

Those “Aha! Moments” In SGM

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UU Small Group Ministry Network Quarterly, Winter 2008

In Small Group Ministry, we sometimes witness an epiphany or an “aha! moment,” either our own or those of others in the group. It may be sudden or gradual and may be felt by one person, several people or perhaps occasionally by the whole group. A limited place in our understanding gives way to a new insight, to a more expanded awareness. Often it can be accompanied by a strong feeling – calm, excitement or even goose bumps. **These moments of spiritual growth are at the core of what makes SGM so powerful.** Groups that don’t experience these moments much, begin to feel stale, shallow or one-dimensional.

We cannot force or make these aha moments happen, but we can invite them. One way of viewing your role as a facilitator is that your job is to create an environment conducive for these moments to occur. Many aspects of the essential SGM model are perfect for inviting these aha moments. (For a description of the essential model see the Fall 2006 issue of this Quarterly, page 4 available online at www.smallgroupministry.net) Let’s explore a few ways that this is so.

In order for an aha moment to occur, one needs to be in the present moment, rather than being stuck in one’s thinking. Being present means really paying attention to what is happening. This sounds so simple but is actually very hard for us humans to do. **Fortunately there are aspects of the SGM model that help participants leave the outside world behind and become fully attentive to the present.** These include the opening reading, chalice lighting, silence, and the check-in. A check-in that focuses on the question “What are You leaving behind to be here today?” can be especially helpful. Answering this question helps each member to acknowledge whatever situation s/he is coming from and to attempt to put that on the back burner for the duration of the meeting and thus be more present.

Non-coercion and respect are also essential ingredients for a group environment conducive for these aha moments. As a facilitator, one of the most important ways You encourage a respectful and non-coercive atmosphere is through helping the group develop and abide by a set of relational ground rules. (For more info on this see the Fall 07 issue of this Quarterly available online at www.smallgroupministry.net). Relational ground rules often include agreements about listening deeply, not giving advice, allowing for silence, sharing the time fairly, using “I” statements, not judging, and allowing a person to pass (that is not be obligated to speak if s/he chooses not to). All of these agreements help create a non-coercive and respectful setting in a group. **When group members understand what is going on, feel comfortable, safe and listened to, they are more likely to experience an aha moment**

As powerful as these aha moments are, one of their characteristics is that they are very hard to articulate. These experiences happen in a part of our being that is non-verbal or beyond words. **Even so, being aware of them and trying to talk about these experiences can help facilitators become more sensitive to these moments and gain skill in inviting these experiences.** Perhaps a session on the power of these aha moments would make a good topic for one of your monthly facilitators’ meetings? **If You have stories, questions or insights about these aha moments in your groups, please be in touch** at mellenken@aol.com. Wishing You the best in your important facilitation work, healing our aching, broken world one group at a time.
