

Small Group Action

Work together and get stuff done

Ever want to change the world, or yourself, and then just... never quite do it? Instead of working alone, the next time you want to make a change, try Small Group Action.

Small Group Action: Step by Step

What you need

Two things you *do* need

You need to *care about something*. Something is bothering you, right? Something is not how it ought to be? That's your focus. Start there.

You need to *know good people*. Not a hermit on a mountaintop? Great, you're good to go. (No offence to all the hermits out there.)

One thing you *don't* need

You don't need *the answer*. Ideas are great but if you're already decided what everyone is going to do, then you're recruiting assistants, not team-mates.

How to begin a Small Group Action

It starts with one person. That's you.

*Let's go! Glide on down to **Step One**.*

Step One: Find one other person

Don't worry about finding a whole group at once. Start with one person. You might already know who to ask. If not, just wave the flag a little bit and watch what happens.

- Post on social media about the focus. Who replies?
- Mention the focus when you're at a party. Who gets into the conversation?
- Pay attention to your social network. Who seems to share your interests?

Your group is out there - start looking!

*Have you found someone? Great! Onwards to **Step Two!***

Step Two: Invite that person

Reach out to the person you've found. Something like this:

- I've been thinking a lot about [...] and I want to actually *do* something.
- Are you interested in doing a Small Group Action with me?
- SGA is for short, sharp projects that fit around our busy lives.
- We'll figure out together what we actually do. Something small but with an impact!

There's also some housekeeping:

- We'll make a group of three to five people.
- The group will have to meet up once or twice - what times can you make? (And are you meeting in the real world or online?)

*Are they interested? Excellent! Skip on down to **Step Three!***

*Otherwise, leap back to **Step One** and find another person to ask!*

Step Three: Build the group

You are no longer alone - now you are two! Now you need to add more people to the group.

Who to invite next?

You and your group will decide together who to invite next, and when you are done.

- Invite new people one-by-one. Even if there are two people who would both be great - even if they are a married couple! Even if they are twins! Even if they are clones! Invite one first, then involve them in the decision to invite the other.
- SGA runs on consensus! This means that you need to agree as a group each time you invite someone new. Probably this won't be complicated: "How about we invite Sally?" "Sounds good to me!" Sometimes it will take a little more discussion.
- Allow a veto, no questions asked. If Amelia doesn't want to do SGA with Albert, then that's the end of that. Amelia doesn't have to explain her veto: her reasons are none of your business.
- Make sure you make the housekeeping part of the invitation! If you form a group of people who don't have any chance to actually meet up, then you're not going to get very far! Timetable clashes are very much a valid reason for someone to sit out of an SGA (not that they need to explain themselves!).

Aim for 4 or 5 group members

You can have a group of three, or a big one of six or seven, but the sweet spot is four or five. Groups that size have a lot of power at their disposal, but they're still small enough to manage themselves efficiently. It's a good trade-off.

Decide together when to stop inviting people into the group. If you're unsure, stop right away! Adding someone later is a lot easier than starting over because the group got too big!

Diversity is good

Diversity gives you strength. Mix it up a little (or a lot) as you build the group.

- A range of personalities, skills, interests and experiences all make your group more powerful and flexible.
- People of different generation or education level or culture will open up your networks and offer surprising new approaches to problems.
- Diverse groups have different assumptions and expectations. This might lead to misunderstandings and friction. Be patient with each other. You can do it.

Not your best friend

Don't invite your BFF into your group. The job of a best friend is to accept and love you, even when you flake out! That's great and important, but it is not what you need for SGA.

You're after the long-time friends you haven't seen for a while, or the friends you only see when other people are around, or the acquaintances who seem nice, or the strangers everyone says you'll get on great with. People you'd prefer not to see you flake out.

Give your BFF a big hug and tell them to start their own Small Group Action.

*Is your group all lined up? Well done! Progress to **Step Four!***

Step Four: Schedule cake and conversation

Become a group over cake. (Probably not actually cake.)

Organization

Sorting out the meeting is on you, starting-things person! Soon you'll be sharing tasks as a group - but not quite yet.

Luckily you already know when to schedule this meeting, because you checked availability as you recruited people one by one, right?

The invitation

Here's how this goes:

- Hey, remember that Small Group Action thing we've been talking about and recruiting for? It's time for us to get together!
- We'll have some cake! (Or do something else nice!)
- And we'll talk about what we actually want to accomplish.

Someone might drop out when they receive this invitation. That's normal and helpful. Find someone else and keep going!

Cake!

Something to make the first gathering a fun and friendly experience. Real cake works well, but you might want to offer something else.

Decide what "cake" you want to offer. Don't throw it to the group - make a call yourself, starting-things person! You're not up to group decision-making yet. Cake first, consensus after.

However, make sure your cake idea is an offer. Going rock-climbing is not everyone's idea of fun! Some people hate eating cake! Just, you know, don't spend too much time on the cake.

Other Cakes

Here are some alternative cake ideas:

- Brunch at a cafe!
- Board game night!
- Bottle of wine!
- Walk along a beach!
- Share a photo of your pet! (Great if you're meeting online.)
- Share a link to an inspirational song! (Ditto)
- Go see a film doco about the issue!

