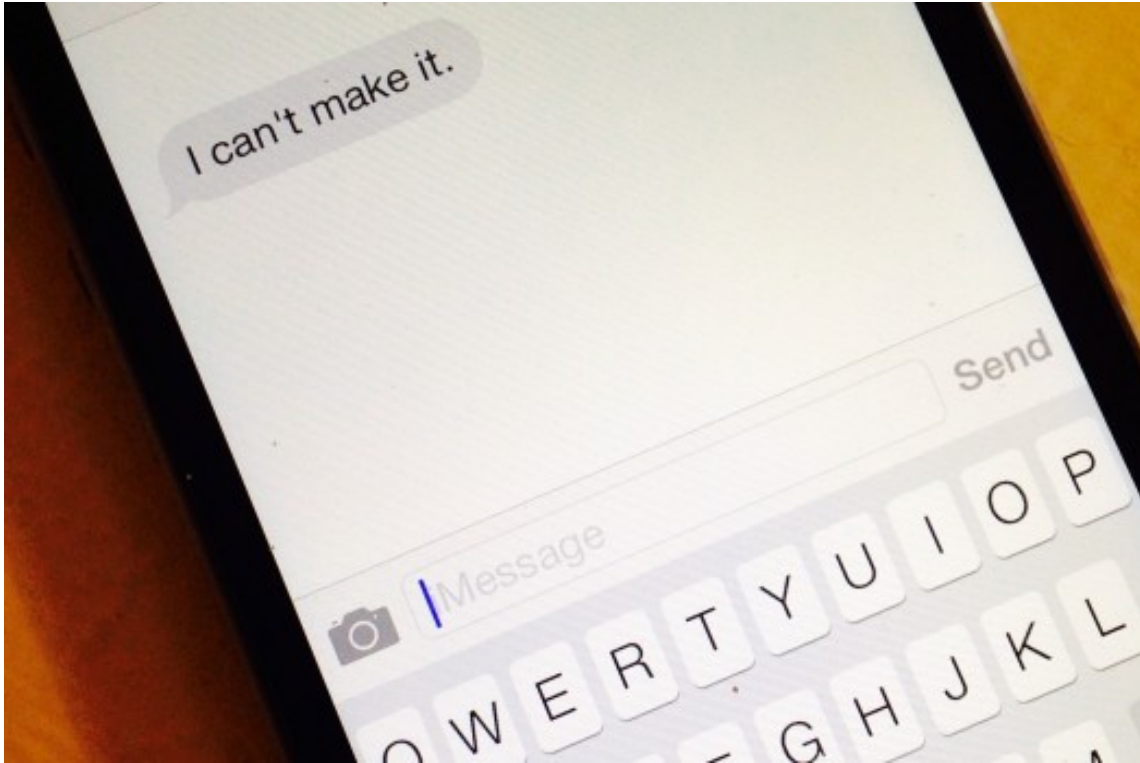


4 Strategies for Improving Group Attendance



One of your top challenges may be ~~encouraging~~ ~~convincing~~ *begging* group members to show up each week. There is no shortage of reasons for people to not show up. It begins with a single text: "I can't make it." And then the dominoes begin to fall: "I can't make it either," "I've got a ton to do." Suddenly, it's you and one other person staring awkwardly at each other. The frustration of last minute cancellations creates a weight on your leadership. You begin to ask yourself what you're doing wrong, and how you can prevent cancellations.

Don't beat yourself up or, worse, send out a scathing email about attendance (admit it, you've done it or you've been tempted to do it). Take a deep breath. Remind yourself that you're not responsible for making *someone else* responsible for their commitments. Instead, focus on these four strategies for improving group attendance:

1. Create an engaging group environment.

Think about environments that you like. What stands out? Is it the warm, welcoming host? One of the things that engages me most is knowing that the leader wants me—specifically me—to be there. A text from a leader during the week or on the day of group is often enough to convince a person to show up. If someone has missed for a while you can follow up with a simple message, “Just wanted to take a moment to check in with you, I haven't seen you in a while, I just wanted to see if everything was going ok, and if there is anything you need prayer for!”

2. Communicate clear expectations.

How do you communicate attendance expectations to your group without sounding like you're scolding them?

- Use the Group Agreement. It's your best tool for setting clear expectations about the group experience. Don't use it as a list of rules, but as a springboard for a discussion about what will make our group experience great. Regular attendance is a huge part of maximizing the group experience.
- Acknowledge the obvious: Poor attendance *will* undermine your group dynamic. *No one* has trouble filling up his or her nights. No one shows up at group each week because they have nothing better to do. We show up because we've decided group is necessary for our spiritual growth. Encourage and challenge your group to resist allowing the urgent to crowd out the important.

3. Hold your group members to a standard.

Don't apologize for holding group members to a standard. At the same time, make your expectations clear. Holding them to a standard you've never communicated isn't fair. Keep in mind that holding people to a standard allows you to be flexible sometimes, too.

4. Plan out 2 or 3 months at a time.

Look at your calendars together and plan out your weekly meetings in advance. This communicates that “Tuesdays” are spoken for, unless a clear exception comes up. People appreciate it when a leader has a plan for a meeting, whether that meeting is at work, a neighborhood association, or a small group. Having a plan communicates respect for people's time. There may be some weeks where everyone is gone. Planning ahead allows you to cancel group in advance.

Finally, remember that you'll probably need to have the attendance conversation more than once. It may not be easy, but it can make the difference between having an okay or a *great* group experience.