



Men's Group Leadership

A resource manual for excellence

Paddy Murray



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Photos by Paul Hoelen for
Tasmen – [Men With Heart exhibition](#)

Preview of Manual, containing Table of Contents, reviewers' comments and material in Part 1, of the three parts in the full manual. The Preview Includes 'The Way of the Mature Masculine' section.

Thanks for buying my men's group manual and supporting my work. You are off to a good start in developing leadership skills. You can recommend others to buy the manual by sending them this purchase/download link.

<https://gumroad.com/products/hmwqE>

The website mensgrouptraining.com has been set up to provide content and updates on mens group leadership plus mentoring and training contacts.

I am grateful for the many people who have reviewed and commented on this work.

In particular Artha Vardin UK, Thomas Ketron USA, Anna Stover Aust., Alan Raby Aust., Bill McDonald Aust. Minh Han USA and James Ryan Aust. who provided more detailed editing and review work.

Contents

PART ONE – introduction and background	3
Invitation.....	4
Men's Group – Working definition.....	4
A Map Not the Territory.....	5
Scope	5
Background	6
Building Effective and Ethical Male Leaders – A Challenge.....	6
Deeper Human Story.....	7
Check-in	8
History.....	9
Way of The Mature Man	10
PART TWO – Core Personal Skills	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Leader - What Do You Bring?.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Beliefs, Values and Skills Relevant to Leadership	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Basic Ethics – Guidelines for Living	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>PART THREE – The tool kit for leading men’s groups</i>	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
Facilitation Skills	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Which skills are the most difficult?	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Circle Guidelines, Why Do We Have Them?	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Guidelines	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Inner Space	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Two levels of facilitation	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Confidentiality	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Circle Stages of Development	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The First Session	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Programme Ongoing Sessions	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Disclosure	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Constructive Challenging – Confrontation – Honest feedback	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Effective and honest feedback	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Anger and Other Strong Emotions	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Dealing with the challenges – Patterns and Games	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Disconnecting as Avoidance of Intimacy	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Elephant in The Room:	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Healing rituals:	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Structure and Flow	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Opinions, Views, Beliefs and Ideologies	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Jester	Error! Bookmark not defined.
CC – Clearing Circle	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Check Out and Wrap Up	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<i>Appendix 1 -Tips and Tricks for Online Men’s Groups</i>	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
<i>Appendix 2. Facilitator Skills and Competency – Evaluation</i>	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
<i>Appendix3. Big life questions for use as topics in a group.</i>	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
<i>Appendix 4 Handout: Guidelines and Contract</i>	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>

Reviewers Comments

Narayan Van De Graaf, Corporate Consultant: *'This manual fills a very important need. It will be highly beneficial for men stepping into a group leadership role for the first time as well as benefiting more experienced men wishing to hone their skills'*

Gordon Roberts Social Worker: *'I have been waiting for someone to can write about the Ethical and compassionate values for leaders of men's groups. His concept of Mature Masculinity introduces a much-needed discussion of contemporary issues and values for men. I have used Paddy's material in this manual to form the basis of training that I am running. It helped me distil my thoughts and focus my ideas of what I needed to present. It saved me lots of time and provided a clear direction for my training preparation.'*

Cathy Baker, School Counsellor: *'an almanac for all men who care to look beyond their everyday behaviour and grow their understanding of what it takes to support the human experience for the better'*

James Ryan, Wellbeing Educator: *'I feel a sense of fear when I think about running my first Men's Group solo, so I loved reading the Men's Group Leadership manual. Paddy covered every angle I could imagine, and many, many more I never considered - the Elephant in the Room question and Clearing Circles stand out as examples. I have a much stronger belief in my capability to facilitate a Men's Group'*

Doug Stark Counsellor: *'The manual, as the author explains, is his contribution to distilling 'the wisdom of the last 50 years of 'men's group work', very much grounded in his own practical experience of being in and facilitating a variety of men's groups over this period. He describes it as, hopefully, a valuable tool in demystifying 'secret men's business'.*