*Enjoying your cake? Excellent! On to **Step Five!***

Step Five: Decide on your action

Finally, at step five, it's time to figure out what you're actually going to do! This is the heart of the SGA process - you've been building up to this, laying groundwork, and now the moment has arrived.

You'll go into the conversation talking about a problem, and come out of it with an action. Go!

Starting the conversation

Everyone is together, pleasantly enjoying some tasty cake. Time for you - yes, you again! - to get the conversation started. Here's your pitch:

- Small group action is about choosing something we can do together.
- We want to do something short, with a definite end point.
- And something that seems pretty easy, so we can start out with a win!
- Afterwards we can consider following up with another action, but that's in the future.

Zoom in tight

You all came together with a shared concern. Often, those concerns are huge and confusing. For Small Group Action, you need to zoom in really tight on one little aspect of the big issue. Always start small!

Talk about problems and actions at the same time

Don't worry about being methodical. Talk about problems that bother you, then think about responses, but also talk about actions you could take and consider how they might fit address different aspects of the problem. Things are often complex and tangled, and instead of spending time carefully pulling them apart, just embrace the mess.

Use your strengths

Figure out what your group can do well. Does someone have an uncle who can loan you a hearse? Start busting ghosts! Does someone have a graphic design degree? Make an informative poster! Does someone know how the inside of a city council office actually works? Write a targeted letter!

Everybody talks

Small group action needs consensus, and you can only get there if everybody talks. Some people are more talkative than others, so remind the group that it's everyone's responsibility to bring everybody along with them. Make sure you ask quieter members to share their thoughts so no-one gets left behind.

Everybody decides

There must be consensus about what you're going to do. Everyone must be enthusiastic about it! If an idea hasn't clicked with the whole group, keep talking. It's probably better doing nothing than settling for something not everyone wants to do.

Check it's a good action

Not all actions are a great fit for SGA. There's a whole section about this below, but here's the action checklist:

- Is everyone enthusiastic and involved?

- Can you get it done in a short time?
- Do you know how to start?
- Will there be a mark of success when you're done?

If you get four ticks, you're good to go!

*Have you agreed on an action? With four ticks? Great! Onwards to **Step Six!**
Got questions about those checklist items? Hit the **Action Checklist** document!
If you need some ideas, check the **Example Actions** on www.taleturn.com*

Step Six: Build your support structure

Agreeing to an action is the first half of what you want to do. But don't stop there! Now you need to put some support in place so you actually follow through on this good intention!

Choose your clubhouse

Every club needs a clubhouse, where you can hang out in private and do your group stuff. Decide on it right now! Some suggestions:

- A group email chain - start a new one for the action
- A private Facebook chat or Google hangout
- A regular catchup over coffee every Tuesday and Friday morning
- A private group blog

Make a timeline

- Think about the steps needed for your action, and guess how long it will all take.
- Agree on an end date. (You can change it at the mid-project review!)
- Speaking of the mid-project review - put one of those in the middle of the timeline. Face-to-face is ideal for this, but you can do it in your clubhouse if you like.
- Talk about any other major milestones you need to hit, and put them on the timeline too.

Assign responsibilities

Work out who, specifically, is going to do each piece of the action. Everyone should have a job! Try and be fair, but don't worry about it too much as long as everyone's happy this time out.

Plan support

With the best intentions in the world, we often fail to do things we've promised to do. Luckily you're in a group, and you can support each other! Agree what you'll do. Here are some ideas:

- Ask someone not in the group to check in on how you're going halfway through your timeframe.
- Everyone pledge to report to the clubhouse whenever they make progress.
- Everyone promise to reply to every report to the clubhouse!
- Assign people to send reminder emails or follow-up when something is behind.

- Give everyone a specific support target who they can phone up once a week to check in.
- Someone promise cookies as a reward, and shares recipes as the group advances through the action.

It almost doesn't matter what you do, as long as you do *something* to keep the action moving in an ongoing conversation. If the group falls silent, then you're not going to get it done.

*Have you sorted out a lovely scaffold for your good work? Outstanding! On to **Step Seven!***

Step Seven: Go for it!

Do your group dance, sing your team song, and perform your elaborate insider handshake that ends with an explosion. You are ready!

*Go out and do it!
And when you're halfway through, you hit **Step Eight...***

Step Eight: Mid-Project Review

You scheduled this in step six. You can use it many ways, but it's a good idea to:

- Check everything is on track.
- Make changes if something isn't working.
- Ask for advice if there's a problem.
- Eat some cake.

*And then - get it done! Which is **Step Nine!***

Step Nine: Finish Line!

You did it! So it's time to:

- Congratulate each other!
- Report on your action to anyone who might be interested to hear about it!
- Talk about what next! Will the group stick together for another action?
- If people want to drop out or swap out, great! SGA runs on shared motivation, so people doing that is helpful and respectful to everyone's time!
- More cake?

*Is your group keen to do another action? Back to **Step Four!**
Have some members stepped down? Hop to **Step Three!**
Did the group wind up but you want more? Off to **Step One!**
And have fun!*