

A Summary of 2: 7 Philosophy and Strategy for 2:7 Group Leaders

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Introduction

As a 2:7 group leader, you must communicate more than methods. To do this, it must be clear in your own mind where you are going with your students, why it is important to get there, and how (by God's grace) you plan to see specific results in their lives. Webster's defines *philosophy* as the "beliefs, concepts, and attitudes of an individual or group." *Strategy* is defined as a "careful plan or method."

The 2:7 Series materials give you a very effective strategy for the spiritual development of Christian laymen and women. The following paragraphs explain some concepts, methods, beliefs, and attitudes that are important to the success of *The 2:7 Series*. If you follow these guidelines, you will find deep and lasting results in the lives of your 2:7 students.

A. Leader Responsibilities

1. Teach from experience. This is the principle of "Practice what you preach." We need to be doing what we expect our students to do. In 1 Corinthians 4:17, Paul says, "I am sending to you Timothy. ...He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church."

It is essential in discipleship training that the group leader be doing everything that is expected of the students.

In the Basic and Advanced clinics you receive training and insight that will enable you to lead with skill and effectiveness. It is as important for pastoral staff to attend this training as it is for local church laymen. There is no substitute for training and experience that specifically applies to *The 2:7 Series* discipleship curriculum.

Those who have graduated from Course 6 and plan to teach *The 2:7 Series* should also go through the training clinics. There is very little financial cost—they enjoy a very reduced tuition. It will greatly enhance their capabilities.

2. Guide more than instruct. The 2:7 group leader is not so much an instructor or teacher as a guide and facilitator. Much of the current literature in adult education makes it clear that (in most settings) adults don't want to be told; they want to discover for themselves. As the group leader you are "directing traffic." You are giving cohesiveness to the group, stabilizing it -helping when the students ask for help or need help. We don't want "to line them up in rows and talk at them." A 2:7 group leader learns as much from the students as they learn from him.

3. Plan to complete all six courses. The result we expect to see at the end of Course 6 is a person who is a functioning disciple. A graduate of Course 3 or 4 is a changed person with noticeably more skill and capacity. Yet we have not reached our 2:7 *Series* goals until the person has graduated from Course 6.

Do all you can to help each student successfully complete each course, one at a time. If for some reason a student must drop out, see if that person can't be brought back into the process in the next year or two. Look for opportunities to help your students continue through *The 2:7 Series* to the completion of Course 6. *Study the many suggestions in the Course 1 Leader's Manual* Enjoy the 2:7 material and be excited about the Scriptures, the Lord, and what He is doing in and through your own life. Share some of your failures as well as your successes.

4. Accept your discipling responsibilities. The late A. W. Tozer said, "Only a disciple can make a disciple." God's most consistent method is to use *people* to accomplish His purpose: "There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John" (John 1:6).

In *The 2:7 Series* the focus is on the group, not on the group leader. Yet the leader must be a troubleshooter, an encourager, and a stimulator. As the leader, you should see yourself as having the primary responsibility for discipling those in your group. You need to feel a healthy and reasonable burden for each of your people. Allow the Holy Spirit to work through you. Prepare each lesson carefully. Be aware as soon as someone starts falling behind. Match that person up with another student for mutual daily checkup. Get individual time with students as you feel there is the need.

First Thessalonians 2:8 says, "We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us." Open your ears to listen. Open your heart to share, verbally, as well as to share your time.

First Thessalonians 2:10-12 reads, "You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory." Those are goals we should pursue as 2:7 group leaders.

5. Pray for your group. "Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain" (Psalm 127:1). In 1 Corinthians 3:6-7 we see that only God can cause growth: "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow."

Ask God to use you in the lives of your students. As a 2:7 group leader, you need to be committed to praying faithfully for each person in your group. Plan to pray consistently for each person in your group. Prayer is a key to lasting results in the lives of people.

6. Develop warm relationships. Build friendships with those in your group. It may take a number of weeks before those of you in your group feel close. The usual experience is a growing openness and freedom to share. It takes time for people to feel accepted and unthreatened. Don't rush it. Let it happen. Be praying for unity and warm relationships among the members of your group.

