

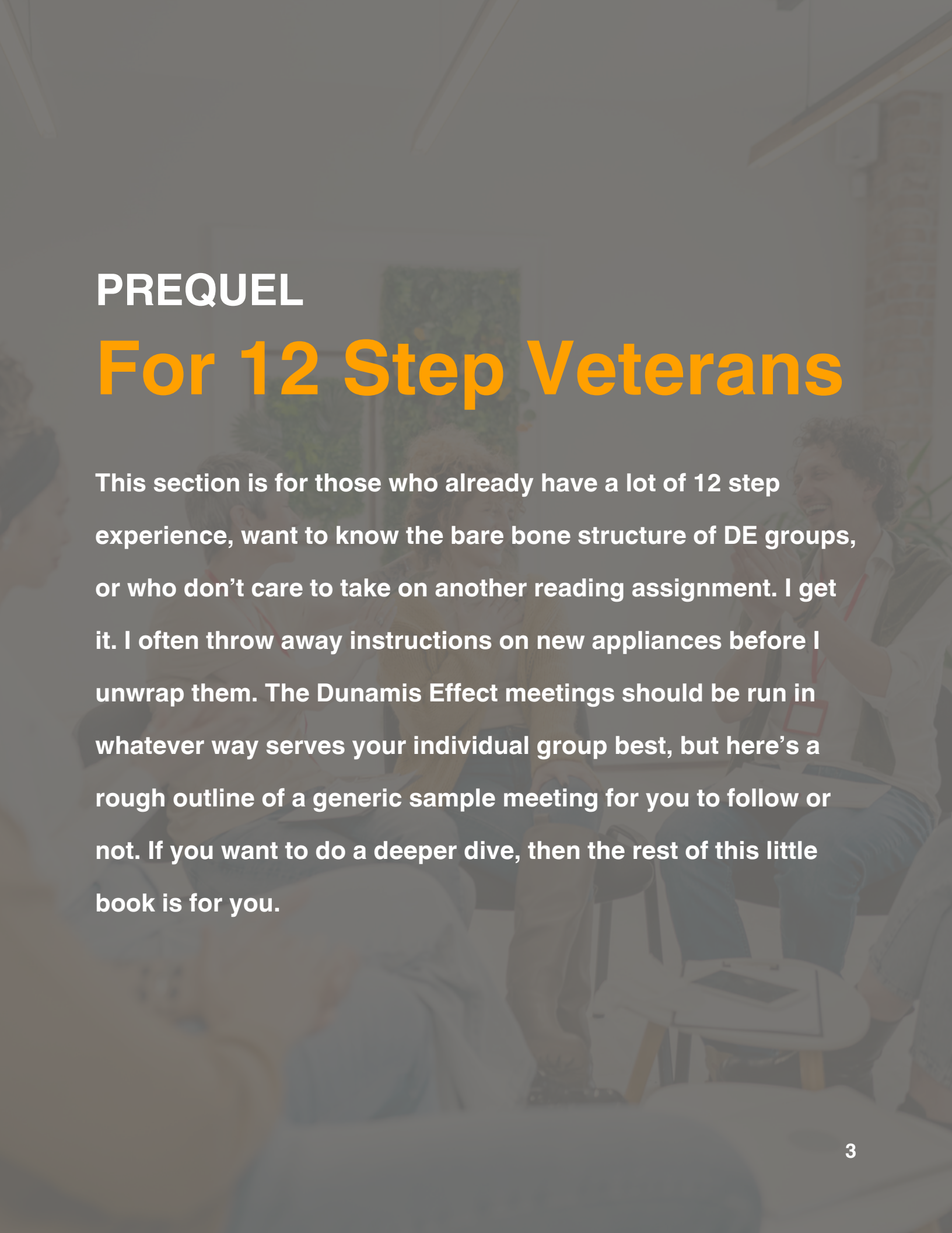


The **DUNAMIS** **PLAYBOOK**

Christian Recovery Group Leader Guide

Table of contents

00	For 12 Step Veterans	p.3
01	<u>Introduction</u>	p.9
02	<u>The “Why?”</u>	p.12
03	<u>The Coach</u>	p.17
04	<u>The Team Lineup</u>	p.24
05	<u>Rules of the Game</u>	p.30

A group of people are sitting in a circle on the floor, smiling and engaged in a meeting. The background is a blurred indoor setting with a brick wall and a plant.

PREQUEL

For 12 Step Veterans

This section is for those who already have a lot of 12 step experience, want to know the bare bone structure of DE groups, or who don't care to take on another reading assignment. I get it. I often throw away instructions on new appliances before I unwrap them. The Dunamis Effect meetings should be run in whatever way serves your individual group best, but here's a rough outline of a generic sample meeting for you to follow or not. If you want to do a deeper dive, then the rest of this little book is for you.

THE WELCOME

STARTING THE MEETING



After the initial howdys and hugs, try to make it a policy to start the meeting on **time**.



Follow with either a **prayer** of your choosing or the Serenity prayer.



Some groups wish to follow prayer with a brief set of **ground rules** that can be modified in any way that includes our basic values...

The next two pages includes a sample set of ground rules that can be used as a guideline or adjusted to suit your group's needs.

Sample Ground Rules Script

Adjust to align with your group's needs

“Welcome to the Dunamis Effect recovery meeting, where we recognize that the specific drug or behavior isn’t the problem – it’s been our crummy answer to our problems. In this meeting, we discuss our personal experiences in order to better understand ourselves and to assist others seeking relief from their issues. This isn’t medical care or counseling. This is a group of Christians who have found themselves in the bondage of addiction and pray for a way out.

Our stories have real value if we are courageous enough to be honest and humble. We share them knowing that they will never be repeated outside of the group with a core value of “What is said in group, stays in group.” A person’s story and history are theirs alone to disclose as they feel comfortable, but we do know that our healing depended on someone else announcing to the world that they had personally found a way out.

Please put your devices on silent, and for the next hour, refrain from using them as much as possible. The miracle of recovery transformation does not come from the internet but from God’s Spirit in me connecting with His Spirit in you. Please feel free to share your experience, but keep cross-talk to a minimum and try to refrain from “fixing” other people. Simply tell them how God is working to change your life.

In this group, our format will be _____, but if you feel a strong urge to relapse, we care more about that than any schedule. At any time, you should let those sitting with you help by honestly sharing your struggles. We have been there and can help or at least understand and pray with you. Please arrive on time and do your best to stay for the entire meeting.

We cannot emphasize enough that in addition to attending various groups, you must place great importance on getting a recovery partner to help you walk through the steps. This is not a do-it-yourself plan, and trying to do it that way has led many of us to repeated relapse. Please learn from our mistakes. If you have questions or concerns about the meeting structure, please feel free to approach me after the meeting, and we can discuss them. Let’s get started.”

