

Four C's of Accountability

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My most significant small-group experience began as a vehicle for professional accountability but has evolved into much more. I meet with three other women committed to using their gifts in writing and speaking. We are all mothers of young children and are married to men in ministry.

Through years of meeting regularly and praying together, we've gradually grown to the level of keeping one another accountable both in our personal holiness and our professional ministries. Four key factors brought us to this point.

1. Concern. One of our ground rules for the group is that everything must be said in love. This can be tricky when we critique each other's writing projects or speaking schedules. But we've asked God to give us wisdom to know when to speak out boldly.

For instance, when Linda began receiving speaking invitations for practically every weekend, we encouraged her to limit her acceptances to once-a-month trips. She even went one step further and hired a publicist to handle her calendar. This freed up more time to spend with her husband and three children.

2. Commitment. We're committed to support one another. We follow through on prayer requests, asking for updates by phone or at our next meeting.

We've also "walked through pain" with each other in the last five years as we've been touched by the death of a child, job loss and relocation, rebellious teenagers, depression, marital conflict, and a lengthy hospitalization. No matter how low one of us was during a trial, we knew we could call on each other.

3. Confidentiality. Because we all have some degree of visibility in the Christian world, our small group became a place where we could let our hair down.

It's a great responsibility to be privy to a struggle or sin in another Christian's life. I've often searched God's Word to know what to share with my sisters and when and how to say it. Sometimes I need to admonish, other times I need to listen quietly and hug. We've tried to extend acceptance and grace to one another, particularly in our areas of failure.

4. Consistency. Once our meeting schedule was decided (and it has fluctuated between biweekly and monthly) we expected one another to attend. There were exceptions, of course. But we've gathered with newborn babies in our arms and around a sickbed. We even mailed cassette recordings of meetings to a member who had moved.

An important part of our accountability has been to set goals and share progress reports when we meet. Above all, we pray about everything.

This true accountability has been the great joy of our small group.