

2008

Brought to you this month
by Mike Harton



The Resource Page

... creative and practical ideas

Equipping leaders not as difficult as you think

In times past, a church could plan a whole week of training and attract a good crowd of leaders for a “church study course” and nightly two-hour sessions. Those efforts have gone the way of week-long revivals.

Pastors and staff then tried retreats, weekend events, Sunday afternoon sessions and transporting a busload to an association or state event. Now, most churches have just given up on leadership training.

What if you could equip leaders with the information and experience they desire or need without pleading, cajoling or guiltting them into attending a conference or meeting? A “personal learning covenant” or “learning contract” not only provides a custom-designed training or learning plan, but also treats leaders as adults and utilizes sound education principles, ensuring relevance and applicability.

A personalized learning covenant is designed by the learner, usually with the help of an educator or a person knowledgeable in the content and the process. Used widely in universities and seminaries and in business and industry, the basic principle behind this approach is the ability of adults to be self-directed learners.

There are four steps to the development and completion of a learning covenant:

1. State clearly the learning goal(s).
2. Identify the resources to be used.
3. Project the evidence that will indicate achievement of the learning goal(s).
4. State evaluation criteria for the evidence and by whom it will be evaluated.

Experience shows that adult learners develop the first three steps easily with the help and encouragement of a person familiar with the tool, but they often get hung up on number four. Most of us are accustomed to someone else (the “teacher”) doing the evaluation and setting the criteria. While it may be difficult, and adults may at first resist (“You just tell me how I did”), this step offers further opportunity to take charge of one’s own learning.

A sample learning covenant for a church leader (in this case, who wants to learn how to be an effective small group leader) might look like the sample below. (For further information, see Wickett’s *How to Use the Learning Covenants in Religious Education*).

In higher education, approaches are often hybrid combinations of in-class, online, small group and/or teleconferences. In the same manner, learning covenants may be combined with other approaches. For example, the staff educator or pastor may assess the needs of all small group leaders, discovering that each has a different level of experience and knowledge.

Each leader may design an individual learning covenant in consultation with the facilitator. If appropriate, all the leaders may read the same texts and may meet together once or twice to discuss their reading. Or, two or three leaders may decide to take an online course together, carrying on dialogue about their experience in the discussion forum of the course. All the leaders may come together at the end of their covenant learning experiences to share what they’ve learned and perhaps to discuss the next step in their training or in its application. **BT**

Benefits of individual learning covenants

- Affirms the ability of adults to be self-directed learners.
- Allows adults to apply and reflect on their previous experience.
- Provides “the ultimate” in flexibility for how and when learning occurs.
- Places the educator/trainer in the role of coach/facilitator/resource rather than teacher or content specialist.
- Effective with most any content and subject matter
- May be used by any church leader (ex.: Sunday school teachers, discipleship leaders, small group facilitators, deacons, ushers, committee chairs, mission leaders)

INDIVIDUAL LEARNING COVENANT

Learning objective	Learning strategy	Resources	Evidence of accomplishment	Evaluation criteria	Evaluator	Completion date
Learn how to become an effective small group leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read relevant information. • Take an online course through the School of Christian Ministry (SCM) at Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond. • Observe three different kinds of groups. • Practice leading a group. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How to Be the Best Christian Study Group Leader</i> (Galindo) • <i>Leading Small Groups</i> (Turner) • SCM course 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journal of reading reflections • Email confirmation from School of Christian Ministry professor • Observation guide • Written comments by group leader 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Satisfactory” on journal • “Passing” on course • “Satisfactory” on observation guide • Minimum of 3 on a 5 rating scale on practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff educator • SCM professor • Staff educator • Skilled leader 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May 1 May 31 June 15

THE RESOURCE PAGE is provided by the Congregational Life office of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in partnership with Baptists Today and for those dedicated lay leaders working in the educational ministries of local churches. This month’s page was written by Mike Harton, a church educator and seminary professor and currently interim dean of the faculty at Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond. Resource Page Archives are now available at <http://www.thefellowship.info/Resources/Church-Resources/Baptists-Today-resource-page>.