Sample Ground Rules Script - Printable Copy

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MEETING STRUCTURE

SAMPLE OUTLINE

At the Dunamis Effect we recognize that there are many effective types of recovery meetings and don't wish to impose an arbitrary structure.

Several commonly used meeting types are:

- 01 Read and discuss a chapter a week
- 02 Step a month (e.g. January is step one, December is step 12)
- 03 Discuss an issue presented by a member (decided upon before the meeting)
- 04 Speaker meetings where a person shares their walk away from addiction
- 05 Meet the newcomer
- 06 A mixture of all the above

Again, use the group's collective decision making to form a structure that works for you – and be flexible.

THE CLOSING

ENDING THE MEETING

We want to build proper social habits so be mindful of the time and end as close to on time as comfort allows. Make sure any newcomers leave with a couple of phone numbers and instructions to use them for any need, but especially if the urge to relapse becomes strong.

Most groups end with a standing circle, holding hands, and praying the Lord's Prayer.

Group culture and personality is important. Don't be so rigid as to ignore obvious needs in the group. Also grow leaders within the group by insisting that others take turns leading now and then. There's no reason to give up meeting because a leader is on vacation. If you want to learn more about the Dunamis Effect culture, read on.

If not, get to leading now!



CHAPTER 01

Introduction

This guide is written to address concerns from some churches or other organizations as to what Dunamis Effect support groups might look like. When I first wrote *“The Dunamis Effect; When Jesus is the higher power”* I assumed that the people starting groups would have a lot of 12-step group experience, and they would know how a 12 step meeting works. I kept hearing that they simply wanted to feel comfortable stating that their higher power is the only true Higher Power – Jesus Christ, and that the God of our understanding is the God of the Bible. This is our core value, and obviously still true. Because many pastors typically haven’t attended these kinds of meetings, there is no reason not to build a bit of structure around the process. It’s also fair to say the leaders of the Alcoholics Anonymous groups had to lend some structure to AA via the 12 Traditions after about a decade of letting everyone do their own thing.

About 90 years ago (I’m writing this in 2024) Bill W. and Dr. Bob got sober using Christian principals. They had suffered many relapses each and felt that they had finally stumbled upon a sobriety that was comfortable and built upon solid ground.

They converted the things they had done into the universally known 12 steps. For many years, and perhaps still now, people thought the steps were the key to getting and staying sober. We have seen many failed attempts at doing the steps as a DIY project and it usually results in a spectacular failure. The “ism” at the end of alcoholism apparently doesn’t stand for “I’ll Sponsor Myself.”

Over the many decades it has been learned that while the steps are a great outline for re-introducing Biblical principles into your life, the secret sauce in a strong and enjoyable sobriety is in the fellowship afforded by others walking the same path. Some are ahead of you and others are newer to the path, but all are seeking a way out of the chaos and pain of addiction.

The good news is that our Lord has provided a clear path for us to follow, and that it is a gentle and wide path. Humans love to overcomplicate things, but walking away from addiction is simple. It isn’t always easy, but it isn’t complicated. Self-will frequently tries to complicate things and, in fact, is the number one cause of relapse. Whenever a person is struggling, it can almost always be traced back to lack of surrender. It has been said that if you can do the first half of the first step 100% every day, you have a pretty good chance to stay sober another day.

Surrender isn’t A thing in building sobriety, it’s THE thing.

The purpose of this booklet then isn’t to teach the 12 steps. That we have done elsewhere. We are offering a set of principles and a rough outline to starting and continuing a Dunamis small group. I have appreciated the tremendous value of group

sports in my life and the lives of my children, so I'm going to be using a team/sports metaphor throughout this text. Apologies if that doesn't suit you, but I'm the one typing so... yeah, team sports metaphors.

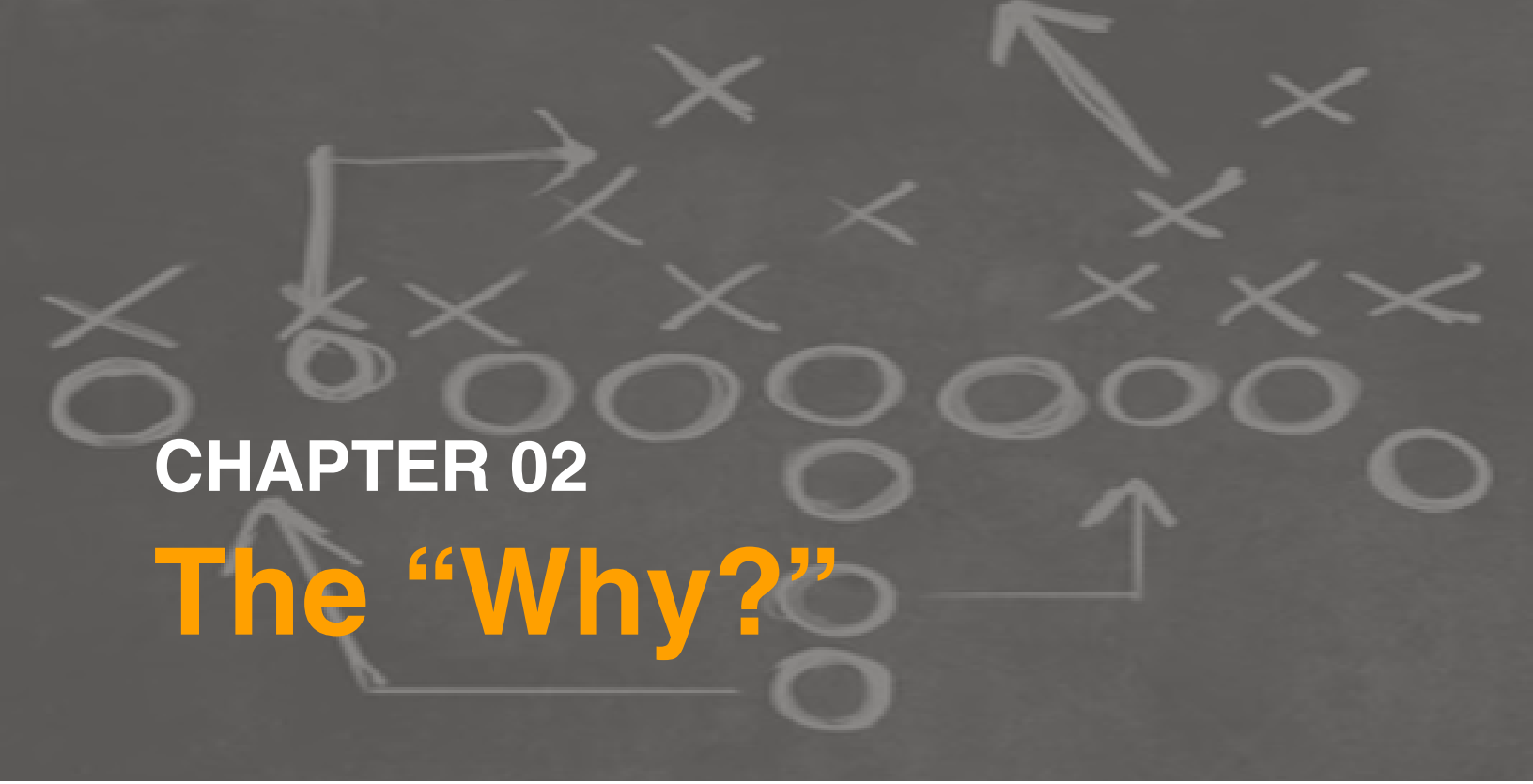
Outside of scripture, nothing here is set in stone. Keeping a sense of flexibility is one of the keys to running a great team. The more we try to dictate a bunch of unnecessary rules, the fewer and smaller we should expect our groups to be. While there are certain things that cannot be compromised, considering the individual needs of a certain group or a specific community should always be of high importance. I will be sure to highlight non-debatable, Biblical truths to set them apart from those items where we have freedom to pivot when needed.

