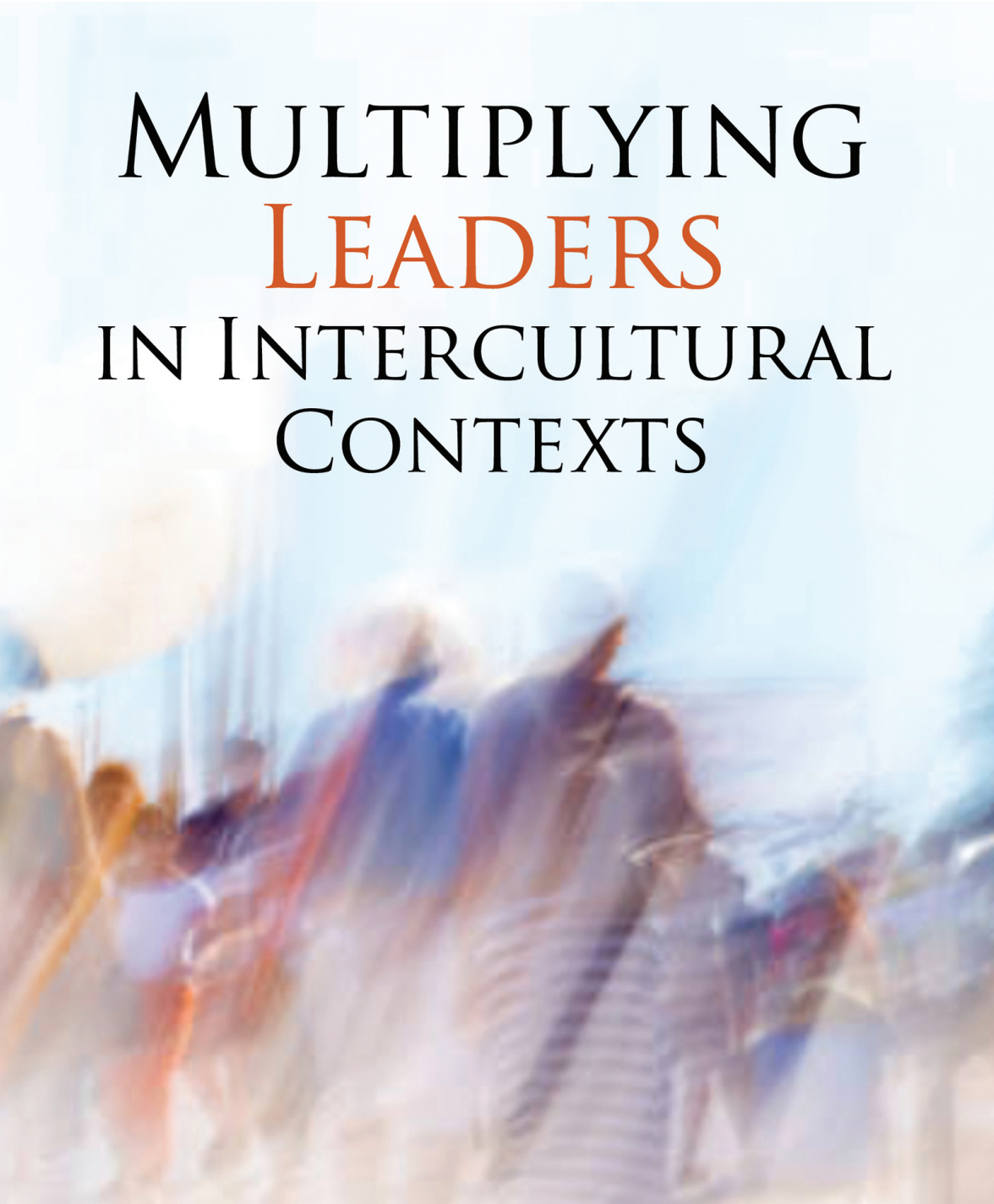
# Multiplying Leaders in Intercultural Contexts



## Recognizing and Developing Grassroots Potential

Evelyn & Richard Hibbert

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*Multiplying Leaders in Intercultural Contexts: Recognizing and Developing Grassroots Potential*

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Chapter

# 1

# Grow the Edge of the Church

Countless leaders gather people into groups for Jesus's sake across the world. They meet in homes, workplaces, parks, fields, churches, halls, wherever convenient for followers. Leaders share their lives with their followers. Along with their followers, they grow in Christ and introduce him to others. These leaders and their followers are the growing edge of the church. They are learning about and living for Jesus amid normal life.

