

Addition, Subtraction and Multiplication, by Eli Bernard

(And look out for Division!)

My college degree and first full-time job were in the area of math education. I found that every one of my math students knew how to add. However, some really struggled with multiplication.

Adding is easy. We learn to add early on by holding up one more finger for one more cookie! Multiplication isn't as easy. But it is only "addition on steroids." Multiplication is hard in the beginning, but how much easier is your life now that you know how? Now we multiply without even thinking about how the process works - we just know it does.

The same goes for your small-group ministry. Are you simply adding to your small groups, or are you experiencing "addition on steroids"?

The "adding" philosophy generates thoughts and comments such as these:

"John's group needs a new leader. We've got to find somebody to take his group."

"It's time for our annual leader training event. I hope we can get a few more people interested in leading this year."

"We've got five leaders stepping down this year. We've got to replace them, and we've only got a few weeks left to do it."

"Mary, I know you've been doing this for years, but we don't have anyone to take your place right now. Could you do it for one more year?"

Ministries like these add teachers when they need them or want them:

- A teacher (or five!) leaves, and new ones need to be *added*. (Sometimes, adding is caused by subtraction.)
- More people are attending your church, so you do a little math and figure you need to add a couple of more groups.
- Some of your people are thinking about leaving the church because the group they're in isn't meeting their needs. As a last ditch effort, you offer the "opportunity" to start another group - and the hunt begins for a leader.

There's a better way. Paul instructs Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2 (NLT): "You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others." Paul saw the third generation of Timothy's work. Timothy (first generation) would teach **others** (second generation), who would teach **others** (third generation).

We have to change our minds - and our *mindsets* - about what we are looking for and what we are trying to accomplish. We need to stop looking for small-group leaders. We need to begin *developing* small-group leaders who *develop* small-group leaders.

You may have 10 people who want to lead a small group. If just *one* of them has a multiplication philosophy and the ability to "lead others" to "lead others" to "lead others," the possibilities are huge. Assuming no subtraction (or division), here's what could happen:

- Year 1, you'd have 10 small groups - nine "adders" and 1 "multiplier."
- Year 2, you'd have 11 small groups - nine "adders" and 2 "multipliers."
- Year 3, you'd have 13 small groups - nine "adders" and 4 "multipliers."
- Year 4, you'd have 17 small groups - nine "adders" and 8 "multipliers."
- Year 5, you'd have 25 small groups - nine "adders" and 16 "multipliers."

You don't need to wait for some annual kick-off date to create more small groups. Most churches don't start small groups because of lack of leadership, not because of a lack of people who would participate in a small group. Create small groups throughout the year, and begin seeing the results of a multiplication mindset *now*.

Articles of DISCOVERY

Imagine what could happen if all 10 leaders in the above example were "multipliers":

- Year 1, you'd have 10 small groups.
- Year 2, you'd have 20 small groups.
- Year 3, you'd have 40 small groups.
- Year 4, you'd have 80 small groups.
- Year 5, you'd have 160 small groups.

Of course, just like in math class, multiplication is harder to learn than addition. It involves study and the understanding of concepts and relationships beyond the simple 1-2-3 recipe for a small group. As a multiplier, you'll need to spend time outside of small group with your multiplier(s)-in-training - debriefing, training, questioning, growing, and challenging them in areas of small-group leadership.

But imagine how much easier and effective your ministry will be:

- Subtraction won't scare you or take up hours of your time. No longer will you spend time trying to find substitutes, replacements, or new group leaders. You'll have a waiting list of trained, multiplication-minded leaders looking for the opportunity to exercise their God-given gifts.

- You'll have trained leaders ready, should your church look at planting new congregations.
- You'll create avenues of leadership opportunity within your church. A growing small-group ministry requires leadership and accountability. A multiplication mindset will grow your cluster leaders, region leaders, and other ministry leaders with and through the ministry.
- Members of your congregation will find more avenues for relationships through a growing small-group ministry. More choices will also create a greater possibility of people finding a "fit."
- Friends of your members will find many more avenues into your church.

And Division?

Take a look at the division in your church? Some of it has been caused by adding and subtracting. Adding untrained, ill-equipped members into service until they are burned out. We pile job after job on the willing, rather than doing real disciple training and growing our members into strong contributors and owners of powerful ministry.

We have other members who have never been added in to significant ministry responsibility. They subtract themselves from the participation - perhaps even church membership

The burned out quit, leaving a void in their passing. The uninvolved and disengaged leave the church. Then blame-based division begins among those who remain.

If you've been an "adder," consider the benefits of multiplication. You, your ministry, and your church will never be the same. And the lives you touch, through the others you've trained who have trained others who have trained others, will be in numbers you can't imagine.