

Serving Small-Group Leaders

Learn the difference between “helping” and “doing.”

By Community Christian Church

Running through e-mails, Heather decided to only check the ones that looked important. She only had 15 minutes before she had to run and get the kids. Then she saw the subject line: “Urgent,” an e-mail from Shelley, one of the Community 4:12 leaders at church. Heather is the coach of a team of compassion ministry leaders who oversee teams that put together events for under-resourced families in the community.

For a second, Heather contemplated ignoring the e-mail; after all, she didn’t have a lot of time. But curiosity got the best of her, and she double clicked. The e-mail read:

Ahhhhh! Terry is driving me crazy! She doesn’t follow directions. I asked her to book the school for the compassion event. We have already advertised the time and date, and now I find out Terry did not book the school! Now we have no place for this event! I asked her months ago to take care of this one small detail, and she never did it. She said she forgot. Help!

Bummer! Heather thought. *Now what are we going to do? The event is two weeks away and we don’t have a space.* She automatically went into fix-it mode. As she jumped in the car to pick up her kids, she ran through the options in her mind and thought of the community center down the street from the school. Flipping open her cell phone, she began to make calls. The community center was available, but would cost an extra \$500. Being a “make it happen” kind of leader, this extra cost was not enough to discourage Heather. As her son hopped into the car, she called Mike, a neighbor and plant manager for a local food manufacturer.

“Mike, this is Heather,” she crooned onto his voicemail. “Just wondering if you and the family could come over for dessert some night this weekend? I’ve got an idea for you.” By the time she picked up her daughter, Heather had an appointment with the community center to formally reserve the space and fill out the paperwork. She also made a call to the church office to change the advertising for the event location, and she got a phone tree started to get the word out among volunteers.

Over dessert with Mike and his family that weekend, Heather presented her proposal of a corporate sponsorship for the event—not only to cover the extra \$500 rent on the facility, but to cover the entire cost of rental and supplies. She flopped into bed afterward, feeling a sense of relief and satisfaction. The adrenaline rush of managing the problem and multi-tasking to get the job done had kept her mind racing the last two nights. She drifted off to sleep with the old cliché ringing in her mind: “When you want a job done right, do it yourself.”

The event was a huge success. Attendance was even greater than expected, and because of the corporate sponsorship, the volunteers raised more money than they had planned—money that would assist families in their community. It was a satisfying day for Heather. When the other volunteers learned of the corporate sponsorship and the last minute crisis of space, Heather got lots of praise and encouragement for her skills of making stuff happen. Even the pastor acknowledged Heather’s efforts during his prayer and remarks at the opening of the event.

As Heather cruised through her e-mails the next day, she noticed another one from Shelley. This time the subject line said, “Thanks.”

Heather, I’m not sure what I would have done without you. Thanks for rescuing me. You did a fabulous job—what a great day! —Shelley

In the following weeks, Heather enjoyed a more comfortable schedule as the flow of ministry cycled down. But just when she was getting really relaxed, it happened again. This time the subject line just read “Help!” Once again, Shelley found herself with a volunteer not following through, a ministry crisis, and a deadline.

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Again, Heather went into fix-it mode. She had already scheduled a meeting with Shelley for that afternoon, so she quickly prepared a list of how they could resolve the current ministry difficulty. The women met at a local park while Shelley's preschool daughter played in the slides and tunnels.

"Last month's event was awesome!" Shelley said. "Thanks again for pulling things together the way you did."

"It's what I do," Heather answered, smiling. As they continued to reflect on the event, Heather realized that she was spending a lot of time accepting praise from Shelley. An uneasiness fell over her that she couldn't quite put her finger on. "It's all God," she finally said, going through the motions of deflecting the credit.

The women continued the meeting with a discussion of their current ministry problem. Once again, the same volunteer had not followed through and Shelley couldn't handle all the details by herself to keep the event afloat. "So here we are again," Shelley grimaced, "Time to pull some Heather magic and rescue me."

Heather squirmed. It suddenly dawned on her—she had rescued Shelley from the previous ministry mess instead of helping her discover a solution. She had accepted all of the responsibility (and praise) instead of taking advantage of an opportunity to help Shelley grow.

Looking at Shelley with new purpose, Heather inquired, "How can I help you, Shelley?"

Shelley looked confused. "What should we do?" she asked after a moment of thought. "You always have a quick and creative solution."

"We are in a mess," Heather agreed. Solutions were scrolling through her mind. It felt clear to her what should be done, but she stopped short of blurting it out. Instead, she said, "Let's pray about this." Shelley happily agreed, but not without a moment of surprise. It was not Heather's normal mode of operation to stop, reflect, and pray before launching into fix-it mode. The women prayed. Heather asked again, "How can I help you?"

Shelley shared her concerns about the volunteer team she leads. She was unsure why they didn't seem to have the same commitment and ownership that it took to meet their ministry objectives. "Here's how you can help me," Shelley finally said. "Help me motivate this team to get stuff done."

The two leaders spent the bulk of their meeting talking about how to motivate the team. They decided to have a team get-together which included some affirmations as well as some vision casting. Then they talked about how to resolve the immediate ministry deadlines. Instead of offering solutions, Heather asked, "What is the purpose of this event? How is God leading in this? What would you like to see happen? What needs to be done to make this happen? Who do you think should do it?"

Shelley left the meeting with a list of calls to make and conversations to have. Three weeks out from their ministry event, she was feeling confident that the event would be successful. Two days before the event, the subject line of the e-mail read, "You're invited."

Heather, we would love to have you come to the event on Saturday. Hope you are planning to be there. Would you like to greet at the door? All other bases seemed to be covered. —Shelley

For a moment, Heather felt sad—but just for a moment. The success or failure of this event wasn't about her ability to do it, but about her ability to develop other leaders to do it. Her behind the scenes role as a coach would not showcase her 11th hour, pull-it-all-together talent. But she knew that was the real test of her leadership.

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Discuss:

1. How did Heather handle Shelley's second crisis differently than the first crisis? Which way was better for Shelley's development?
2. When have you been tempted to take over the tasks that have been entrusted to your small-group leaders? What happened?

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3. What are some ways that you can serve your small-group leaders and help them accomplish their ministry goals without doing it for them?

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