Please know even though I may never meet you, you have my prayers that God will be with your efforts in walking alongside of those wanting and needing a better life.

Addiction is a generational disease that ruins the lives of so many other people in the life of a single person suffering from the issue. As you help the one person you have no idea the many family members, friends, coworkers, and even strangers in the community that will benefit from your efforts. Stopping the illness in one person has the potential to affect generations yet unborn as the offspring can be taught to learn from the individual who fought and survived by God's grace.

You will never know until the afterlife how many people benefitted from your surrender to God's call to serve. Please rest assured that He can multiply your efforts in the same way Jesus multiplied the bread and fish at his gatherings.

May He richly bless your offerings!



CHAPTER 02

The “Why?”

From the Classic Lewis Carrol novel *“Alice in Wonderland”*:

Alice: “Would you please tell me which way I ought to go from here?”

Cheshire Cat: “That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.” Alice: “I don’t much care where.

Cheshire Cat: “Then It doesn’t matter much which way you go.”

Many silly conversations take place in this classic book/movie/play. It has had such a long run in our culture because there are lessons for everyone throughout the work depending on your current needs. When it comes to starting any organization, no matter how big or small, the question of how must always be preceded by the question of “Why?”

What is the point of this organization, and where are you wanting it to take you?

Simon Sinek, in his book *Start with Why*, teaches CEOs of Fortune 500 companies and humble small group leaders alike that the ability to lead effectively starts with a simple question: “**Why do we exist?**” Identifying the purpose behind our actions allows us to tap into the parts of the brain that not only attract people to our group but also build loyalty that can endure difficult seasons.

The **Why** tickles a part of our brain called the *limbic system*, which scientists tell us is responsible for motivation and emotion. Simply put, the most successful organizations put the **Why** before the **How** and the **What**.

We think we are an intelligent species, but we are often more motivated into action by emotion than by reason or logic.

So, what exactly is our “**Why**” in the Dunamis Effect groups? Every individual will have their own motivation for doing this important work, but our corporate mission statement is:

To act as instruments of God as He walks people away from addiction and back into the body of Christ.

Is this my Why? No, it is my “what?”. If you are a small group leader in Christian addiction recovery, probably your what too. We may all have different answers to the why question, but mine is simple. I have been so blessed to have the thirst for alcohol removed from me by my Heavenly Father that I cannot imagine keeping those blessings to myself. When looking to express my gratitude for God’s blessing on me, one simple directive from Jesus became very, very clear:

“Do you love me? Feed my sheep.”

We all need to quit being receptacles of God’s grace and become conduits of it.

“Create **through** me Lord,” is my frequent prayer. Something tells me you may have a similar prayer life. Please pray frequently for God’s will to be done through your group work. When we pray for God’s will and the strength to carry it out, we honor the blessings we have received by seeking a fantastic ride through the amusement park of a Christian life. We no longer seek to serve ourselves, but instead, follow our Lord into selfless service to others.

I have been in small groups that were really great, and some that were... let’s say, less than great. If I look back at the best church small group I have ever been part of, I’d have to say the difference was that we somehow learned to get real with each other. Exactly how that happens will be different with every group, but most frequently comes from intentionality from the group leaders. The 12 step groups have always had great strength in this area.

There are many possible benefits from support groups in addiction recovery. Addiction has as one of its most prominent symptoms crushing isolation. The shame of the misbehavior, and the desire to use in secrecy, leads one to withdraw from normal relationships. The **social support** offered by peer groups allows the recovering person to slowly reattach to other humans. Over time, more substantial relationships can be envisioned. Additionally, since during the abuse season of our lives the flooding of dopamine causes the breakdown of our ability to properly assign value, simply hanging around folks that have moved back toward a **more rational value** system “rubs off” over time.

There is no doubt that one of the most important aspects of support groups is the **transfer of past wisdom**. People freshly entering sobriety are desperate to know “the secret” to getting and staying sober. Sometimes they can be a little skeptical when they go to a group that says, “Just don’t drink today,” and that would be understandable. Instead, if they are fed a steady diet of tools that have worked to soothe the fears and pains of other folks, over time they can begin to see light at the end of the tunnel. Prayer and meditation, time in God’s Word, and open conversation about your thoughts and feelings are all in the new toolbox of the person wishing to rebuild their lives after addiction. Share these truths openly and frequently and model their use.

***“And do not forget to do good and to share with others,
for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”***

– Hebrews 13:16

By becoming a witness highlighting the examples of Christians who have the scars from addictive wounds that have been healed by God, men and women fresh out of the chaos of their addictive lives can begin to rebuild their social skills and realign their selfish compulsive behaviors with a strong Biblical worldview. If there is one most important gift people seeking freedom get from associating with a group of believers who have the been-there-done-that diploma:

They get inspired.

Learning to see past the differences and recognize similarities in the stories of others allows the troubled individual to do something they often haven't allowed themselves to do for a long time – to dream of a better tomorrow.

The value of a small group of believers can make all the difference in a person's struggle to repair their lives and those of their family.

Maybe, just maybe, that is our "Why?"



CHAPTER 03

The Coach

People that are way smarter than me in the area of social sciences study group dynamics a lot. Groups of all sizes make up the fabric of our society, so it seems that understanding how they work best makes a lot of sense. This field is quite easy to fall into debate, because much of the data depends on humans, and if you haven't noticed, we can be a rather undependable species. Nevertheless, there have been some generalities about smaller groups and especially support groups that can be of help to us.

