

Leader Lifter: How Can I Get My Members to Talk?

(This [Leader Lifter](#) is from Allen White, one of the sharpest small group pastors anywhere. His blog, AllenWhite.org, is a great resource.)



After so many questions about dealing with difficult people in groups, I'm tempted to say, "Count your blessings." But, we do want everyone to get involved in the group discussion. The most significant gift that we can give another person is our full attention and a listening ear. There are several reasons why your group members may not be talking.

1. How large is your group? Quiet people tend to disappear in large groups. The quick solution is to make your group smaller. If your group has more than eight people, then sub-group during the discussion. I do this with my group that meets in a restaurant. When it's time for the discussion, we divide it down the middle. One half of the table turns toward each other to discuss, and the other half does the same. It works. Everybody can get their word in.

Another way to get quieter folks to talk during the discussion is called "Neighbor Nudging." It goes like this: "Okay, on this next question, turn to the person next to you and discuss it, then we'll come back together again." Every person is at least talking to one other person.

If your small group is beginning to look like a small church, it might be time to think about sub-grouping on a permanent basis. As Andy Stanley says, "It's not a small group if it has a back row."

2. Who tends to answer first? If your more talkative members are the first to answer every question, then it's time to have a conversation with them. For some pointers on dealing with talkative members, check this post: [They Keep Talking and They Won't Shut Up](#). If someone is dominating the conversation, then your quieter members won't try to enter in.

If you, as the leader, are the first to answer the questions, stop it. Count to 10. Count to 100. Give your group an opportunity to answer. If you answer every question, the discussion will be inhibited because you have gone from facilitating to teaching. The teaching gift is awesome, if you have a class. Your small group is not a class.

3. Get comfortable with silence. Silence is deafening. We don't talk about awkward noise. It's awkward silence. But, in your small group, silence is golden. It allows people to think. Silence also allows reluctant people to finally chime in.

4. Assume that your members didn't prepare. We used to say that statistically half of group members do homework and half don't. These days I think far fewer group members prepare for the meeting. Don't get on your soapbox, just go with it. As the leader, you've looked over the questions and thought about the answers. Since your group members are coming in cold, they will need a little time to think about the answers and respond. Allow for a little thinking time. Refer back to #3.

5. Talk to Your Quiet Members Post-Meeting. If they didn't have anything to say during the meeting, talk to them about the topic after the meeting. Hear what they think. Give them positive feedback about what they have to say. (Don't lie.) "That's a really good point. Wow, I wish you would have shared that with the group." Each touch will build their confidence to participate in the group.

The last thing you want in small group is yet another environment where someone can't get their word in. The early church met in temple courts and house to house ([Acts 5:42](#)). The large gathering was informational and inspirational. The smaller gathering was interactive.

How are you going to help your quieter group members this week?

Allen White is writer, trainer and small group pastor and the South Carolina State Point Person for the Small Group Network. He also serves as a board member for Water of Life, Greer, SC: givefreshwater.org.