Some of the following activities have helped other groups grow closer together:

1. A monthly or quarterly potluck dinner in one of the homes. Sometimes, have your 2:7 session after the meal. Other times, make the whole evening a social time.
2. Some activity that includes the children of parents in the group.
3. Picnics.
4. Sports events together, as spectators or as participants.
5. A work project to help one of the students with a home project.

You and your group can brainstorm other ideas. Be very conservative in the number of additional activities that you schedule. The students have their hands full in doing their normal 2:7 assignments in addition to their many regular responsibilities.

7. Keep attrition down. Even in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ there was attrition: He had dropouts, too. In John 6:66 it says, "...many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him." Some attrition in discipleship training is normal. Most often, attrition results from routine circumstances such as people moving to another neighborhood or city, medical problems, or an unpredicted workload on the job that requires extra hours or travel.

Several years of experience have shown two major causes of attrition (and their resolutions):

1. *People joining a 2:7 group without knowing what they are getting into.* These people don't realize that they are committing themselves to weekly accountability. They aren't ready to take on regular homework assignments. Brochures, orientation meetings, showing the 2:7 film, and clear personal explanations can be deterrents to this type of attrition.
2. *Being asked by an authority figure to take on additional responsibility-saying yes under compulsion-then dropping 2:7 when the time pressures become too great.* Both students and group leaders need to be freed up from most other responsibilities during their involvement with *The 2:7 Series*. Discipleship training requires concentration, time, and effort. Pastoral staff must help protect these people from recruitment. We must not forfeit our training investment.

Some people will drop out of 2:7 simply because they are unwilling to pay the price to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. We live in a generation that likes comfort. Many are not immediately ready for accountability, standards, or even nominal discipline. Perhaps they will be later.

If some attrition continues, it may be wise in latter 2:7 courses to combine two or three groups of the same course into one group. This conserves group leaders and helps maintain a large enough group for good discussion.

For whatever reason individuals drop out of *The 2:7 Series* they can recycle at a later date and join a group where they left off. They do not need to redo assignments they have already completed.

8. Arrange individual time with students. There are three types of people with whom you will want to get individual time:

1. *A person who is falling behind in completing the course requirements.* This person may simply need encouragement or some help in planning or time management. Usually this one-to-one discussion can take place before or after the regular class session. A phone call can handle it in many cases. You may arrange for this student and another student to alternate weeks in making a daily phone call to each other to share the progress they have each made on completing course requirements. In more complex cases, you may need to schedule a half hour to an hour to talk with an individual.

2. *A person who is going through a personal trial or hardship.* This could be a financial or health problem, or it might be a death in the family or difficulty with a child. You might simply have prayer together, or the person may just want someone to talk to. Others in the group might also help in any way they can. Relieving some of the stress and pressure could make the difference between the person continuing or not continuing in his training. Whatever he or she chooses to do, this person needs your friendship and possibly your assistance in some way.

3. *To give additional discipleship training to an individual.* Occasionally, an individual will want some extra input and time. Often those who are single, without small children, or in a relatively undemanding situation may want to do more than the course requirements dictate. As you gain more experience in discipling, you will have more to share with this type of person. In Courses 4-6 you will be more likely to develop this type of supplemental ministry than in earlier courses.

B. Leader Attitudes

1. **Seek quality to produce quantity.** Jesus carefully trained twelve men. He taught the multitudes, but he trained twelve. It is possible to go much deeper and do a more complete job of training in a small group of eight or ten than in a large group. In analyzing 2:7 graduates from several countries, it is apparent that they gravitate toward a variety of challenging and important ministry opportunities.

Spiritual multiplication takes place where training is thorough and standards are high. Be a faithful steward with those people God has given you. You will be surprised at which ones become multipliers and effective ministers for Christ in the months and years ahead.

2. **Build on success and encouragement.** Negative criticism stifles enthusiasm and participation. Genuinely commend and compliment people as often as you can. You can say things like: "Thank you," "I appreciate that," "That is an excellent thought," "Thank you for sharing that," and "You are doing a fine job in this area."

Paul was sometimes direct and hard, but whenever possible he expressed gratitude and appreciation. He praised people for what they were doing right. Perhaps Proverbs 3:27 applies to this concept: "Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act." Many people suffer from discouragement much more often than they do from pride.