Avi Franks - Psychologist, Leadership Consultant and Coach: *'Paddy has condensed his hard-won experience of working with men into a comprehensive yet pragmatic resource for the development of effective men's group leaders. He knows the territory and shares it from his heart.'*

Paul Henley chair and Director of the Pathways Foundation: *'I have been working with men and boys for 30 thirty years now. We have had to develop all our guidelines and practices as we grow. So at last all of those experiences, scratching's and realizations have finally landed in Paddy's manual. I am in awe of his creativity and tenacity in putting this together. It allows us as men to stand on the shoulders of those men who have gone before and take another step in this life changing work. I highly recommend this manual to all of us out there that realize the importance of the mature man and how that will have a profound positive affect upon our culture as humans.'*

PART ONE – introduction and background

Invitation

Are you ready to step up to the challenge of running a men's group? Do you accept the challenge to go deeper in understanding yourself and enhance your life journey? You cannot do the first without accepting the second. This is my invitation.

This resource provides the distilled wisdom of the last 50 years of men's group work. The ingredients required for you to move forward on both challenges are here.

Men's Group – Working definition

The men's groups covered here are usually groups of less than 12 that share some following characteristics:

- A place where men come together to get and offer support with other men in their personal and emotional journey.
- A place where men are asked to focus on or come from their own experience and feelings from a deeper internal self, sometimes called *heart space*, as opposed to coming from a heady intellectualized space. A common shorthand being: - from the Heart, not the Head. Where men are encouraged to speak from the first person and make 'I' style statements as opposed to "you, your, we, they, them" style statements.
- A place where men are expected to own their emotional and personal reality and be responsible for it, as opposed to taking the stance of a victim and blaming others.
- A place where the men involved have working guidelines or protocols that they adhere to for the making of a safe and secure container for the above work.

Groups that share the above characteristics comprise groups of like-minded men who are willing to explore heart work, intimacy and vulnerability. Men's groups can

be organised in a variety of ways to meet specific needs, each with their set of advantages. Some groups help men at different stages of learning and ability to go deeper. Groups can be “closed” and don’t readily accept new members, while others are open groups that accept newcomers at least for a trial period. Open groups usually have a greater variety of men with different interests and problems. In groups that are associated with multi-day men’s gatherings, men are allocated to circles of up to 10 men to meet for up to six times over three days. In such gatherings, there are usually 30 percent or so who are new to the work. Finally, there are specialist groups of men, e.g., men in prison, men just released from prison, army veterans, or men working through divorce and custody issues.

The all-around training offered here will apply to the leaders of the wide range of groups that share these characteristics.

A Map Not the Territory

This manual uses words to describe how to run a men’s group, do not confuse the words for the actual experience of being in a men’s group and leading it. Neither is reading a how-to book on blacksmithing the same as the reality of drawing a glowing yellow/red bar of iron from a forge and hammering it on the anvil with sparks flying.

This manual is the map, the landscape is the reality of men sitting in circle: learning to trust, shed their armour and sharing their deeper realities. The reality has to be experienced.

Don’t try and remember all you read here. Just get a sense of it and come back to it if necessary. You don’t have to agree with all ideas here, just take what makes sense for you. Focus on the insights and challenges for your personal development and the leadership skills you wish to develop. The truth of it all for you awaits in the reality testing of leading a men’s group.

Scope

This work is intended to cover, in a comprehensive way, most of the issues involved in men’s groups. It travels from history, philosophy, values and ethics to practical details. It also covers the essential matter of evaluating the competency of leaders.

This has been written for men wanting to improve their leadership skills in running men’s groups. It presumes that they have been in a men’s group. This manual would also be of use to men wanting to find out more about what being in a group

involves. It would also be useful for anyone wanting to demystify what is sometimes called 'Secret Men's Business'

This is not intended as a basic 'how-to' guide on running a men's group, although it can be if you wish to wade through it all and distil the essence. There are many guides on running men's groups that can be found on the internet. The 'Men's Group Field Guide' by Brett Churnin, et al. is a good example and is available [here](#) Brett also runs the successful [Facebook Men's Group](#)

Background

Since the end of World War 2 we have experienced rapid and massive social and economic changes. We have moved from a predominately manufacturing economy to a predominantly-service and now digital economy. Feminism is now in its third wave and is associated with major changes in women's roles. These and a myriad of other changes have led to confusion about, and a reevaluation of, men's roles in society. It's a challenging and difficult time for men. They have the choice to reflect, adapt and find more satisfying ways of being in the world that work for them, their families, and society.

