

"And the East German judge gives her a 4.7"

By Carol Klitzner, Small Group Ministry Chair,
Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock, Manhasset, NY

Small Group Ministry at UUCSR is in its eleventh year, with about 60 participants in six groups. We emphasize training our facilitators to ensure the quality of our program remains high. We invited two trainers from the SGM Network to present our Fall 2009 training. Our February 2010 training was designed as self-training time, where we would gain from each other's expertise.

The Olympics

We started with a warm-up exercise where teams of facilitators were challenged to come up with an "elevator speech" for Small Group Ministry. An elevator speech should deliver the essence of an idea in the time it takes an elevator to get to the ground floor. Amid some hilarity, teams were scored on technical merit and artistic impression. The Gold Medal went to:

"Small Group Ministry is a group of about eight or so people that meets once a month for two hours to talk about the deeper matters and big questions of life that you don't usually get a chance to discuss. It gives you an opportunity to meet people and get to know them at a deeper level since we all listen as one person talks. Everyone gets a chance to talk without interruption about what they're thinking and feeling right then in their life."

The Challenges

The majority of the time was spent on a series of situations that challenge a group leader:

*Too Deep Sharing Cross-Talker Person Who Offers Advice
Exhibitionist Hijacker Strong Opinions Silent One*

For each, we had a brief scenario like this one for **Too Deep Sharing**:

Participant "Holidays are tough for me and always have been. My dad is an alcoholic and so every holiday was basically ruined by his behavior. I remember when I was 10 he showed up totally drunk at the end of our holiday meal. ..."

Problem for facilitators: Is this sharing going to get too deep and make the participant have regrets later or make the group uncomfortable? What do you do?

We brainstormed how to handle each scenario. For Too Deep Sharing, our responses were:

Use the introduction to the check-in to set limits:

- Say something like "we'll take no more than two minutes per person."
(Then you can gently stop any person when the time limit is reached.)
- Especially if you have people who are going over their past history, use prompts like "Focus on what's happening now in our lives." "What is on your heart and mind right now?"

Responding to the speaker:

- Go by your own reactions and a quick look around at the group to see whether this is indeed too deep.
People may look at you if they are uncomfortable.
- You do not need to acknowledge the specific content.
- Hold the group in silence.
- If this becomes a pattern, offer help from the minister afterwards, privately.
- Interrupt with a statement such as "I think this is going beyond the group's ability to

address.." or "beyond the scope of SGM to handle..." but acknowledge how good it feels that someone trusted the group enough to speak so deeply.

- It is OK to clarify what level of sharing is comfortable for all. Ground rules make everyone more secure.
- Remind at end of check-in to hold what's shared in confidence, especially if something very deep has been shared.

Working through the scenarios gave us tools to handle these tough situations and also gave us more confidence in our own skills as facilitators.

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