3. **Be patient: Growth takes time.** It might be possible in six months to race through the information covered in *The 2:7 Series*, but we could not get the material into the lifestyle of the students in that amount of time. We can grow vegetables in a few weeks, but to grow a tall, sturdy tree takes years. We want to build solidly into lives!

The 2:7 Series takes no shortcuts. Careful field-testing has shown how rapidly we can move people along in their training and development. For the best results, follow what you are taught in the training clinics and in the leader's manuals. It took Jesus Christ three years to train the twelve. In *The 2:7 Series*, we are dealing with habit patterns, personal application, and character changes. Don't rush. Go at the recommended speed. Do a thorough job without belaboring the material.

4. **Keep the six courses in perspective.** It is important to have in mind an overview of the contents of all six courses. Leading any specific course material must not be done in isolation. Each course is part of an overall plan for producing a functioning, well-rounded disciple of Jesus Christ.

In Courses 1-3, the students generally think *inward*. They talk about their own needs, struggles, and success. In Courses 4-6, the students generally think *outward*, increasingly about the needs of other people. Some think outward as early as Course 1; some still think inward at the end of Course 6. Still, the generalization needs to be kept in mind. Focus on seeing students' needs met in the early courses. Challenge them to minister to other people as they participate in the later courses. It is important for students to become successful in Scripture memory, Bible study preparation, and quiet time in Courses 1 and 2. These success patterns carry over into subsequent courses.

In Courses 1 and 2, the group leader must model good Bible study leading techniques. In Courses 3-6, the students will be growing and developing in their own Bible study leading skills.

Keep teasing students with positive anticipation of course material that still lie ahead of them. Occasionally refer back to previously covered material. *Keep your six course perspective at all times.*

C. Expected Results in Students

1. **Look for character changes.** First Corinthians 8:1 says, "Knowledge puffs up but love builds up." Raw knowledge without personal application tends to cause a prideful attitude. Knowledge and training do not equal maturity. The goal is that we become more Christ-like.

Application of truth, in real life, changes character. Quiet time, Scripture memory, Bible study, etc, are means to an end. God will contribute circumstances of life to mesh with what each of us is learning from Scripture and from others. God's desire is that we be godly people-not just spiritually intelligent.

People will come to times of surrender and more comprehensive commitment during 2:7 training. Values will change. Patterns of lifestyle will change. Convictions will deepen. Constantly focus attention on application. We want the students to gain knowledge and skills, but a more important value is being a Christ-like person.

2. **Develop lifelong habits.** It was said of Daniel: "Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before" (Daniel 6:10). Daniel had developed a positive and meaningful habit. Habits are helpful; they can work for us.

Certain aspects of *The 2:7 Series training* should become lifelong habits. The Bible describes certain prerequisites for growth and knowing Christ, specific things that every Christian should do faithfully: a consistent time with God in His Word, a regular intercessory prayer life, memorizing and meditating on the Scriptures, studying the Bible, and witnessing for Christ. Many of the meaningful and satisfying patterns your students have developed during *The 2:7 series will continue with them for a lifetime. Pray for an impact that is permanent.*

3. **Develop skills and concepts.** Certain skills and concepts that are learned in *The 2:7 Series can be used whenever the need arises. They may not be used every day or every week, but when the opportunity or need is there, they can be put to good use. For example: how to spend a day in prayer and evaluation daily checkup, setting priorities, how to lead an investigative Bible study, and how to use a "do list."*

4. **Produce leaders and workers.** *The 2:7 series will effectively generate lay leadership for the ministries of a local church. If quality men and women are invested in this training, the dividends to a local church are tremendous!*

It is unrealistic to think that every 2:7 participant will become a leader. But you can expect a 2:7 graduate to show more skill with the Scriptures, be more stable and have a more consistent devotional life. *The 2:7 series will help you produce both leaders and workers.*

You will find that some people you expect to enrich only their own lives will later take spiritual responsibilities no one dreamed they could grow into taking.

Invest into 2:7 training a high percentage of those people you suspect have the most potential. Talk to them personally when recruiting students for their group. Ask someone on the pastoral staff to help you recruit specific "high-potential" people. However, you will often be pleasantly surprised when you see what happens in and through people you thought had much less potential and capacity.