The leaders we focus on in this book are ordinary people with a passion for Jesus. They are grassroots leaders, settled in their families and communities. They are leaders because they naturally gather people around them. This might be in very small or large groups. They may not be formally appointed (e.g., a woman who starts a group in her home), but sometimes they are (e.g., a cell-group leader).

As long as these groups continue, these leaders faithfully share Jesus with group members. In rapidly growing movements, these leaders catalyze new groups forming. They multiply leaders who start more new groups.

Leaders cannot be separated from their groups. They are firmly embedded in the community of Jesus's disciples. With their followers, leaders clarify the group's specific purpose and bring that purpose into being. They foster the "one-another-ness" that shows the world that they are, together, Christ's disciples. Separating leaders from their communities breaks this mutual bond and makes them vulnerable.

How leaders lead their groups is affected by culture. Likewise, the way groups work is affected by culture. Culture influences the way we communicate and the way we physically arrange ourselves. It controls how much power followers give to leaders and what they expect of them. When we develop leaders across cultures, culture also affects what people expect of us. To multiply disciples and their leaders, what we develop needs

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to fit in the culture. Christians and non-Christians need to feel that Jesus belongs among them.

The leaders at the growing edge of the church are unlikely to attend Bible college. Many cannot read. They are unable to stop work or leave their families for study. Even if they do go to college, what they study will probably not help them in their day-to-day leadership. Developing these leaders requires a different approach.

We have to find ways of developing them where they are and which help them to apply the Bible practically to what they face in daily life. This book explores the specific needs of these leaders and what we can do to develop them while they remain at home.

If we want to develop leaders, we need to be with them in their communities. As we share in everyday life with them, we become examples in all our human weakness. Our lives are on display. We implant a DNA that will reproduce itself. But we also learn from the community and its leaders.

Whatever we produce, we will gain much more than we give. As you read this book, keep your mind's eye firmly on the people. Developers are people who come alongside leaders, who are people surrounded by people. We mutually learn and grow together.

## Focus on Groups

We are communal beings. We need each other. We grow up in families and gather into groups of many types and sizes. One group that Christians gather into is the church. Where his disciples gather, Jesus is there with them (Matt 18:20). Christian leaders are embedded in these communities of Jesus's disciples. But so often when we discuss Christian leaders, we forget the community and focus only on the leader. Without a community of people to lead—without followers—there are no leaders.

KEEP LEADERS WITH THEIR GROUPS. COME ALONGSIDE LEADERS AND LEARN WITH THEM.

We need to expand our focus beyond the individual leader. Individualistic thinking extracts leaders from their groups. It tends to ignore the interaction between any group and its leaders. A discipline all developers need to cultivate is widening our gaze. We should always include followers whenever we consider leaders.

In contrast to an emphasis on groups, most Christian leadership teaching is strongly biased toward a single, superhero-like, male. This can be an implicit bias. Even if nothing is said, it is the picture in most people's minds. Unfortunately, this bias tends to ignore the many people leading

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within churches. These leaders may be running Sunday school classes or Bible study groups in established churches. They may be simply gathering people to share the gospel with or teach the Bible to. They may do social justice activities, such as helping widows. They frequently have no official recognition. We wrote this book to facilitate the development of these many, often unrecognized, leaders.

All people in the world belong to ethnolinguistic cultural groups. Some people may belong to more than one ethnolinguistic cultural group. Each person's primary cultural identity incorporates the language learned since early childhood. Along with language, our parents and community teach us cultural values and ways of doing things. Our home language and the culture of our parents is critical to our sense of identity. It is part of how we define who we are in this world. We learn how we fit into our group, who the leaders are, how they should lead, and what we should do in response to their leadership.

Culture, in the ethnolinguistic sense, is often a contested term in today's world. This is usually a reaction against stereotyping. Stereotypes are based on fixed descriptions of cultural traits. They fail to acknowledge the broad range of individuals within cultures. They also do not take into account the constant changes that occur in cultures over time. Yet, no matter how much some people may deny the reality of culture, it still exists. Failure to recognize cultural difference when developing leaders results in ineffective training. It also tends to force leaders to become like leaders in the developers' cultures.

Culture refers to how people perceive their world and act within it. It helps them create and preserve their identity in relation to others. The best way to learn another language and culture is to be fully immersed in it. Without this experience, it is difficult to appreciate how much culture affects who we are and what we do. This includes how we relate to other people. To be effective developers of leaders from other cultures, we need to invest time and effort learning their culture. If there are many cultures where we reside, we will need to learn about all of them. This includes how the different groups interact with each other.

