



[Coaching Life Changing Small Group Leaders](#)

Bill Donahue and Greg Bowman

★★★★☆ (3.5 stars)

Buy this book if:

- *You already know how to coach and want to apply coaching to small groups*
- *You coach in a Willow Creek-style small group system*

This book from Willow Creek is designed to be a how-to for those who coach small group leaders. It provides an overview of the coaching component of the Willow Creek small group system.

Like much of the coaching materials from the small group/cell group movement, this book mixes coaching and mentoring. It includes some excellent coaching questions for small group situations, but much of what “coaches” are asked to do is guide, advise, train, share from their own experiences as small group leaders, develop skills – essentially, to mentor. For instance, to explain what coaching is, the book repeatedly uses sports metaphors and apprenticing examples which depict coaching as a guiding, imparting relationship instead of an empowering one. That’s not a problem if you already understand coaching, but I’d hesitate to put this book in the hands of coaching newbies. Again, this is a common way to define coaching in the small group world—it just doesn’t match what the coaching world says coaching is.

The book names four key practices of a coach: modeling Christ-likeness, shepherding (providing pastoral care), envisioning the desired future, and equipping (skill development). Building a strong relationship is emphasized throughout, and an excellent set of questions for telling life stories are included. I appreciated the emphasis on coaches living a balanced life and not over-committing (many churches are guilty of burning out their leaders at this level), and on living the kind of life that you want your coachees to live. There are some great guidelines for selecting apprentice coaches as well. I also liked the guidelines providing for cross-gender coaching.

The book also includes quite a bit of material on leading “huddles”, or group coaching sessions with your coachees. Helpful outlines of eight potential meetings are included, as well as a template for creating a meeting agenda. There is a lot here about setting up a small group coaching **system**.

While some forms and sample exercises for coaches are included, I would have liked to see much more hand-holding in a book designed for those who haven’t coached before. For instance, coaches are exhorted to create an open relational environment in their appointments, and to utilize teachable moments to train leaders, but no examples or instructions are given as to how to do so. Coaches are encouraged to sign a covenant, but

no sample covenant or form you can use is provided. And next to no practical instruction is given on constructing excellent questions, goal setting or on how to improve your listening skills.

Summary

This book is best for those who want hints on designing or setting up a small group coaching system. If you are using the Willow Creek ‘church of small groups’ model for your small group system, this book may be a good fit. And if you’ve already had formal coach training, you’ll find some excellent ideas for adapting what you already know about coaching to the small group world.

However, it isn’t the best choice for learning how to coach. [*Leadership Coaching*](#) or [*Coaching for Christian Leaders*](#) are much better coaching how-tos. Use this offering as a supplement to one of those books and you’ll be fine.

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