Some of the most effective small groups depend upon the leader approximately 60%, the group dynamics about 25%, and things outside of our control about 15%. We'll discuss the group dynamics later, but this chapter is to discuss the group leader or the coach.

I'm guessing that if you are reading this little book, you are at least considering leading a Dunamis Effect Christian recovery support group. My other assumption is that you

probably have some degree of recovery experience in your past as well. If you don't, then there are a couple of paths you may wish to avail yourself of to broaden your understanding of how best to understand walking away from addiction.

The first is to get a partner who does have recovery in their past. It is hard to imagine a church that has no one sitting in the pews with an AA chip in their pocket. If no one will readily admit to it, it may be an amazingly rare church demographic. It is more likely that the people don't feel safe in being transparent and vulnerable about their past. I'm not trying to shame any specific ministries, but if your church seems to be full of perfect people, you may want to refer back to Mark 2:17. For the rest of us, the average church will have about 5–10% of its folks with some degree of recovery experience. If they have done the 12 steps, they will probably be poised to follow Step 12 and pay forward the healing love they received when they needed it most.

If getting a recovered group member seems to be a difficult thing (or even if it doesn't), know this: many 12-step meetings around the world are what is known as "open." This means you can attend even if you aren't suffering from addiction. There's no problem with this, and if someone should ask what your story is, you can say, "I love some people with addiction and want to learn more about it. I'm just here to listen." Pretty much everyone honors that, but definitely resist the urge to help and just listen. If it feels a bit uncomfortable to you, imagine how folks seeking help feel as they approach a group soaked in shame for their past behaviors.

Minor warning: tighten your seatbelt – these secular meetings can get pretty raw emotionally, and there is rarely a prohibition against vulgarity. I'm just sayin'... take your thicker skin with you.

As we said earlier, the head coach of a recovery team carries a good deal of the weight when it comes to the effectiveness of the group. His or her emotional and spiritual health will be tested at times and a hard stumble will not benefit anyone. Past experience suggests that the group leader should have at least a year of sobriety themselves, but several years is obviously much better. Many of us know from experience that we weren't really getting emotionally and spiritually healthy until we had several years of God's hand on us. That being said, I'd rather have a solid one year person running a group than no group at all.

Good leaders find an accountability group that they can be part of or at least a mentor with some experience to bounce things off when new situations arise. And they WILL arise. Humbly asking for advice beats the heck over winging it every time.

***“Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisors they succeed.”
– Proverbs 15:22***

Excellence in coaching starts and ends with prayer. Sure, there's a lot of other stuff in the middle, but like we teach kids in kindergarten, when you start with a please and end with a thank you, life seems to be a lot smoother. I find that if I can start my day off seeking God's direction in my day, I often get it. When I don't, I am usually asking the wrong question or listening for a specific answer that I want to hear. Regardless of the outcome of the day, I spend time every evening in gratitude for God's provision. If you have “lead me Lord” for breakfast and gratitude for dessert, you have your best chance for a good day.

There are many lists of what makes a good small group leader, and they seem to be all over the map in their focus. I think for our purposes, we can drill down and focus on three main disciplines, as modeled by Jesus in leading others.

1.The Discipline of Hospitality

Your group may or may not be in your home. It might be in a church room or in some other meeting place. Regardless, arriving early, making sure the room is set up to meet your meeting structure, that there is comfort and safety, that written resources are plentiful in case newcomers walk in – all these lend to a good meeting experience. Whether or not you provide snacks or beverages is optional to your group's wants.

If hospitality isn't your strongest spiritual gift, you can at least care enough about the people you serve to team up with someone who does excel in it. Some meetings spread the work out with one person providing the room, and others taking turns with snacks/drinks. In the end, understanding that there is only one chance at a first impression, and that people are more likely to want to invite others to a place in which they feel welcome and comfortable, will go a long way to grow your group. Our Lord Jesus taught us to lovingly care for absolutely everyone we come in contact with.

2. The Discipline of Truth

I hope this doesn't need to be said too strongly, but the Dunamis Effect groups are based on a Biblical worldview. The Bible is the final decider on matters of Truth. Period.

As we attend groups of most kinds, and indeed in our groups, people are encouraged to tell their stories. The mind of a person in the middle of their addiction, and indeed as they first come out of the fog, can be pretty confused. Childhood Bible lessons maybe absent or forgotten, and sometimes some pretty creative theology might be deeply held by a newcomer.

Loving redirection can be the medicine needed to heal some wounded thinking. If possible, try to remember the wisdom of “Praise in public, and correct in private.” Publicly shaming someone who hasn’t ever been taught better is a recipe for the newcomer to cop a resentment and never come back. Look for that magical balance that Jesus always reflected between grace and truth.

3. The Discipline of Relationship

Jesus was the master of relationships. He chose rough, young fishermen and, in three years, turned them into a mission team that has changed the world forever. His humility, compassion, and dedication to servant leadership are still being written about by leadership authorities thousands of years later. We can all learn much from Jesus’ leadership example, but many of his finest qualities have to do with the quality of his relationships.

Jesus could look into someone’s eyes and see into their soul. He knew their fears, their needs, and their failings. Nobody expects you, as a small group leader, to have the same spiritual gifts as our Lord, but empathy is an important trait as you help people seeking freedom from the chains of addiction. Empathy is not the same as

sympathy. **Sympathy** sees a guy down in a hole and says, “That looks terrible.”

Empathy climbs in and says, “I know this stinks. Let’s get out of here together when you are ready.”

I know this all sounds so dramatic, and 90% of the time it won’t be. Most people that come to your group will simply need an understanding ear, a touch of sage wisdom, and occasionally throwing of the BS flag when needed. Conventional wisdom says try to put yourself in their shoes; try to ask what you would need if you were wishing to lift yourself out of the hole they are in. Mr. Sympathy just buys them a ladder and feels proud of himself (and probably tells people about the awesome act of charity he just performed.) Mrs. Empathy looks at the person and compassionately tells them about ladders and how they worked for her life. She then helps them make their own ladder.

See the difference?

In seeking sobriety, sometimes we get told by religion to read our Bible and we’ll be OK. Now I’m a big believer in spending time in scripture and seeking Truth through it, but Jesus coached in a different way. When the disciples asked him what he was up to, Jesus simply said, “Come and you will see.” Rather than tell them which scripture to read he lived it out in front of them so they could go and make a difference in the lives of others.

