

From Facebook to face-time

THE ONGOING CHALLENGE: How to connect new people who are seeking transformational relationships through the local church. Sign-up forms, Web-based strategies, and social networking are valid ways to provide broad-scale assimilation pathways for interested community-seekers. But they lack the most important factor: a *real person* who takes a genuine interest in someone's

journey. Regardless of the approach, strategies that work best involve authentic "face-time" with people trying to find a group. Make sure your strategy includes this oft-overlooked aspect. Here are some keys to shape an effective connection strategy:

- Make it clear: Do people know where to go to begin forming relationships?



© iStockphoto.com/astseent

RIP&EQUIP

- Pastors
- Small Groups Pastors
- Small Groups Leaders

CLICK&EQUIP REV! subscribers can now download digital versions of this page. Go to rev.org and click on the **CLICK&EQUIP** logo.

- Make it accessible: Is it easy to get there and to take a next step?
- Make it personal: Who will be a friend or guide along the way?
- Make it meaningful: Why is connecting to a little community so important?

Take a few moments to evaluate these guidelines against your existing connection strategy for helping folks find a group, regardless of the size of your church community.

RESOURCE

To expose your leaders to world-class training without spending world-class dollars, consider the Church Communications Network. CCN brings together top-notch Group Life pastors and leaders from all over North America in an affordable broadcast format. The *Point Leader Café* and the *Groups That Grow* training segments help leaders at all levels develop the skills needed for building life-changing groups.

Visit ccn.tv/grouplife for more information. Learn how to access training resources and events at a CCN church site in your own backyard. Consider becoming such a site and host regional training experiences for area churches for a fraction of the cost of a regular conference.

BEST PRACTICE

This spring I travelled south—*way south*—to teach and mentor leaders in four cities in amazing yet challenging South Africa. At Hillcrest Christian Fellowship in Durbin, I learned how they connect people to group life—right from the service.

Those interested in finding relationships that foster growth are invited after service to an open lounge area attached to the main auditorium. Elders and church leaders provide an overview of the church and the small group ministry. Most important, they invite people to their homes the *very next* weekend. In

each home 10 to 12 people get to know these leaders and each other, and are invited to return again another week. There they begin to form groups or are connected to an existing group.

"It is so important to us that people see us in our homes," said one elder, "because in a church of 1,500 it is difficult to find a connection with church leadership." This "face-time" and the interaction with each other allow people to receive that personal touch from church leadership and also discover a clear pathway to a small group. Go to the Hillcrest Web site (hcf.co.za) for more information.

BILL DONAHUE is executive director of small group ministries for the Willow Creek Association and works with Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois, to train and develop small group leaders.

