

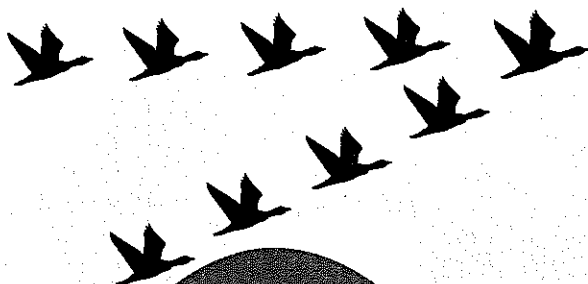
# Group Work, or Why Birds Fly in V-Formation

BY GREGG LEVOY

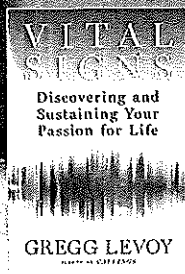
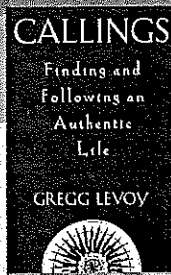
Group facilitation can often be more effective than individual coaching/counseling in helping people clarify vocational issues, as it offers participants the support, feedback and cross-fertilization of a community of fellow searchers—but it can also be highly individualized through self-reflective questions. This article explores why it's so potent.

According to the naturalist Milton Olsen, birds fly in V-formation on their migrations because each bird flapping its wings creates an uplift for the bird behind it, and by flying in V-shape the whole flock gets over 70% better mileage than if each bird flew solo.

drafting



**Callings are signs, signals, promptings, even imperatives emanating from your life telling you how to stay true to True North.**



This is the logic and power behind group career coaching/counseling. Especially given people's tendency to isolate around their vocational challenges, attempting to figure it out all by themselves, groups offer a community of support, input, encouragement, and people who are in the same boat.

Furthermore, in many settings (such as colleges and universities), group counseling offers career staff the opportunity to meet with more than one student/client at a time, making it more time- and cost-effective. And more than a few studies have demonstrated the efficacy of group work (Giallombardo, 2005; Pyle, 1986).

I've been facilitating group workshops for 20 years—based on my book *Callings*—in venues as varied as colleges, companies, professional conferences, faith based organizations, Meetup groups, alumni retreats, senior centers, even prisons. These workshops are thus designed as much around coaching people toward callings as careers, the sense of calling being a deep feeling of fit and purpose, aliveness and contribution, and a match between who they are and what they do. They're also typically one-time seminars, anywhere from two hours to two days, and they work with 10 people or 200.

## Self Reflection is Key

Ultimately it's a clarification process, with participants generating a body of data from their own files which helps them clarify what their lives are calling-for from them, professionally or personally. This could involve a career decision, a creative leap, an enterprise or collaboration to start, a role to take on or let go of, or any course-correction in their work/life.

The key to generating this data—and making collective coaching effective as both an individualized and a group process—is a series of self-reflective questions designed to be answered by each participant but also shared (optionally) with the group (see sidebar for sample questions). The point is self-awareness, getting people talking and revealing, and finally identifying patterns of passion, purpose and gifts that can help them clarify their direction and decisions.

Though the process and timeframe don't allow for as much personalized attention as individual coaching, there are plenty of opportunities for the facilitator(s) to offer thoughts and guidance to individuals as they share responses to the questions, or invite feedback from other participants.

# A Walk-Through of the Process



Here's a snapshot of the process I typically offer in the shorter group workshops where the focus is primarily on clarifying the sense of calling:

- The more intimate groups begin with go-round introductions, to familiarize participants with one another and offer a chance to share why they're there and what they hope to get out of the experience. A second round of introductions could involve breaking into groups of four to give folks a chance to share more in-depth what brought them to the workshop. These ice-breakers help people feel more relaxed up-front, more a part of the group and more at ease in sharing themselves.
- A brief discussion, with input from participants, about what constitutes a "safe space" in the workshop (deep listening, honesty, courtesy, confidentiality, etc.).
- In introducing the 20 self-reflective questions, which I give folks about a minute each to answer, I make three suggestions: 1) be spontaneous, generate relatively unfiltered data, 2) be specific, and 3) write down the questions, so their answers will make more sense on later review.
- After each question, we open it up for people who'd like to share their responses, popcorn-style. I offer commentary/advice when appropriate.
- Dyad exercise. Participants buddy-up, and one person asks the other a single question, repeatedly—"What do you know for sure?"—and the other responds differently each time it's asked. Then they switch and tackle a different question—"What do you really want?" After each round, the person asking the question gives their partner a bit of "mirroring": "This is what I heard you say you really want."
- Participants skim through their responses to the questions, looking for patterns by circling all recurring themes.
- Participants break into groups of three and share anything they want about what they circled.
- Finally, by way of taking action on whatever they circled, we do a full-group brainstorming exercise on behalf of a volunteer—a process that generates a great deal of energy, momentum and to-do list items, and demonstrates the role community plays in the unfolding of an individual's sense of calling. The operative question in brainstorming is "In how many ways can I....?"—clarify what my calls are, make money doing what I love, work with my own resistance, etc.

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

*Callings: Finding and Following an Authentic Life*  
(Random House), G. Levoy, 1997

Article: "Group career counseling: Principles and practices",  
R.K. Pyle, 1986

Article: "Using Group Counseling to Implement a Career  
Development Program with High School Students",  
L. Giallombardo, 2005

## Group counseling can still be highly individualized with the use of self-reflective questions

### SAMPLE QUESTIONS

- What can you talk about for hours?
- What section of bookstores do you usually spend the most time in?
- What subjects in school have you typically aced?
- If you could test-drive another profession, which would it be?
- What have people most consistently told you you're really good at?
- If you were encouraged to "Just go for it!" what would "it" be?
- What's the most important thing missing from your life?
- What's the un-lived life of each of your parents/primary caretakers—the calling or dream that didn't come to fruition?
- What are you passionately curious about?
- What activities put you in a "flow" state?
- What do you sense is trying to emerge in your life at this juncture?
- Where in your life can you say "I like myself here"—doing what, being where, in whose company?
- There's a signpost in front of you with two signs on it, pointing in different directions—what's written on each sign?
- What decision could you make today that your future self would thank you for?



**Gregg Levoy** ([callings@gregglevoy.com](mailto:callings@gregglevoy.com)) is the author of *Callings* (Random House)—rated among the "Top 20 Career Publications" by the Workforce Information Group—and *Vital Signs: The Nature and Nurture of Passion* (Penguin), the former "behavioral specialist" at *USA Today* and a regular blogger for *Psychology Today*. A keynote speaker at NCDA 2018 in Phoenix, he's presented at the Smithsonian Institution, Environmental Protection Agency, Microsoft, American Counseling Association, and been a guest on ABC-TV, CNN, NPR and PBS. His website is [www.gregglevoy.com](http://www.gregglevoy.com).



A complete list of references is available upon request from the author.