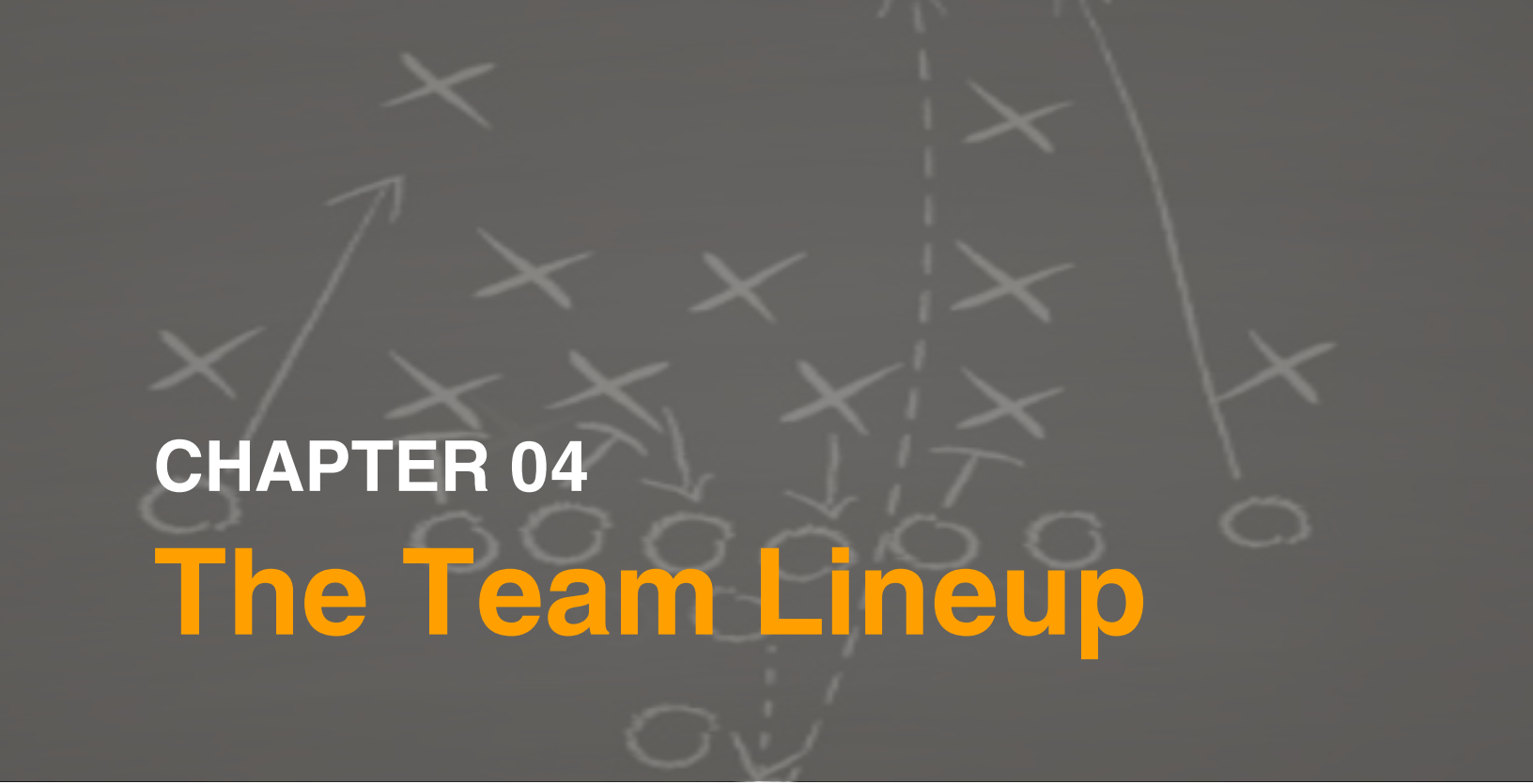
Let me introduce you to a coach you probably have never heard of. Eddie Robinson, the head football coach of Grambling State University for over 50 years. This is a historically black school in Louisiana and coach Robinson is in the Hall of Fame for

leading his team to 26 championship wins and a streak of 27 consecutive winning seasons from 1960-1986. There are many more famous coaches I could have used for this chapter, but coach Robinson is a guy who didn't care much for the spotlight. Instead, he preferred to simply grind out season after season, loving his players and making a difference in their lives.

Most of us who coach a small group or sponsor a person seeking a better life will never get any recognition except an occasional expression of gratitude from them (or perhaps even their family). I can tell you that when I see a young family attending church together in a way that wasn't going to EVER happen just a year or two earlier, I am so filled with gratitude to have been the recovery partner of the dad. To even imagine that God would use me to do something this great is impossible to adequately describe, but it makes me want to carry on knowing my efforts aren't wasted. Are there failures and relapses? Heck yes, but coach Robinson would tell you that losses are just part of the game. The point is for us to love them until they learn that their Father has made them worthy of unconditional love.

***“Coaching is a profession of love.
You can't coach people unless you love them.”
– Eddie Robinson***

Develop a discipline of relationship, the way your savior modeled.



CHAPTER 04

The Team Lineup

Ok coach. Let's all agree that addiction recovery is a team sport, and very few people get better by themselves. Those lucky folks that do wouldn't be needing a support group, and you'll probably never meet any of them. Everyone wishes that they could snap their fingers and make their addiction go away. Most people coming to a meeting have tried to quit dozens or even hundreds of times on their own. It is only by repeated failure to control this disease on our own that we can reach the level of humility to fully surrender to God. It's just the way we are wired.

If you simply open the doors to a new group by yourself, there is a chance you could get several people new to addiction recovery every meeting right off the bat. Not every group starts like that, but I think we need to dream big and prepare for it. If you are the only person in the room with any sobriety, it could overwhelm you, especially if you feel like they all need to be sponsored. Also, they might not get the one-on-one time that we know traditionally makes a huge difference in forming solid sobriety. The mentor relationship of a person working their way through the steps with a recovery

partner (RP) is part of the way God heals us – through other people, not just a book written by some knucklehead doctor.

All this means that you can be better prepared with some solid veterans for your starting lineup. Seeking out at least one other person with 12-step experience would be so very important to your new team. Having a male and a female would be ideal (if you have a mixed gender meeting), so you are able to accommodate anyone that comes through the door. You may already know folks in recovery – we tend to know each other in the local community. If you don't know anyone, or the ones you do know don't have the bandwidth, maybe the local pastor or associate pastors might know a few. Often, they have been building relationships with members of the community for years and may well have a few people in mind.

If you and the pastor don't have appropriate candidates, then perhaps the pastor, or whoever makes announcements from the stage, can announce that there is a new ministry forming to address addiction in the church. By simply asking the congregation for those wanting to do a little 12th step service, there may be several suitable starters for your new team. As a final possibility, I've never been to an AA group where the announcement of a new 12-step group is prohibited. Perhaps a player or two who share a Biblical worldview could be obtained. Can't hurt to ask.

