

SERIES STRONGER LINKS FELLOWSHIPS

KNOWING YOUR FELLOWSHIP



Strengthening your group identity
for the sake of Christ's kingdom

A wise observer of the game once said, “Egos can be terrible caddies.” Egos urge us to go for the green when we have no business taking such a risk. Egos tell us we *have* to make this putt, so we ram it six feet past. Egos love the miraculous, the macho, even the maniacal. And usually to our detriment, we love our egos back.

Ego’s counterpart is identity. Where ego is overly positive, identity often beats us up. Fred Shoemaker writes of the way golfers view their game: “The quest for identity is so strong that it is very common for people not only to adopt a negative image but to hold onto it even in the face of contradictory evidence—a good putt is just an aberration because really I’m a lousy putter. They have their story and they stick to it.”

But ego and identity have this in common: they represent who we are. We might say they help define us. This can be a dicey business, though not so much for one who follows Jesus. When we learn to see ourselves as God sees us—as his children, as his friends, as those who will inherit eternity with Christ—we are increasingly compelled to speak and act in accordance with his view of us and less in response to how we see ourselves or others see us.

To complete this foundational picture, then, our identity (either as an individual or a group, such as an organization or corporation) is a combination of how we see ourselves and how others see us. But most significantly for believers in Jesus, it also includes how God sees us.

IDENTITY MATTERS

Identity matters because we ourselves take action based on our identity as we see it and others take action toward us based on how they identify us. Establishing an identity that cannot be shaken by circumstances or unfounded criticisms is critical to progressing in confidence and excellence. Believers who draw their identities from how Christ views

them are positioned to stand more faithfully against the lesser objectives of human design and the vagaries of life itself. They can continue in faith despite doubt, pain, persecution, or disdain.

We also believe that the identity of Links Fellowships is significant. For instance, if your Fellowship becomes known as a group that cares for the needs of hurting members or employees, even those outside your Fellowship will approach you to pray or to assist. Likewise, if your Fellowship is known for its propensity to drift off into politically polar stances, there’s no reason people will choose time with your group over time with their friends in the grill or the bar. While you may see your Christian faith as the best possible life (after all, Jesus called it “abundant!”), others see Christians as narrow-minded, power-seeking, or even bigoted. Sometimes when criticism comes our way like this, it is appropriate for us to take an assessment set against Scripture and ask ourselves, “Are we really living as Christ would have us live? Do we properly represent who he is?”

TWO LEVELS OF IDENTITY

For those who identify with Christ, some aspects of our identity apply to all believers. Among these are:

- We are sinners saved by the grace of God
- We have union with Christ, where he lives in us and we in him
- Christ sees us as friends, as brothers and sisters, and as his bride
- We are Spirit-led people, guided by the same one who comforts us
- We possess the hope and promise of eternal life with our Savior

As we have already noted, these aspects of identity give us a bedrock connection to Christ, allowing “our house” to weather the storms that come our way.

Additionally, though, we are gifted by the Spirit and function in various local bodies (church, Links Fellowship,

accountability group, committed cluster of believing friends, etc.). In these contexts, we may be gifted as a servant or teacher or benefactor, and the others in this body may see us this way as well. For instance, when hospitality is called for, if we are gifted in hospitality, we will be among the first to put our hand up to help; likewise, we may be among the first to be approached when hospitality is needed. In this way, as we have noted, our identity can shape our actions.

From here we turn to a local Links Fellowship and its identity. Just like an individual believer, each Fellowship has an identity. Some aspects of this identity should be fixed across Fellowships (i.e., we are those who: uphold Scripture as our source of information about who Jesus is and what he makes possible in our lives; provide a safe place for exploring the Scriptures, for believers and unbelievers alike; pray for one another’s needs; reach out in care and evangelism both in and beyond our golf community). It is also true that Fellowships vary in their identity, and these variances can affect how we are seen and received by those around us. A self-evaluative inventory can help a Fellowship recognize their strengths and weaknesses. It may encourage the Fellowship to stand firm in key areas and give ground in less important matters.

YOUR FELLOWSHIP’S IDENTITY

The pages that follow will allow you to unpack your Fellowship’s identity, something which you may do on your own or in partnership with others in your group. There’s no “gold standard” against which to apply your findings, as different settings and leaders will contribute to the ideals for your Fellowship at present (yes, this can change). Our hope, however, is that what you learn here will help you consider how you are connecting with those in and outside of your Fellowship now and how you may connect with them more purposefully in the future.

