

Q Asking A Giving Answers

by JOSH NELSON

TEACHING THROUGH DISCUSSION

SERIES STRONGER LINKS FELLOWSHIPS

I don't know about you, but I'm one of those people who would much rather take a golf lesson than visit a doctor's office. The funny thing is that they're really quite similar. Even when we're going only for a check-up and not because we already know something is wrong, we're concerned that the golf pro or the doctor is going to find a problem we didn't know we had. In either case, we had better prepare ourselves for some instruction: "Let's get you holding the club this way." "Let's make a change in your diet." "You want to be sure to take the club back more on an inside plane." "You want to get at least seven good hours of sleep a night." (I wish on that last one!)

But here's something I've noticed. The instruction we get from our teaching pro or our doctor is

built on a conversation. They ask questions and so do I. And from there they tell me things I need to hear.

As a leader of a Links Fellowship, you are like the golf professional or the doctor. You may not have a certificate of expertise, but the men or women in your Fellowship are likely looking to you for some sound instruction. And you have probably asked yourself how you are going to give it to them in a way they will receive it, learn from it, and grow in it. In fact, you have probably asked yourself a question like this one: "What role do I play in facilitating the spiritual growth of those in my Fellowship?" This question is not as easily answered as asked.

Not long ago, our Links Players staff asked ourselves whether we thought of ourselves as "teachers" or "facilitators." I've always thought of myself as a teacher. However, after nearly nine years of leading Links Fellowships around Atlanta, I would consider myself as *a leader who teaches through discussion*. In that way, I am both a facilitator and a teacher—and I think you will find yourself more comfortable and effective if you become both as well.

Teaching through discussion is prob-



ably not natural to most of us. Like our staff, most Fellowship leaders fall into two camps, as either Bible teachers or discussion facilitators. This is like being right-handed or left-handed. We all have a preference; however, we are not one or the other. Just like playing golf, leading requires us to use both hands. (When someone notices I write as a lefty, I am often asked if I play golf left-handed, too. I like to respond, “I use both, but I have right-handed clubs.”)

PULLING AND PUSHING

To get technical about my swing, I am actually a left-handed “puller” versus a right-handed “hitter.” That could be discussed in depth in a different article; however, just as it’s important to know if you’re a puller or pusher (hitter) in your golf game, it is important to recognize your tendencies in leadership style.

Are you more of a puller or pusher?

If you tend to ask questions, listen for answers, and think everyone’s thoughts and opinions are equally as important, then you are likely a puller. Pullers usually make for natural facilitators.

If you feel more compelled to teach people your insights, share your knowledge, and direct people, you are probably a pusher.

When I facilitate leadership and discipleship trainings for groups and organizations, I teach them to think about their personality types as right- and left-handedness. Our personalities and temperaments dic-

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tate our preferences and tendencies. They often reveal our strengths, but they can also help us become more aware of the things that undermine our influence and ability to lead others.

Let’s apply this concept to being Bible teachers or discussion facilitators. Just like we use both hands in golf, as Links Fellowship leaders we should use both to lead our groups if we want to do a good job of engaging all who attend and assist in their spiritual growth. This is how we teach through discussion. However, we all have a non-dominant trait.

Though I indicated that I am a puller in my golf swing, I am naturally a pusher in personality and leadership style. I am not a naturally good question asker, but I work at it. I also need to remind myself often not to talk too much and listen.

Some people would say they are not good facilitators. Regardless, we must work on the areas where

we have to use our non-dominant hand. When I walk into a Fellowship (or any environment, if I’m being honest), I naturally desire to be more interesting than interested. I want to be the most knowledgeable one in the room. So I must be intentional about using a facilitator’s techniques. I try to remind myself often, “Be quick to listen and slow to speak” (James 1:19). I usually write questions to ask my Fellowships in my notes, which keeps me from delivering instruction the entire time. People need to know what the Bible has to say, but I need to know which part of the Bible will be most helpful for them that day. I find this out by asking and listening.

If you are more inclined to facilitate discussion but lack confidence to teach, I encourage you to spend a little more time preparing each week by reading additional scripture that is topically related to your upcoming discussion. Search for articles on the internet from experts and look for videos on the issue on YouTube. Teaching may be your off hand, but you should heed Peter’s advice to “sanctify Christ as Lord

A Function of Size

How small should a small group be? There’s little doubt in researchers’ minds that the dynamics of a group change with its size. They even have some specific numbers in mind. For instance, they’ll tell you that once you pass 17 people, you’re going to have a hard time facilitating a discussion. Your meetings will look more like speaker-to-crowd lectures. That’s OK. There are ways you can still accomplish the feel of a discus-

sion-based Fellowship. For one, you can pose common questions then answer them. By building an outline around questions rather than points, you invite your learners to ask these questions with you. And while it can hard to take questions or comments on the fly, you can leave time at the end to tackle a couple. And if you can’t get to (or don’t know!) all the answers, kick off the next session with them. This gives your teaching sessions that discussion feel.

in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence” (1 Peter 3:15).

We have thriving Links Fellowships all around the country led in both styles—neither is better than the other. You don’t need to try to be what you are not; just work on rais-

ing your level of competency by addressing your tendencies. Recognize what role God has assigned and the gifts he has given you. “As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10). And don’t forget that you lead and serve with others. You may find Spirit-given assistance in a

partner in leadership, where one of you is better at asking the questions and the other excels at answering them.

IMPROVING YOUR SKILLS

In closing, I encourage you to examine yourself. Look in the mirror, and ask “What is it like to be on the other side of me?” It cannot hurt to ask those in your group whom you trust what you could do better in order to lead them well. We all have areas that we can develop as leaders of our Fellowships. Here are a few suggestions:

- **Take an assessment** online to get a more objective analysis of your personality and hard-wired temperament (I like MBTI, but there are many others out there)
- Recognize if you are more inclined to push or pull, and work on doing the other better
- **Mix up the format** on occasion; don’t be afraid of going outside your comfort zone
- **Discover your spiritual gift(s)** and put them to work faithfully
- **Pray for discernment** and ask the Holy Spirit for wisdom
- **Be vulnerable** with your Fellowship; don’t hide your insecurities 🙏

The way Jesus taught

Not all good ideas are God ideas. It can be a great encouragement, then, when we see that Scripture supports what we’re thinking. And if it doesn’t, we should be cautious. For instance, if Jesus always taught by way of lecture, we wouldn’t want to advance practices that he didn’t demonstrate. But Jesus very much taught by way of discussion. He responded to the questions of his listeners, and we find these words recorded in the four Gospels, words you’ll often hear called “the teachings of Jesus.” Here are a few examples:

THE LORD’S PRAYER Luke 11:1-4

It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, “Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples.” And He said to them, “When you pray, say:

‘Father, hallowed be Your name.

Your kingdom come.

‘Give us each day our daily bread.

‘And forgive us our sins,

For we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us.

And lead us not into temptation.”

THE GREATEST COMMANDMENTS Mark 12:28-31

One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, “What commandment is the foremost of all?” Jesus answered, “The foremost is, ‘Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

SINNERS AND SHEEP Matthew 18:12-14

“What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying? If it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray. So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish.

By answering and asking questions, we can engage those we are teaching and find ways to teach to the very things that are on their minds.

Josh Nelson is the Atlanta area representative for Links Players. Copyright © 2019 Links Players International. All rights reserved. You may copy and distribute this article unaltered as long as you do not charge for its use. Scripture quotations taken from the NASB. Copyright by The Lockman Foundation.