If all these options fail to get you some trained assistants, don't let it keep you from starting anyway. You can, with time, build your own veteran players. While you are leading your new group, there may be whispers in the community about a group where Christ is THE higher power, and that could be an attractive ideal to many

people. To repurpose the whispered voice in “Field of Dreams,” if you build it, they will come. Start the new meeting, but keep talking about it to pastors, Christian counselors, and your friends in recovery. Local rehabs may wish to know about a Christian 12-step group to refer their clients who share a love for Christ and need a new home group after they discharge from inpatient treatment. It probably won’t happen overnight, but eventually you will have a strong starting lineup. Trust God to bring you the right people at the right time.

The next question is how to best utilize your team. We already mentioned that you can use help in sponsoring folks as they come in seeking help. It should be a very deeply held value of the group to make every rookie on your team feel as if they are getting the best possible chance of getting sober. AA groups have traditionally left the selection of a sponsor to the newcomer. I have personally seen people wait over 12 months before they “felt comfortable” in making a choice. This is to presumably make sure they have the necessary humility and surrender to make working the steps effective, but often it takes so long because of fear or grandiosity. (“I’m not worthy” or “I’ve got this” are both losing personal mottos.)

Waiting even just a couple of months to meet up with a Recovery Partner can expose the new person to stressors they are unable to navigate, and risk relapse. The Dunamis Effect hopes to reduce this risk by offering a recovery partner very early in the process. If not the first meeting, which would be ideal, certainly within the first couple of weeks. The hope is to teach them to get used to leaning into help rather than waiting until they are desperate and make a life-threatening mistake of using again. It should be clear from day one that there is no rule against changing recovery partners

if desired. The goal is to support the newcomers and give them the best possible chance to become a veteran player.

Another very important role of the veteran players is to build up new leaders. It should be another core value of the group to be so valuable in helping others that the group eventually gets too large. The exact number that qualifies as “too big” will vary from group to group. Groups of this type seem to function best in the 10–20 person range. While less than 10 is doable, having a variety of stories and a diversity of opinions makes for great discussions. Also, if a group is much smaller than 8, just a couple of people leaving for whatever reason or missing for temporary reasons like summer vacations will gut the team and leave you with just a few people meeting. Truly, Jesus said that “Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, I am there with them” (Matt 18:20), so even smaller groups should continue to offer companionship and support.

When you get over 20, strongly consider birthing a new group – preferably on a different night to offer flexibility to newcomers. Jesus also commissioned us to spread the gospel and to not hide it under a basket. Keeping the blessings all to ourselves is not a Christian thing to do. We should seek to not just be a receiver of God’s blessings but a conduit of them to others. A background goal of the team should be to eventually split into two teams. Our Father honors our efforts to multiply our service to His kingdom, and we should always have that as a vision from day one. Keeping an eye out for veteran players who would make good leaders, and nurturing their skills in this area is part of every good leader. Ask others to lead the group occasionally, especially when you need to be absent.

I've seen meetings where the leader made themselves indispensable, and they would fall apart and quit meeting if the leader was indisposed by a medical issue or an extended vacation. Let's also remember that the leader's sobriety is not guaranteed forever, and a relapse for the coach could mean disaster for the entire team if other leaders aren't prepared to step in. The only one who should be indispensable in your meeting is Jesus.

Of course, there wouldn't be much point in having a group if your team were to consist of just veterans who have already settled into long-term sobriety. The goal is to offer transformation to newcomers and to love them until they learn they are truly worthy of love and respect. Getting new folks to come to a meeting can be a bit tricky. We have experience with groups where many people sign up but then never show up. We are unable to determine why, but we think it either has to do with the perceived shame of needing a recovery group, or maybe the person signed up in order to please someone in their life and never honestly intended to come at all. Regardless, don't let this defeat you; God will use your efforts for His purposes.

Like we said earlier, the church leadership can play a big role in this part. Starting from the top down, there should be an acceptance of addiction being no different than any other sin, and all are worthy of God's grace and healing. If I could wave a magic wand and have my way, I would encourage a church to get educated on addiction. The staff can access informative videos and written materials from The Dunamis Initiative website just for the asking. Planning a sermon or even a short series educating the congregation would go a long way in giving suffering folks the courage they may need to start attending a support group, and maybe even bring some more veterans out of

he pews to participate in some Christian 12th step service. The focus should always be on making sure we all look upon folks suffering from addiction as “Us,” not point them out as “Those people.”

In most churches in today’s culture, frequent questions arise as to how a person might relieve themselves of compulsive behaviors or chemical use. These staff members or pastoral staff can refer them to your group if they know it is there and can depend on folks showing up reliably. They should be reminded that when they outsource addiction recovery to semi-secular groups like AA and all the other Anonymous groups, they are saying two things:

1. Jesus isn’t really all that important to their healing, and
2. Their church community isn’t needed either.

Now, that certainly isn’t in their hearts or coming from the mouths of these servants, but I can personally tell them – that is exactly what people seeking help hear. It is as if they are being told, “Go get better, and then come back.”

As a church community, we can and **must** do better in our messaging.



CHAPTER 05

Rules of the Game

What We're Not

A. Medical care

The Dunamis Effect is NOT medical care. Yes, I'm a doctor – but I'm not your doctor. I am just a regular guy seeking to share the blessings God has given me through sobriety. I attend meetings and try to honestly share my feelings and emotions, my fears, and my shortcomings. We all struggle, and we all are desperately in need of God's grace. If there are physicians or other medical people in the group (and those super-smart guys and gals who have a google medical diploma) decide to share their wealth of medical knowledge, they should be gently reminded that the advice we give in the Dunamis Effect meetings is to go see their doctor. Period.

B. Psychological Counseling

The same advice for medical advice goes for recommendations in mental health. Yes, it is appropriate to ask people how they are feeling and tell them if you have experienced a similar thing, but we at Dunamis Effect strongly encourage EVERYONE in addiction recovery to get some counseling visits. Trauma (even minor trauma from long ago) is a frequent contributing factor in addiction formation, and addiction is frequently a source of very dramatic trauma. Seeing a professional for screening, treatment, or a tune-up if things start to go sideways is a sign of wise self-care.

C. Pastoral Care

The pastoral staff at your church is a valuable asset to your community. These men and women have usually trained with both formal education and a good dose of practical, real-world experience. This program is obviously people sharing their experience and insight that they have received from their suffering and recovering from addiction, time in the Word, and their prayer lives. There are, however, situations in everyone's life that require deeper understanding and experience. Allow these servants to do what they do best.

D. Church

Going to a group for an hour or even several groups a week is NOT a substitute for regular attendance at weekly services of the church of your choice. The time in

worship, prayer, communion, and learning with other believers isn't just a good idea; it is supported throughout the Bible. Jesus had the understanding of God, and he still attended temple. Members attending DE meetings should frequently be encouraged to attend services in person, not just watching them on YouTube. Encourage everyone to go to groups AND church.