Men's groups have developed over the last five decades to support men in these turbulent times. As a social phenomenon, they have only catered to a small proportion of men, maybe less than 1%, but interest is growing. It's now time to refine the experience and knowledge gained over the last fifty years to support the training of more men to lead this work.

Building Effective and Ethical Male Leaders – A Challenge

I take a proactive view that men's groups can build better men, and through that, a better society. The pandemic and the full awareness of the genuine threat to humanity posed by climate change cries out for leadership. Building better men and a better society has never been a more urgent task. We have no choice but to step up and accept the challenge of growing more effective leaders.

'In a time of crisis, like we are in now, with people feeling frightened and uncertain, leadership doesn't just matter more. It matters exponentially more.'

[Thomas Friedman in the New York Times](#)

I express statements of values and ethics throughout this document. They express what I, and I think many men, view as important. You cannot become a better leader without first being clear about your values and ethics. They are always a work in progress. I invite you to unashamedly own and share them in leading men's groups.

[David Whyte](#), one of our greatest contemporary poets, challenges us to waken to the fullness of our potential. He encourages us on a journey to our deeper selves and gives birth to a knowing that we can grow to have a wonderful impact on our world. A poem by David:

SELF PORTRAIT

It doesn't interest me if there is one God
or many gods.
I want to know if you belong or feel
abandoned.
If you know despair or can see it in others.
I want to know
if you are prepared to live in the world
with its harsh need
to change you. If you can look back
with firm eyes
saying this is where I stand. I want to know
if you know
how to melt into that fierce heat of living
falling toward
the center of your longing. I want to know
if you are willing
to live, day by day, with the consequence of love
and the bitter
unwanted passion of your sure defeat.

I have heard, in that fierce embrace, even
the gods speak of God.

David Whyte
from Fire in the Earth
©1992 Many Rivers Press

Deeper Human Story

This manual introduces techniques and skills to create effective and safe containers for supporting men. The deeper human stories of the men who come to men's work won't be found in these pages. Some of those stories entail years of sexual and

physical abuse as children and teens; suicides of parents, brothers, sisters or their children; drug addiction; time in prison; heartbreaking marriage failures; and the trauma of war. Not all the stories are as heavy as this. All men who turn up have interesting and deeper stories. However, it is the men with significant earlier trauma whose stories are written on my heart that most show the power, alchemy, and elixir of life that can be present in men's groups. That they are still alive or not in prison and have become better partners, fathers, and more useful members of our communities is often much attributed to their participation in a men's group. This motivates me to write. I hope that by creating more effective groups and leaders, more men will be served well in their journey.

Check-in

Check-in is how most men's groups start. It is an essential agenda item. In a new group, it involves a basic introduction of who you are, what you are feeling now, what's uppermost in your life, and what your needs are. That's usually kept brief, with a second round of sharing allowing you to elaborate. So I check-in:

Hi, I am Paddy, 74 yrs. old. I live in Deloraine, Tasmania. Deloraine is a rural service village of 3,500 people on the Meander River. I retired here four years ago and am originally from the state of NSW mainland Australia.



I'm a trained counsellor and over several decades it has involved me in a variety of men's work that has included work with homeless men, behaviour change with domestic violence perpetrators, prisoners, and veterans. I have taken part in several men's gatherings and men's groups around Australia. I am active in a global men's network and lead an online men's group that I started during the COVID-19 pandemic. I also teach sourdough bread making, grow vegetables and run a flock of chickens. My earlier professional training was as an economist which led to jobs in business and economic research.