D. Recruiting and Promotion

1. **Be a wise recruiter.** Be honest with people. Let them know there is accountability - that they will need to do one to three hours of preparation each week. Also, describe some of the blessings and benefits they will receive if they participate in *The 2:7 Series*. In Luke 14 Jesus said that we should count the cost of discipleship before we start. Give people the facts they need in order to think and pray about joining a 2:7 group.

Conduct orientation sessions in which you show the 2:7 film and hand out brochures. Two or three people who have been in *The 2:7 Series* might give a testimony about some of the results they have experienced in their lives.

The month before school starts is usually when you will do your most extensive promotion. Recruit people for groups that will begin about the time school starts. In the Northern Hemisphere extensive promotion is done in August and 2:7 groups begin in

early September. In the Southern Hemisphere the heavy promotion is done in January and 2:7 groups begin the first half of February.

When you sign up people, have them make a commitment for one school year. You will miss recruiting a number of people if you ask for a two-year commitment. After people have a one-year time investment it is rare for them not to continue with 2:7 through the second school year.

2. Be somewhat selective in recruiting. You can be selective without excluding people who want to be in a 2:7 group. By selection we mean ensuring that high-potential and committed people are not inadvertently left out of a 2:7 group. If most of those who are recruited for a 2:7 group are problem-oriented people, it will take longer to raise up a broad base of lay leadership in your church.

When *The 2:7 Series* is initially beginning in a church, preferably the first two groups (eight to ten people each) should be potential group leaders for future 2:7 groups. This will provide a strong base of leadership for subsequent years.

It is very important for husbands and wives to go through *The 2:7 Series* together. It deepens communication and strengthens the marriage. Later they may decide to teach discipleship together.

It is wise strategy to give priority to recruiting people in their twenties and thirties. An investment of training with them will reap dividends for years to come. Make the training available to all adult ages, but focus your promotion on the younger adults. *The 2:7 Series* has been designed for adults. It has been effective with teenagers only when the students were above average in capacity and commitment.

3. Enlist some 2:7 graduates as group leaders. As people graduate from Course 6, you increase the base of possible 2:7 group leaders. Some of the graduates will want to lead a 2:7 group. Those who do should attend the Basic and Advanced 2:7 clinics in order to sharpen their leading skills and enlarge their perspective.

Graduates who are not interested in leading a 2:7 group will gravitate to areas of ministry of their own choosing. These graduates will strengthen many different ministries in a local church. A smaller percentage of the graduates actually lead a 2:7 group. Therefore, you will need to continue to recruit a few people to be trained at a 2:7 clinic even though they have not previously participated in a 2:7 group.

4. Select 2:7 group leaders. From year to year, you will need to select people to attend 2:7 training clinics for preparation to lead a 2:7 group, because someone must confirm their willingness and availability to attend the clinic and lead a group. Here are some things to look for in selecting 2:7 group leaders.

1) They have a good reputation in the congregation. They are not rebels. They are not necessarily widely known but are respected and appreciated by those who know them.

2) They have a fair grasp on the Scriptures. They should be more practical than academic in their approach to the Bible.

3) They have good verbal skills. They can communicate ideas. They don't have to be eloquent, but they do need to be adequate.

4) With a couple, both the husband and wife should want to work together in helping other people. They may feel inadequate but must both desire to minister in this way.

5) Those in their thirties are ideal. It is likely that a training investment in them will result in years of spiritual productivity. They are at an age where they can lead both older and younger adults. Those in their twenties are limited to the younger adults. Also look for people over forty who can specialize in this ministry: there are a number of people in this age group whose background and commitment will enable them to be excellent group leaders.

6) Singles should lead singles, and couples should lead couples. It works well to have a minority of singles in a couples group led by a couple. It is not good to have a minority of married people in a singles group led by a single. It has been proven more effective for single men to lead single men and for single women to lead single women.

7) They should have a stronger desire to see Christians mature than to specialize in evangelism. It is very helpful if they have led a few people to Christ, but they should lean toward the growth and maturity emphasis. It is a rare person who maintains a balance between evangelizing and establishing/equipping.