Decision Making

One of the very common symptoms of addiction, regardless of the drug of choice (DOC), is grandiosity. We develop this symptom to cover the pain of deep-seated shame and a sense of inferiority. While some retreat into introversion and withdrawal, putting up a front of confidence and trying to be in control of everything is quite common. The lie that people suffering from addiction tell themselves constantly is that they are not worthy of God's unconditional love. This is too painful to experience, so they cover over it with false confidence and pretense that they are in control.

We, as Christians, know better.

***“Lord, I know that people’s lives are not their own,
it is not for them to direct their steps.”***

– Jeremiah 10:23

The 12-step community usually relies on what they call the “group conscience” for decision making in all their processes. While the Dunamis Effect honors democratic decision making, we must dedicate our groups to ensuring that decisions of any consequence be filtered through God's Word. I can't find any verses directing my

choice of Maxwell House or Folgers coffee, so maybe the little things don't need Biblical direction. If group decision making is used, it should be to verify that the group is being taken in a direction with a Biblical worldview.

We Answer To The Lord God.

The Focus

There are many ministries in this amazing world. A couple of the bigger Christian ministries serving those with addiction also seek to heal those with other mental challenges, marital conflict, and emotional problems. While the Dunamis Effect has empathy for people's "hurts, hang-ups, and habits," we wish to laser-focus on addiction and addiction only. Those other things are very important and sometimes accompany addiction. We know that when the focus is too broad, it allows the team to wander around and risk missing the point.

While our focus is addiction, the question frequently comes up – "What kind of addiction? Alcoholism? Drugs? Porn?" This is a valuable question because it goes to one of the very foundational questions about addiction. When we focus our attention on the DOC, there is risk that it will be seen as the problem. A truism from AA is, "I don't have a drinking problem, I have a **THINKING** problem!" Alcohol (or insert any other DOC) is not the problem, it is the crummy, misguided answer to the problem. Like we said above, the main issue is frequently a sense that one isn't worthy of unconditional love or respect.

Certain chemical addictions demand special detox medical care to keep the person safe. It seems like a wise thing to recommend a person consult a physician before stopping their chemical DOC (especially alcohol, benzodiazepines, and opioids). Safety first, of course.

There is wisdom that discussing deeply held personal feelings should be a similar-sex thing. People newly into addiction frequently are vulnerable, and unwise romances can and do occur, so we need to keep boundaries up against this. There often can be value in having someone with the same DOC available to you. A guy with a porn addiction will have difficulty opening up to a female with alcoholism. We have more to say on this topic in the Building Your Team chapter.

Group Structure

The actual leadership structure of a group should be up to the individual group. Some may wish to have designated assistant leaders, and other jobs like secretary, treasurer, and even duties like literature chair, coffee/snacks, etc. All these are okay and up to the group in the end. Every team should definitely have a head coach, and indeed, a church that is helping sponsor a group with space and/or other resources will desire (and deserve) a point person to discuss issues with. Meetings being held privately and in private space like a home group may not have the same expectations. In those situations, it's assumed the homeowner will wish to have some say in how things are run.

Anonymity in a Modern World

AA, NA, GA, and all the others clearly have the word "anonymous" stated front and center, but are they really anonymous, and why? Anonymity serves several purposes in the group that developed 90 years ago. Back then, addiction was poorly understood with regard to genetics and neurobiology, and it wasn't uncommon for people to look at addiction as purely a moral issue. Most people admitting to addiction were seen as weak and morally bankrupt, so there was a lot of shame associated with seeking help. Being anonymous in a treatment program helped get butts in the seats.

Nowadays, we understand genetics and the workings of the brain in a different light, and the person did make some bad choices in using a substance or behavior to soothe themselves instead of leaning into the peace of God's grace. There have been huge strides in our understanding of mental illness, and we, as a society, have developed a great deal of grace toward those willing to reach for a better life. Perhaps now there is far less shame for those seeking help instead of staying involved with their DOC and all the chaos that goes along with it.

The 12 traditions of AA say that anonymity is the "spiritual foundation" of all their traditions. This is curious at first since AA was written by Christians using a Biblical worldview. Nowhere in the Bible is anonymity mentioned, and it is not a spiritual cornerstone by any stretch of the imagination. In fact, Christians are admonished to NOT keep the gospels to themselves. With deeper investigation, it seems most likely that they were using the word anonymity to mean humility. Humility and surrender are, of course, cornerstone values in the Christian life.

It seems as if there is no good reason to put up a sign stating, “Addiction Recovery Meeting,” but there isn’t a great reason to prohibit it either. Your group should advertise or not advertise however you see fit. We don’t wish to wear our problems on our sleeve seeking pity, but if people know there is a way out of their disease, maybe one more family can be saved. AA groups frequently use the triangle in a circle as a signal of a recovery meeting; maybe the lightning bolt in the circle logo of Dunamis, signifying God’s miraculous power, could serve in the same way. Feel free to follow the group’s wishes.

Regardless of an individual’s perspective on their own anonymity, there should be ZERO doubt about our stance on privacy. Anything said in the groups is to be kept in closest secrecy. Sharing outside of the group is prohibited for everyone. We need to know that we can share openly and honestly without our privacy being at risk, so what is said in group – stays in group. What is shared with a sponsor – stays in the confines of that friendship. The only possible exception would be if someone was threatening themselves or posed a threat to someone else in a convincing manner. In that case, for the sake of safety, it must be revealed to whatever authority seems most proper. Privacy must be broken to protect the physical health of another human. Often, bringing a pastor or some other outside authority into the picture is a sign of wise thinking.

Types of Meetings

Pastors frequently ask me about the structure of these Dunamis meetings, and my most common answer is, “It’s whatever they want it to be.” The same way AA

meetings have many different flavors, we expect the same to develop over the years in The Dunamis Effect. Speaker's meetings, reading through the book, a chapter a week, a step per month... any of these are legit. Probably the most frequently used format is a chapter a week and then open to discussion. There should be prayer to start and a check-in around the group. If any member is struggling with a pressing issue, the reading can be postponed to take time to support the member needing some love. Some successful groups offer an opportunity for people to share how the Lord has moved in their lives. Of course, you should end in prayer too.

Using outside materials and other books are allowed, but please seek books with a Christian worldview, and strive to keep the discussion directed toward addiction recovery.

Money Issues

The name Dunamis Effect is trademark protected, so raising money using it should only be to benefit the group. No one should personally prosper from this program. "Passing the hat" or minimal dues can be collected if the group must pay rent for their meeting spot or wishes to provide group refreshments, but very clear and accurate accounting should be made available to anyone who asks.