Six years ago, I wrote a basic resource for men's groups. Then, in 2020, I connected with a global network of men and saw the need for a more comprehensive resource to guide the growing interest in men's groups. There are several web sites with excellent information about running men's groups, though not as detailed as this or as focused on leadership, ethics, and values. There is enough content here for men to create training courses for leaders. Training needs to be experiential, and each

trainer needs to adapt the material to the needs of the men involved.

Part of being an elder in men's work is to pass the story and knowledge on.

There are no formal associations or Universities that have courses or that create standards in this field. The standards and content here are a start towards that.

History

Men's groups arose in modern times out of the [mythopoetic men's movement](#) which originated in the USA. That work spread to the rest of the English-speaking world and in more recent times to continental Europe. Groups were a function of mythopoetic men's gatherings. These took place over two to three days and typically included workshops on themes exploring ritual, ceremony, and the experience of being a man in contemporary society. A feature of most gatherings was men being allocated into small groups, usually no more than ten, which met several times during the event. Some then took the concept of these groups into the broader community and developed their own life as men's groups.

There is nothing new about group or circle work. Humans relating in circles is as ancient as the development of language 100,000 years ago. In hunter-gatherer societies, circles were a common way of coming together to address tribal business. One could postulate that these earlier styles of circles diminished during the agricultural and industrial era and have now been revived as a phenomenon in the post-industrial world.

The men's gathering movement adopted a general style of [psychological self-help](#) inspired by the work of [Robert Bly](#), [Robert A. Johnson](#), [Joseph Campbell](#), and other [Jungian](#) authors associated with the [mythopoetic men's movement](#) (Wikipedia). Groups were also influenced by the advent of humanistic psychology, notably the work of Carl Rogers, the creator of the person-centred approach in the 1960s. In his own words:

"It is that the individual has within himself or herself vast resources for self-understanding, for altering his or her self-concept, attitudes and self-directed behaviour - and that these resources can be tapped if only a definable climate of facilitative psychological attitudes can be provided."

Rogers, Carl R. (1980. Way of being. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.p.115-117).

Rogers recommends a safe place for a person to speak openly where the facilitator is authentic and lets the client know that he is fully heard and not judged.

Anyone interested in understanding circle work would be encouraged to read Carl Rogers' work. The book I use is, 'The Carl Rogers Reader' edited by H. Kirschenbaum and V. Henderson. Pub. Houghton Mifflin, 1989. There are many online resources on his work such as [this link](#), which provides an excellent summary of his theory and guidelines.

There is a substantial body of work on group therapy that can help inform men's group work. Two of the key texts I have found very useful are:

- 'Theory and Practice of Group Counselling', 5th edition, by Gerald Corey, pub, 2000 by Brookes/Cole.
- 'The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy' 5th edition, by Irvin Yalom, pub. 2005 by Basic Books.

Way of The Mature Man

"At last, something positive about men", said Anne, the head librarian of a major public library. She was looking at the promotional material for our Men with Heart exhibition in 2018. I was then president of Tasmen, overseeing the displaying of the still images of men taken over 17 years at our annual men's gatherings, by award-winning photographer Paul Hoelen. Included were men's video stories, writings and poems. Anne explained that she had two boys who were dismayed at the overwhelmingly negative media narrative about men. Her oldest suffered from depression which was impacted by that narrative.

The exhibition was a success, with heaps of visitors and positive media coverage. Deeply moving was the number of women who cried while exploring the exhibition – awakened memories of sons, husbands, fathers, lost opportunities and sadness. Strong emotional realities, not being acknowledged by society through its media. Senior schoolboys told me they were resentful about the overwhelming negative stories about men. They enjoyed listening to the work of Jordan Peterson and Joe Rogan speaking positively about men. They were creatures of the internet, mainstream media not relevant and not part of their world. Those women and boys were asking, 'where are the men standing and speaking up about the positive masculine and its challenges for good men?'

I often ask myself why are so many men hiding in the trenches, absent in this discussion. Having nearly finished this manual, I realised that good men's groups were opportunities and processes to develop what I call the mature man. A concept that I could develop and speak about.