Culture is just one of many groups that people belong to. A local church is another. Together, all the groups in a specific geographical region form a *society*. Societies are larger groups of people, often encompassing many ethnolinguistic cultural groups. We use the term *society* to refer to the broader context in which people live and interact.

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There are usually multiple types of groups in any society. Examples of different groups include family, sport, work, professional, and activist groups. Each of these groups defines itself by having rules of belonging. The rules define who belongs. They exclude others. For example, members of a soccer club might have to play soccer and support soccer players.

Whether a group is small or large, its rules determine how the group does things. They outline what to do when conflict arises and the basis for discipline of its members. Leaders are an example for members and others of what it means to belong to the group. They are also usually responsible for enforcing the conditions of belonging.

Societies create rules that enable all their members to live safely together. This is always a negotiated process. It is continually changing as the interests of different groups within a society conflict. Leaders act at the boundaries between different societal groups. Churches are just one set of groups within a society. Christian leaders are accountable to society for what happens within their groups. Paul stresses this in Romans 13:1–7. We have seen this demonstrated in recent years with Western[1] societies holding churches to account for sexual abuse.

Christian leaders do not operate in a vacuum. They are accountable to the groups they lead and the church as a whole, as well as to wider societal standards. It is a good exercise to draw up a map of the different groups that leaders are part of or are affected by. Map the interrelationships between groups. Also map how relationships change as leaders gain responsibility. This helps us understand what the most influential relationships are for each leader. Doing this reinforces for us the embeddedness of leaders in their groups and society. It also makes us aware of the constraints on them and who they are accountable to.

## Reproduce Life

Jesus told his followers that he had come so that they could have life in all its fullness. Life reproduces itself. Jesus commanded his disciples to go

1 *The West*, or *Western*, are poorly defined shorthand terms which encompass values that are particularly characteristic of the main missionary-sending, Christian-heritage countries of the last two centuries. These countries have successfully exported their views of theology and leadership around the world. *The West* and *Western* refer to cultural emphases of individualism, rationalism which separates thinking from emotions and embodied experience, and other cultural characteristics that are particularly associated with English- and German-speaking European-background cultures.

As the West has also become associated with higher education, scientific advance, and material prosperity, aspects of Western-ness can be found throughout the world. We use these terms to refer to this complex of values, and leave it to readers to determine how much it applies to themselves or the people they are working with.

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and make disciples and pass on everything they had received from him. Jesus did not control his disciples. He left them free to make mistakes, to fail, to have exhilarating success, and to be fully human in all its weakness. Compelled by Jesus's love and example, leaders who follow Jesus reproduce life in all its dynamic out-of-control-ness.

The church is a living community. Life is messy, unpredictable, uncontrollable, and changing all the time. Even when things are settled, a chance event can change everything in an instant. Leaders of small groups and new churches are on the front line in managing life's uncertainty. They work out how biblical faith is relevant to the unpredictability of people's lives. These leaders live out their faith in full view of their followers in the nitty-gritty of real life. They influence others to follow Jesus like they do.

When the good news of Jesus is introduced into new places, it beds down in small groups around local leaders, very often in homes. In this book, we focus on the Lydias, Corneliuses, and Priscillas and Aquilas. They are the non-ordained, often unrecognized, women and men who share their faith and seed new churches wherever they find themselves. Like the home groups of Acts 2:42–47, these mini churches are the building blocks of the larger church in any city or region.

We affirm the many faithful women small group leaders, as well as the working men, who gather people around them in their workplaces, homes, and the places they travel to in their free time. We find these leaders at the living, multiplying edge of the church rather than at its institutional center. As developers, we can learn much from these leaders. We should honor them in our interactions with them and with others.

When we think of leaders, we often think of men at the head of institutions. These institutions are usually associated with big buildings. Institutions and buildings are static, not living, entities. They are built to last a long time. Many people have invested much, emotionally and materially, over a long time, to establish them. With time, the focus of the institution shifts to sustaining itself rather than pursuing its original purpose.

Institutions generate rigid structures to support themselves. These structures include administrative systems, committees, welfare systems, and connections with other institutions. The longer the institution has been around, the more people who join are attracted to its longevity and stability. These people resist change long after the institution has lost its founding purpose or has failed.

Across the West there are many empty church buildings. The last people in them were unable to adapt to the changing world outside the buildings.

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