Some groups find it to be a good idea to pre-buy some books and workbooks to have available to a newcomer so they can get started right away without any excuses. Later, they can be responsible for replacing the books to pay it forward to the next guy or gal. Some churches may find it helpful to purchase a supply of these resources to have available when staff is confronted with a person seeking relief from addictive

struggles. Putting a book in their hand and introducing them to a group of like-minded folks can potentially save a life.

Outside Issues

Again, this group is about addiction recovery, and only about addiction recovery. There is no reason whatsoever to spend precious group time in circular arguments about politics, sports, or who should be voted out in survivor. Giving others medical, psychological, financial, or pretty much any other non-addiction topics should be off the table as much as possible. Look, we aren't asking people to be robots. In fact, we are hopeful that relationships develop and these folks can build a new sober life around them.

In a world that is becoming increasingly divided, it is far too easy to feel threatened and pick a fight over something that has nothing to do with addiction. We need healing, not new reasons to form shiny new resentments. Let's keep to the subject at hand – learning to lean into God's healing powers for our future.

***Trust God from the bottom of your heart;
don't try to figure out everything on your own.
Listen for God's voice in everything you do, everywhere you go;
he's the one who will keep you on track.
Don't assume that you know it all.
Run to God! Run from evil!
Your body will glow with health,
your very bones will vibrate with life!***

– From the Message Proverbs 3:5-8

E. Team Boosters

Nobody lives in a vacuum, and neither does any successful organization. True, the group will meet in private and respect each other's privacy, but like we said in the "Rules of the Game" chapter, there are many things that the group is not. For those things, a good coach will recruit team boosters to support them in good times and bad.

I spent over two decades as a family physician, and always felt like it was very similar to pastoring a church. We both meet people during their triumphs and during the very worst times of their lives. We help as many people as we can, comfort always, and recruit members of the community to help with the things that are beyond our training. As a family medicine physician, there were things that were beyond my training. I may know some things about cardiology, but I frequently needed a talented cardiologist to consult on the more complex cases.

The most accepted model of addiction used by those offering treatment is the Bio/Psycho/Social/Spiritual model. This gives us a reasonable explanation of how addiction takes hold of a person and offers a robust and holistic plan for treating it. Doctors can address the biology, counselors handle the psychological, and the Church is perfectly positioned to cover the social and spiritual aspects of recovery. As a support group, we hope to help people re-establish themselves socially and provide a platform through which they can practice Christian principles. These are very essential skills for a person emerging from the chaotic thinking of addiction, but occasionally they will need outside help for problems the group is not well-situated to treat.

Building a “booster club” of names and numbers can be just the trick to push back on objections the person may have to maintaining sobriety. The old saying that “you can’t want it more than they do” has some truth to it, but we can try to take away some objections. Let’s explore a very incomplete list of the referrals you may need to help a person struggling.

Medical

As has been said before, a Dunamis Effect group is not medical care. Competent medical care is a part of everyone’s life, especially as they walk away from years of abuse and/or neglect. Everyone should be encouraged to seek medical care early in their search for a new life without their drug of choice. If they get shaky from going without their alcohol or pills, they should DEFINITELY get professional detox help. Not Doctor Google, but a physician or clinic trained in detox. Having the name and number for a couple of these doctors in your phone notes will obviously come in handy.

Not everyone needs detox, but some people benefit from meds designed to help curb their cravings. A doctor doesn’t have to be an addiction specialist to use these drugs, but some otherwise talented doctors shy away from addiction treatment. Having the name and number of a couple that do in your area is helpful. If someone joins your group and says they have a good doc, ask for the name for future reference.

Even away from addiction medicine needs, responsible grown-ups see their family physician and dentist on a regular basis. Dental cleanings, blood pressure and cholesterol tests, and occasional cancer screenings are the kinds of actions that let the people around you know you have shifted into adult gear. Let's get healthy in mind, body, and spirit – what do you say?

You too, group leader!

***“May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
– 1 Thessalonians 5:23***

Counseling

We all share our experience, strength, and hope to help others find their way in sobriety. Most of the important lessons I have learned over the years have come from regular folks who have been there, done that, and are willing to share. God used those folks to save my life, to be sure, but they are NOT counselors. Very often, trauma or mental illness leads to addictive use. In other folks, years of turmoil and impaired thinking lead to trauma or mental challenges.

The Dunamis Effect will never speak against professional counseling. In fact, it is our recommendation that everyone should get a few visits, if economics permit them to. Most people are surprised how much can be gained from some help gaining self-awareness. Again, having the names of a few local counselors can be helpful. Often, if

the person looks at their medical card, there will be a phone number for “Behavior Health.” That is, of course, a good place to start. Other times, a corporation will have a company that is contracted to give a handful of confidential visits to any employee.

Finally, some pastors are trained in counseling. Those who feel confident in their training and skills can often fill this void. I have been told by some younger pastors that they have some training, but mental healthcare has become so specialized that they prefer to refer to licensed counselors who have a biblical worldview. Googling “Christian counselors near me” will often list several options. Keep a few numbers on hand.

Pastoral Care

While many group discussions center around spiritual topics, prayer is frequent, and often the meetings are held in a church building, the Dunamis Effect is not pastoral care, and NOT a substitute for regular church attendance. The phrase “pastoral care” seems to have as many definitions as there are pastors. For many Christians, a conversation with their minister, pastor, priest (whatever word your church uses) is the first stop in addressing a problem. Not just issues of sin, but of course, that is frequently the discussion. Additionally, the conversation can involve difficulties in finances, relationships, legal matters, and pretty much any other topic. A pastor may not have a direct answer for these things (although sometimes they do), but they usually have lists of people who can help you move forward.

Never underestimate these amazing servants! Having contact information for your

local clergy can be very helpful.

I suppose it shouldn't be an issue, but some people who attend recovery groups do so in exchange for going to church. As a group leader, you should occasionally remind folks to go to church. My favorite way to do this is to recommend the group discuss a point from the message that relates to the recovery path – there almost always is one. I always ask, “What step did you see in the message this week?”

Preachers/ministers/priests offer a weekly message that is designed to feed the soul. Group worship, prayer, and learning are an extremely important aspect of the Christian life.

Miscellaneous

It always amazes me how many crazy situations those of us suffering with addiction can create with our dysfunctional thinking. We seem to have the ability to mess things up as a superpower. Legal help, housing, food insecurity, and a zillion other things seem to always be popping up. Now, none of these things are specifically your duty as a group leader, but because you care enough about others to lead, you will occasionally find yourself going down some rabbit hole and wondering why.

Do what you can, but protect yourself from burnout with appropriate boundaries, and let others do some of the heavy lifting. When you do all the service, you deprive others of being allowed to be used by God to help others. Like we said at the beginning of this chapter – addiction recovery is a team sport.



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