8) Look for potential leaders. Those who are the current leaders and backbone of a local church are often unable to take on additional activities. Select those you suspect will gravitate toward leadership responsibilities in the next two or three years. Leading a 2:7 group will be superb training and experience.

9) Look for people who: show spiritual hunger, are alert, demonstrate personal stability, think, have capacity, ask questions related to applying the Bible, are teachable, have a stable family or living situation, and are energetic.

5. Have both men and women leading. In singles groups, the men and women often meet together at the same time and place. When the 2:7 groups begin their class sessions, men lead men and women lead women. The single men and women may have refreshments together before or after their class.

In couples groups or mixed groups of singles and married, it is advantageous to have a couple as the leaders of the group. In Course 2, the work on the personal testimony can go much more efficiently when the husband and wife both critique testimonies. It is also easier for them to get personal time with individuals. Many couples find great satisfaction in working together in a common ministry.

E. Management

1. Cooperate with leaders and pastoral staff. Ideally, someone on the pastoral staff should be responsible for *The 2:7 Series* in your church. This will ensure that the Series is represented at staff meetings. If it is appropriate, *The 2:7 Series* should have church board approval.

Whatever the organizational structure in your church, group leaders need to keep the pastoral staff informed about how their 2:7 group is doing. For *The 2:7 Series* to be effective in a local church, it is important for the pastor to make an occasional reference to it from the pulpit-as part of a sermon or in announcement form. People must see that the pastor is supportive of *The 2:7 series training*.

2. Schedule 2:7 classes. Schedule 2:7 groups concurrent with the school year. In the Northern Hemisphere it is ideal to start Course 1 in early September. This enables a group to complete three courses before summer. It also enables a church to get their people through *The 2:7 Series* in two winters. In the Southern Hemisphere it is ideal to start 2:7 groups in the first half of February.

Experience has shown that people need to take several weeks off between school years. Students need a break from the intensity of their work, and they need an opportunity to fail in their basic disciplines. Some 2:7 groups get together two or three times during school vacation just to share, do some evangelism, or have some type of social time.

Classes are normally cancelled from about December 15 through after January 1 because of the Christmas holidays. Through the year, an occasional class session may be cancelled for some special church activity or event. In a few rare cases, a class session might be postponed in order to feature a special topic or to have something like an extended time for prayer and sharing together.

A 2:7 course can be started or completed at any time. The more 2:7 groups you have in your church, however, the more important it may be to have courses starting and finishing at the same time.

It is imperative that 2:7 class sessions not be less than 1 1/2 hours long. It is ideal to have an average of two hours available for your sessions.

A church with multiple Sunday morning services can often schedule some 2.7 groups Sunday morning. Lack of available space is the most frequent difficulty encountered. Some groups meet in nearby homes during this time while children are in classes.

3. Schedule class locations. Meet in a room that creates a relaxed and informal atmosphere. Many groups meet in homes, either in the same home every week or at rotating locations. If you are meeting in the church building, choose a room that doesn't look institutional. If possible, select a room with carpet on the floor. Some groups like to meet around a large table so it is easier to write. Sitting in a circular pattern is conducive to informality, warmth, and participation. The group leader should not be in a prominent position. All members of the group should be seated as equals.

4. Control the activity level of 2:7 people. Both the 2:7 group leaders and the students must keep their activity level down while going through *The 2:7 Series*. A general guideline is to have only one other continuing church responsibility during this time. Those with young children or those who are in a heavy workload period in their career must have the courage to say no to additional demands on their time. A person cannot be in a time frenzy if he is to reap the optimum results from the training. Pastoral staff and key lay leaders must help protect the 2:7 leaders and students from becoming overextended.

5. Manage finances. Some churches pay part or all of the cost of sending people to 2:7 training clinics. In other churches, people pay their own clinic tuition. Your church will need to make its own decision about this. In some churches, students pay for their 2:7

materials. Other churches pay half (or less) of the cost of student materials. Experience has shown that students should pay something: Personal investment increases personal motivation. The most important thing is that you work out financial details with your pastoral staff and come to a clear understanding. If policies need to be made, see to it that these decisions are made and the results communicated.