EVALUATING YOUR FELLOWSHIP

Begin by answering the following questions, which represent a wide range of possibilities compiled from the many Fellowships meeting across the country.

Where you meet

Do you meet onsite at your club or somewhere else?

Do you meet in a visible space (e.g., dining room)?

Do you meet in a closed space (e.g., board room)?

Your content

Do you consider yourself a Bible study?

Do you consider yourself a book study?

Do you consider yourself a discussion group?

Your attendees

Do those who attend see themselves as participants/attendees?

Do those who attend see themselves as members (almost formal)?

Do those who attend see themselves as friends?

Interaction

Do you interact outside the Fellowship time?

Do you eat together?

Do you play golf together?

Do you interact outside the club setting?

Do you interact with Fellowships from other clubs?

Your leadership

Do you have a designated organizer?

Do you have a designated facilitator/discussion leader?

Is there someone "in charge"?

Your discussions

Do your Fellowship's discussions get sidetracked with elongated personal stories?

Do your Fellowship's discussions get sidetracked with national/global politics?

Do your Fellowship's discussions get sidetracked with club politics?

Do your Fellowship's discussions get sidetracked with doctrinal positions?

Prayer

Does your Fellowship pray together?

Is there one person who prays, or do several pray?

Do you ever “pair up” for more personal prayer as part of your Fellowship time?

Do you maintain a prayer list of needs expressed by the group?

Do members of your Fellowship contact each other through the week for prayer?

Your Fellowship and church

Is your Fellowship connected to a local church?

Do outsiders see your Fellowship as an arm of a local church?

Your Fellowship and Links Players

Do your Fellowship members know they are part of a larger Links Players community?

Does your Fellowship consider connection to the greater Links Players community as valuable?

Do your Fellowship members individually engage with Links Players resources, such as the Daily Devotional?

Does your Fellowship use the Links Players Friday studies to guide its conversation?

Awareness

How do people find out about your Fellowship?

How good is your Fellowship at making visitors feel welcome?

When was the last time you add a new ongoing member to your Fellowship?

Positioning

Are you well-received by the club’s leadership?

Are you well-received by the club’s staff?

Are you well-received by the club’s members?

Outreach

Does your Fellowship specifically support the club’s staff, meeting prayer or financial needs?

Does your Fellowship support the local community by giving to financial needs?

Does your Fellowship volunteer together?

Does your Fellowship host/lead fundraising efforts for a local ministry?

Now, using an X, take time to place your Fellowship on the following **spectrums of identity**.

- We are hidden We are well-known
- We are criticized We are appreciated
- We are academic We are relational
- We respect each other We enjoy each other
- We are formal We are relaxed
- We are intentionally led We are egalitarian
- We are organized We are haphazard
- We have healthy discussions We stray in discussion
- We are church-minded We are missions-minded
- We support each other in prayer We don't include prayer much
- We come to the Fellowship and leave We connect frequently apart from the Fellowship
- We feel a real part of Links Players We'd do fine if there was no Links Players
- We are the same old group We often get new people
- We reach out and help others together We mostly keep to ourselves

Now complete these two **statements about your Fellowship**.

We are strongest as a Fellowship when...

We are weakest as a Fellowship in regards to...

Finally, answer these questions about **your Fellowship going forward**.

What are two practices of your Fellowship that you absolutely want to guard?

What are two ways you know your Fellowship can improve?

What members of your Fellowship can be more engaged than they are now?

How can your Fellowship engage people not in the Fellowship now?

HELPING AND GETTING HELP

By now you should have a pretty good picture of your Fellowship's identity. However, if you've filled out the evaluation on your own, you may still have questions: Do others in our Fellowship see things the way I do? How about those outside the Fellowship? You don't have to give everyone the full evaluation, but you can ask key questions of appropriate people. For instance, what does the bartender hear other members

say about your Fellowship? Do they even know you exist?

While we noted that there is no one standard of excellence, you may also be interested in talking to other Fellowship leaders to compare notes. If you can find a Fellowship that is strong where yours is weak, the insight available to you might be just the impetus your group needs to improve. In the same way, you may find that you can help others.

The Links Players network includes

region and area directors in many parts of the country. These directors have helped start and have visited many Fellowships. Only they can tell you if they've "seen it all," but they've seen a lot, so they'll know which leaders to connect you to.

To contact us about conversations with directors and other Fellowships leaders, email us at linksplayers@linksplayers.com. Put "Fellowship Identity" in the subject line. 📧

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