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Self-Help Group Analysis

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The meeting I attended was an open group for alcoholics anonymous, AA, the meeting was called "It's 5 o'clock somewhere." The meeting is a recurring meeting and it is held on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday from 5 to 6pm EST via zoom. The meeting I attended had about 110 participants, which seemed overwhelming to me, but on their description, it states that they did expand their meeting to over 100 in order to ensure that everyone who needs a meeting finds one. The description of the group was so inviting and upbeat, even the title showed a light-hearted side of dealing with their addiction, which made me want to pick this one out of all the other groups listed.

I decided to attend a support group that had a large group because I was curious to see if it was helpful. It is difficult at times to get people to share in small groups but to have a large community of so many participants sounded chaotic, so I wanted to see how this would work. Before joining the zoom, I read the guidelines for joining the meeting. It stated that everyone was welcome, observers as well but for them to just let the host know so that they can write listener, next to their name. It further noted that everyone was welcome to share a clean joke with the group and they wanted to show any newcomers that sobriety is not boring at all.

I joined the meeting about 5 minutes before the start time and there were already 75 participants in the room and it quickly jumped to about 112 participants. I should note that before I was able to enter the room there was a warning about being respectful once in the zoom and any inappropriate behavior will be flagged and reported so that the individual may be removed

from using zoom. I like that part because I have heard of people joining zooms and doing crazy things. This meeting addressed practical concerns in the formation of the group not only in the description of the meeting but before entering as well. “A poor setting can set a negative tone that will adversely affect the cohesion of the group, so every effort should be made to secure a meeting place that will facilitate in-depth work.” (Corey, 2016, p. 74)

The following was noted of the participants, most of the participants were Caucasian and there were few minorities. There participants who were present were male and female. The ages seemed to range from mid-twenties to about 60ish. I was able to see where people were from as they noted their State next to their names, I saw California, Oregon, Florida, Rhode Island, Maryland, Boston, Ohio, New York, New Jersey, and several others. I noted that most of the participants had their cameras on and were already interacting with each other. It seemed that some have been in previous meetings together, which I found interesting that despite the group size there was a strong connection among the members. As I was looking at those with cameras on, I saw one young lady who was present holding her baby and another participant who seemed to have joined with his wife.

The meeting started promptly at 5pm and there was one clear facilitator. “Opening a group session effectively sets the tone for the rest of the session.” (Corey, 2016, p. 28) I think that for a group session this is very important, especially for such a large group and the facilitator did a great job in setting the tone for the meeting. I noted that during the meeting the facilitator showed many characteristics needed for a group leader, especially when he would address the participants. The facilitator showed belief in the group process and enthusiasm, stamina, sincerity and authenticity. The facilitator had a very engaging voice and was energetic, he even shared that this was his 6th meeting of the day and you would not have known it by his energy

level. As the facilitator spoke, he encouraged those to share, shared his own experiences and throughout the meeting providing encouraging words and thanked those who shared. “For a group leader, caring means challenging the members to look at parts of their lives that they are denying and discouraging any form of dishonest behavior in the group.” (Corey, 2016, p. 15)

The facilitator went over the guidelines, such as being respectful of one another, observers to not share and if they did, they need to turn their cameras on. The facilitator informed everyone of the format, which was that if you wanted a chance to speak you needed to raise your hand and each person will have 2 minutes to share with a 30 second warning to wrap up. There were about 5 other students in the meeting as they noted their status in the chat box. I thought that joining a meeting as a student was going to be a problem or even weird, but the participants appeared used to it and sent messages in the chat box, saying “thank you for joining”, or “welcome”, “nice to have you.”

The facilitator shared that first they would start with one of the participants who wanted to share a song of inspiration and then they would start sharing. The song that played was Courage Is by The Strange Familiar. It was a good song and I found the lyrics to be empowering, what I like is that after the song, everyone who participated mentioned how uplifting it was and thanked the sharer.

The first sharer was very emotional as he recently relapsed and was sharing how difficult it has been for him especially during COVID and how his family does check-in, but it is hard. The sharer was so into his story that he did not note the timer and then the 30 second warning, so he kept talking, the facilitator then muted him and thanked him for his story. I was happy to see that the next sharer acknowledged the first one and gave him encouraging words. Other participants went back to the statements the first sharer made and provided their own insights

and coping skills that has worked for them. As noted in the readings, one reason the group approach has become so popular is that it is frequently more effective than the individual approach. This effectiveness stems from the fact that group members not only gain insight but practice new skills both within the group and in their everyday interactions outside the group.” (Corey, 2016, p. 5) Some of the participants even shared that they were encouraged by their sponsors and their individual therapist to attend meetings. It seemed to flow as every sharer acknowledged those who expressed really having a difficult time coping and even sent uplifting messages in the chat box. Each sharer started with Hello, name and stating that they were an alcoholic. The meeting had a good flow, and everyone seemed to stay within the 2-minute time and were good with noting when the 30 second wrap up was shown. One sharer stated that he like the group as he appreciated the varied that it brings as smaller groups can get repetitive. Another one shared that they really did not want to join but their sponsor encouraged him to attend a meeting and he was glad he picked this one, he was not expecting to get anything out of it but as he looked at the gallery he noted a sober person caring for her child and in another a person saying goodbye to another person who was walking out. He stated that these simple things were so touching that it made him happy. Throughout the meeting the participants joked in the chat box, provided encouraging words to those who needed it, and reminded each other that they were not alone and that they had ongoing strength. I was engaged in the meeting and found myself laughing at the jokes, what do you call an alligator in a vest? An investigator. It was such a corny joke but that one joke started a list of jokes and laughter among the participants. The meeting felt light hearted despite the difficult topic and struggles those in the meeting were sharing. It seemed to help the participants. Since the meeting was only an hour long and there was well over hundred participants not everyone was able to speak, but I believe

that the meeting did accomplish the goal, which was to make everyone to feel welcome and a chance to talk. Everyone who wanted to share was able to speak since towards the last 15 minutes the facilitator started to pick on participants since no one else was raising their hand. I noted that even though they did not raise their hand and the facilitator just picked them they still shared. Most of the participants shared they were glad they had this meeting to attend and found it helpful to their ongoing recovery.

By the end of the meeting I felt that the participants did find support in the group and it was overall very productive. The facilitator did a group job wrapping up the session. “Before closing a session, it is essential to allow time for integrating what has occurred, for reflecting on what has been experienced, for talking about what the participants may do between now and the next session, and for summarizing.” (Corey, 2016, p. 32) The facilitator summarized, acknowledged how much time was left to give an opportunity for the participants to share, if needed, and reminded the group of the next session, as well as other sessions that were available. The facilitator stated as always, we end with the burning desire questions, which was does anyone feel the need to drink? Harm themselves or others? The final close out for the meeting was for everyone to state their name and day count, with each name there was a chorus of cheers, no matter what the day count, as “failure is part of the story.”

References

Corey, G. (2016). *Theory & Practice of Group Counseling*. Australia: Cengage Learning.