

## **LEADERSHIP SYNC: The transformational dynamics of silence.**

### **SILENCE IS GOLDEN**

Powerful gospel transformation can come from silence. Perhaps because silent indicates awkwardness in social conversations, new leaders often feel uncomfortable with silence and quickly fill the gaps between the group's discussion. We must allow pauses to take place so people can process the truth of scripture.

#### **Three types of helpful pauses:**

1. Emotional pauses - where people attend to strong feelings. They are asking the question, "how do I feel about what is being discussed?"
2. Reflective pauses - where people seek meaning or make connections of what they are learning and experiencing. They are asking the question, "how does this apply to my life?"
3. Expressive pauses - where people seek labels or language to describe what they are learning or experiencing. They are asking the question, "how can I put this in my own words?" When a person can restate the truth of scripture in their own words the Word of God has begun to pierce their hearts and minds.

#### **Two types of pauses that are not helpful:**

1. Obstructive pauses - people avoid processing what they are experiencing or learning. They disengage in an attempt to avoid the truth of scripture. This kind of pause is often rooted in rebellion. They are asking the question, "what is this truth going to cost me?" I don't want to give up something (control or something they deem more precious than Jesus).
2. Protective pauses - people are silent because they fear that in sharing something may be revealed about them. They disengage in attempt to protect themselves. This kind of pause is rooted in shame. They are asking the question, "how will these people think of me if I share?"

### **PASSIVE RESISTANCE**

These harmful pauses are called passive resistance. Passive resistance (as opposed to active resistance) often go unnoticed. When they go unnoticed we miss an opportunity for our people to let the truth of scripture penetrate their hearts (Hebrews 4:12). These pauses go unnoticed because the leader is too quick to fill that gap of silence in the group's discussion.

Passive resistance is indicated far more often by nonverbal cues than by verbal cues. Facial expressions can indicate resistance or acceptance of truth. Are they perplexed? Are they anxious? Body language can be a good indicator of resistance or acceptance. If a group member is fidgeting or crosses arms resistance can be taking place. The one verbal cue of resistance is deflecting. When the discussion goes deep the member cracks a joke or changes the topic to bring the discussion back to a superficial level.

### **Never assume passive resistance-ask**

Resistance is an indicator of a person's willingness to be transformed by the gospel. A discerning leader can confront these harmful pauses by asking "why are you hesitant to share?" Often times that question gives permission for the member to confess their desire to avoid or self-protect. A wise leader when confronted with passive resistance creates a safe environment for people to wrestle through their fears. Fear of losing control or being revealed.

### **CONTENT VERSUS PROCESS**

A strong community group leader understands both content and process.

1. Content - what the Word of God says. Understanding scripture - the text.
2. Process - how I am understanding scripture and applying it to my own life. Understanding your group - the subtext.

Many group leaders focus on content versus process. Focusing on content is far easier than focusing on process. If you want to focus on process, allow time for the processing to occur. Processing usually cannot occur in a useful manner during a constrained time period (for example 10 minutes before the group ends). An effective leader understands the art of weaving process throughout the discussion of content. We must not only lead our group members to read the scriptures (content) but we must allow time for the scriptures to read them (process).

Processing typically cannot be forced, but occurs when the leader notices an opportunity to allow a focus on process. These windows of opportunity to process often happen in the midst of silence. It is in these windows of silence that people may engage emotionally, expressively and reflectively with the truths of scripture.

Once processing has occurred in the group, the leader and the group members typically experience greater emotional closeness that allows for further exploration of scripture and the group's vulnerabilities and sin issues. This is when the Holy Spirit can deeply minister to the soul.