Discussion leading

1. Know where you want to take them.
   a. Think and pray through, ahead of time, what the "one thing" is for the meeting
2. Help the group know where you want things to go from the start
   a. Let your time be the right balance between casual and fluid and structured. Inform the group of the direction in the beginning.
   b. Communicate long-term plan as well. "As we dive in for the next 6 weeks, I am hopeful we will discover X. On week 7, we're going camping/out to dinner/etc…"
3. Know when you can only move them one step.
   a. You need to be able to edit your goal as the LifeGroup leader when it becomes clear that the topic of discussion is too much to "resolve" in a single meeting
4. Include everybody
   a. Why don't we take a minute or two for each of us to present our views and where we got them?
   b. We'll discuss all these ideas after we hear what everyone thinks.
   c. "You don't have to agree with her, but let her finish."
   d. Let's spend a few more minutes to see if there are any possibilities we haven't thought of, no matter how unlikely they seem.
5. Post questions in a visible spot.
   a. Visual accountability for "rabbit-runners"
   b. Be sensitive to when God has thrown out your plans.
6. Lead the group
   a. Sometimes you have to call it out for being distracted
      i. "Is there something about the topic itself that makes it difficult to stick to?"
      ii. "How do you all feel like we're doing with our focus tonight? What can we do about it? Member X, what do you think?"
   b. Call on names specifically for input.
   c. Acknowledge when the groups gets it right
   d. Acknowledge when the group is losing its traction

Some Different Types of Questioning

Adapted from the Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning, Harvard

Open Ended Questions

What's Going On? What do you make of this situation? Casting question nets out to see what comes in. Listening for entry and emphasis points.

Asking for Information

Where? When? Who? What? Facts and opinions.

Diagnostic Questions

How do you interpret and explain "A" and "B's" impact on the situation? How do you weave these points into some kind of understanding of what else is going on, possibly behind the scenes?

Challenge Questions

Why do you say that? How would you explain? Where is the evidence for what you say? Is that all? That's just the opposite of what member X said. Can you persuade him/her?

Extension Questions

Exploring the issues. What else? Can you take us farther down that path or find new tributaries? Keep going: Therefore…..?

Combination Questions

How would you relate your points to those mentioned by member A or to something else you said?
How would you understand X in light of Y?

Priority Questions

Which issues do you consider most important? Where do you start? How would you rank these?

Action Questions

What would you do in Person X's shoes? How?

Prediction Questions

What do you think would happen if we followed member Z's action plan? Give us a forecast of your expectations. How will he/she react to your thinking?

Generalizing and Summarizing Questions

What inferences can we make from this discussion and case? What generalizations would you make? How would you summarize the three most critical issues that we have discussed? Can you summarize the high points of the discussion thus far?

Helpful tips for creating better discussion dynamics:

Variety.

Keep things fresh if you can. Think of ways in which you can make slight variations to how you lead discussions, how you work through an idea, and who leads the discussions. After months of the same format, with everyone in the same seats, it can become something stale. Be creative. It won't go unnoticed.

Body language.

Used in moderation, active, affirmational body language can be instrumental in establishing a comfortable atmosphere. Raising your eyebrows, nodding your head or tilting it to the side, and maintaining eye contact with the person speaking are all ways of showing curiosity and interest. Avoid hunching over or resting your chin upon your hands as this can inhibit your ability to project your voice and enunciate clearly. Avoid negative gestures, like turning your back partially or leaning predominately to one crossing your arms across your chest, or checking your watch. One should also be attentive to the body language the other members. As much as possible, arrange the room so that you can see the face of each member at all times. Fidgeting, furrowed brows, and earnest eye contact are often signs from members that they wish to speak but need a little bit of encouragement. Do not hesitate to call on them by name.

Intelligent restatement.

Ideally, the conversation is not triangulated: in other words, talk passes freely between the members rather than, after each statement, returning to the gravitational center of the leader. But a generous restatement of what a student has said ("let me see if I get what you're saying...") can be very helpful, particularly if the member's comments are confusing. Putting a new spin on their

comments, or even reinventing them slightly, while always attributing the ideas to them or their original inspiration, can do much to improve a group dynamic and everyone's confidence that they don't have to have thoughts 100% processed before they can pitch into the conversation.

"There are two universals for a discussion: people and ideas. The discussion leader, in that sense, is not a necessary ingredient but a self-regulating catalyst who becomes a part of the process only when it becomes necessary to keep the discussion going or to provide direction. It follows, then, that a successful discussion leader has to be equally concerned with both people and ideas. Such a balance ensures that everybody gets an equal opportunity to speak and that what is said s understood and evaluated and used as a basis for developing new ideas to further the discussion. Pursuing ideas or cross-examining participants too intensely tends to destroy the social aspect of the conversation. On the other hand, an over-regard for a pleasant exchange that tactfully avoids analysis or disagreements in an attempt to keep people happy will allow thoughts to go untested. The equal concern for people and ideas is the leader's dilemma. It cannot be solved as a problem; it can be resolved only by the recognition that the situation is a dynamic one, and the leader must provide the equilibrium."

> *-Charles L. Ferrara, The Language Game: The Joys of Leading a Discussion*