



Initial Leadership Guide

Planning & Preparation

The Goal:

The ultimate goal of BunchOBlokes is that men will discover, accept and celebrate their individual uniqueness and personal value and will encourage one another to be transformed to live a full and satisfying life.

Like all good things, the achievement of this goal requires a precarious balance between purposeful intervention in each other's lives, and just being mates. If we go too hard on the purposeful intervention side, we will stray down the pathway of presumption and ignorance and will do more harm than good, to all of us.

On the other hand, if we are too informal, we might just as well go to the pub or watch TV together for all the good it will do us in achieving the worthwhile goal of enhancing our lives. Balance is best achieved by doing some things objectively, while being flexible with others. The art is picking which ones are which.

Group composition

As long as the key principles of BOB are observed, both diverse and common interest groups can be successful. Apart from all blokes in my men's group being more or less connected to the same church, the major factor in the effectiveness of the group is that we are all very different in age, career, social status, family and personal situations. It was these differences that provided a rich reservoir of knowledge and experience, because the much younger guys are far more in touch with the culture than us old blokes. These differences also gave us a lot to talk about such as sport, politics, work, family, faith and the stages



of life. When it came to the more serious issues, our divergent views stretched us, but because of our diversity, we discovered that we had much to learn about ourselves from each other in a deeply compassionate way. One of the blokes had been recommended to join such a group by his therapist as he was dealing with anxiety and commitment issues. This was very revealing as he had been a group member for some time without us knowing anything of his background. When he later announced his engagement, he revealed much more of his life story and explained how the group had helped him to deal with issues that had troubled him for many years. We are not suggesting that the composition of the group should be contrived at all; rather, take it as it comes and learn from each other, valuing each other's perspective, regardless of the differences or similarities.

As far as the number of men in a group is concerned, a useful minimum would be three or four and a maximum 12. Groups of more than 12 can become a bit unwieldy, especially when it comes to consistency of attendance. However, if only half of the group members turn up, you may be able to discuss things in more depth than would be possible if all were there. We suggest the optimum number for a group is between four and ten.

Stick to the meeting schedule

The meeting schedule – how frequently you have meetings and for how long – is one of the make-or-break issues of BOB groups. Your group will need to decide how often you meet – weekly, fortnightly or monthly – the time of day you meet and how long you meet for. Whatever you agree to, you should stick to it, no matter how many of the group members are available, unless the rescheduling of the group meetings is necessary for a member to continue attending. Perhaps the most difficult part is to follow blokes up who say they are going to come. This needs a bit of personal contact and then email reminders to the whole group of the date, time, location and maybe the topic.

Timekeeping

Respect the wishes of the group to stick to a time schedule. Keep an eye on the clock and wind up the discussion if necessary.

Food and drink

Our experience is that food and drink is important as it helps get the early part of each group going without the leader always commencing a discussion about “how has your week been” or worse, “how did you go applying what we discussed last time”. The ideal is to have a coffee and a snack to start, and then allow the discussion to take its course. This will often provide an opportunity for a leader to pick up a subject and use it to find out a bit more about topics of common interest, such as work, family, sport, politics, etc.

Venue

The venue is not important provided the basics are available. I have seen quite intimate meetings of blokes in McDonalds. We discourage the use of venues like pubs, which in themselves become distractions. Nothing wrong with a pub, we just don't



want you to forget why you are there.

Topics

Topics should be as purposeful as they need to be. BunchOBlokes is not a Bible study although the Bible will be used and mentioned often. The purpose of the group is to encourage each other to live a full and satisfying life. Use of the Guides will help, especially if you let the group choose the topics of interest.

Discussion leadership

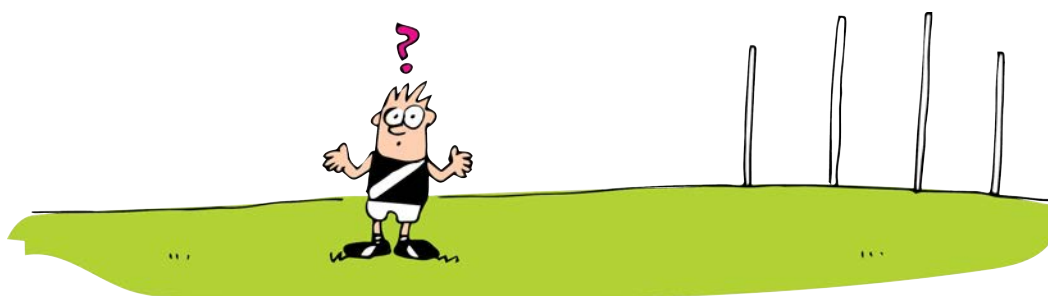
We strongly recommend that you ask various willing members of the group to lead the discussion, even if they are not all that competent at leading groups. One of the best methods for someone to learn about a topic and about leadership is when they have to try explaining it to a group. Any discussion leading that a group member does will have an impact on them that you won't necessarily be aware of. A skilled facilitator can easily keep a group on task, by asking questions as a participant, without undermining the session leader.

Don't be an expert, unless you are asked to be

BunchOBlokes is designed to allow men to feel the power of mate ship and the significance of their own voice amongst other voices. People who lead groups often forget the significance of giving people an opportunity to speak and valuing their contribution. A dominant group leader rather than facilitating group discussion, can tend to shut people down by countering or correcting their view or providing answers to all the questions. As a group leader you are entitled to your view, but only as one of several views. Certainly, your role is to clarify and to establish facts where appropriate and to summarize the views of others, or the group, if that is possible.

Keep the goal in mind

Keep reminding the group of the Goal of BOB groups. It will help you as a leader to sideline irrelevancies and divisive issues, by steering back to the topic and back to the Goal.



How to use Discussion Guides

Discussion guides are arranged in a sequence to establish the foundational principles progressively. We suggest that the Series 1 Guides, including "The Thinker" video clip are presented over the first few meetings either in hard copy, or on devices such as iPhones, iPads, TV, projectors, etc. The discussion leader should read the Guide before the meeting and present it in a way that best suits the audience and circumstances, such as:

- Reading it aloud
- Getting others to read parts of it
- Summarizing the ideas of the Guide in your own words
- Using the headings and pictures to ask questions, assuming that others may have read it (which most will not, even if you ask them to)
- Asking others to present their view on the subject

Please keep in mind that the goal is to create discussion, rather than agreement on a particular point of view, at least initially.

Discussion questions

Discussion questions are provided to stimulate discussion which at least, will create opportunities to clarify thinking around the major points of the Guides. You will notice that we do not provide answers, nor are we necessarily seeking agreement on every point of discussion. Our hope is the discussion and the relationship between Blokes will provide an opportunity for the Spirit to do his work over time.

Written by Warren Mills