The prevailing narrative about men: that the masculine is chaotic, passionate, explosive and overwhelmingly negative, leaving gender roles very much in flux and in the slow process of reforming. We are not there yet.

I see an absence of a positive language about men that also acknowledges this challenging situation and is not just defensive. There is no shortage of politically correct ideas of what men should be, leaving some feeling that they should apologise for being male.

We need to create a path leading out of the quagmire of this in-between time of chaos. It is time for men to accept the challenge of creating a more psychologically healthy future for our boys and young men. This benefits everybody. The Way of the Mature Man is my response to that challenge.

First, some clarification - for most people, the word MAN and MASCULINE mean the same thing. Yet technically masculine refers to a set of qualities that are identified as predominantly associated with men in the same way that feminine qualities are associated with women. A woman can be seen to have a lot of masculine qualities and a man can be seen to have a lot of feminine qualities. For example, nurturing is seen as a feminine quality, yet many men are nurturing. Equally violence is seen as dominantly masculine yet women can be violent. For clarity then it is best to use the words Mature Man. I have discussed the Way of the Mature Man in several men's forums, most liked that language and concept as being a positive and aspiration goal for men.

Men are very diverse in physical form, physical abilities, personality qualities, skills, talents and intellect. Any term like Mature Man should be open to all types of men and not create winners and losers or better and worst. It should equally apply to the ballet dancer and lumberjack. This is not about the tantric wonder boy, the buff gym boy, the warrior and martial arts expert or the successful wealthy businessman. These can all be good in their own right, but do not necessarily make the mature man.

I see the list of the Mature Man qualities below as a start to a conversation. A men's group run along the lines set out in this manual can be an opportunity to develop these core qualities. It also gives the men's group a sense of continuing along the path towards an ever-evolving destination.

Mature Man - Some Core Qualities

1. Responsive and Reflective: - Rather than reactive in personal and social matters.
2. Emotionally intelligent: - Can identify deeper feeling spaces and talk about them.

3. Authentic: - Can be present and acknowledge all aspects of self, without hidden agendas.
4. Ethics: - Has a robust sense of his core ethics, can state and stick by them. Must include by default - not intentionally causing harm to others. Where harm is intended it can only be a last resort for example, defence of self, family or community.
5. Values: Has a sound sense of personal values and acts on them.
6. Truth Speaker: - Can speak his truth even in tough situations.
7. Fairness and Justice: - Seeks to explore all aspects of a situation before deciding.
8. Respects Boundaries: - Respects the boundaries of others in particular sexual boundaries.
9. Responsibility: - Accepts responsibility for his emotions, thoughts and actions.
10. Listener: - Listens to others and tries to understand where they are coming from.
11. Wisdom: - Seeks to use knowledge and experience before making decisions, including seeking help from others when they don't know enough.
12. Compassion and kindness: - Understands compassion and kindness and seeks to use them where possible.
13. Forgive and Apologise: - Can forgive and apologise.
14. Grounded: - Can cultivate, being emotionally, mentally and physically stable and connected, fully present and aware.
15. Stewardship: - acts to make the planet and all its inhabitants better than he found it.
16. Connection: - Stays aware of and acknowledges all that exists now, in the past and the future. E.g. Plants, animals, water, air, soil, humans, Ancestors
17. Humour: - can laugh at himself and with others.
18. Peaceful and Tolerant: - Chooses peaceful resolution of conflict rather than violence or abuse. Is tolerant and inclusive of all people, regardless of race, beliefs and sexuality.
19. Equitable: - Acts in a way that promotes equal opportunity for everyone.

A men's group can be an effective pathway or training ground for men to move up the scale towards the Mature Man. It can provide a goal and purpose for the group. This would be a wonderful sign of men stepping up to the leadership challenges that humanity and the planet desperately need.

In discussions with men and women about this list of core qualities, some have said that there is nothing uniquely masculine or man-like about them. That they could equally be applied to the mature feminine or woman. True, it's about all of us accepting the challenge to be a mature human. The world needs men and women to step up. This manual is about men, it presents these qualities as describing the

mature man. It could equally be applied to women. Would a list for the mature women be any different?