind. At Frontline Church, community groups play an essential role in how we do ministry. We've chosen to gather our community groups in three different rhythms: discipleship groups, family meals, and missional gatherings. These three rhythms are not sacred nor inherently superior to any other model. Other churches may do things differently with great success. But we believe these rhythms are the best way for us to love God, love people, and push back darkness in our local context.

Community group leaders must be willing to champion these rhythms and how we seek to execute them. They cannot half-heartedly run these plays, or pull their group in a different direction from the rest of the church. Leaders who spend valuable energy complaining about the model instead of capitalizing on its strengths will miss out on countless opportunities to disciple their people. If all our groups are rowing in the same direction, and working from the same plan, our people will generally experience growth and health, despite the inherent imperfections of any and every ministry strategy. Our leaders need to believe in our model, be able to explain why it matters, and call their people to commit to living it out alongside them.

A commitment to champion might look like...

- ...thoughtfully reading through the appropriate section of the *Community Group Leader Handbook* in order to gain a better understanding of the “why,” “what,” and “how” of each of our three rhythms.
- ...identifying and naming any internal resistance towards, or confusion about, any of the three rhythms you might be feeling—and then giving your community director the opportunity to process with you in person about that resistance or confusion.
- ...being well-versed in not just the limitations and imperfections of our model, but also its benefits, advantages, and unique opportunities.

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