

MasterMind groups that really work

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Napoleon Hill developed the concept of the MasterMind alliance in his classic book Think and Grow Rich some fifty years ago. He believed that a group of *like-minded, achievement-oriented* individuals could dramatically leverage each other's success.

But even earlier than that Benjamin Franklin's autobiography alluded to 'Juntos' in the sense of group problem-solving.

Since then many others have also attested to their value.

JFK *"Lofty words cannot construct an alliance or maintain it; only concrete deeds do that."*

Hillary Clinton said, *"No one ever became a success without the help of other people."* I believe it. You need others to help and support you and for you to help and support them.

MasterMind groups are formed for a variety of reasons including: increasing business, spiritual fellowship, education or intellectual pursuits, networking, cross-coaching, problem-solving and planning either personally and/or in business and personal goal setting and attainment, again either as part of a life plan or in business.

Over time through your MasterMind partners you will get support, ideas, accountability on the aspects of your life you select – business, personal, career, physical and spiritual. They assist you both personally and professionally by building resources into your life, career or business, and also providing support and encouragement.

Members of your MasterMind group become your partners and so their selection is critical to the success of all group members. More than any other qualities, prospective members must be totally trustworthy, dependable and have a genuine desire to do better – there is no room for 'needy' people. Find people who are mature enough to commit time, and healthy enough not to suck energy or induce negative energy.

Relationship bank deposits - Zig Ziglar – *"You can get everything in life you want, if you'll just help enough other people to get what they want."* Clearly for me this is an underlying principle of a MasterMind group. Ask yourself, Am I consistently adding-value to the Relationship Bank?

You will have partners/coaches and not advice givers – resulting in a broader frame of reference and experience for you to apply your own judgement to before making decisions, but, more importantly, acting on the information and feedback. Interdependence, not dependence.

Consider members as your sounding-board and if a little problem-solving help is required, fine. But it is not the main order of the day. The group will help you think smarter, brainstorm ideas, encourage creativity and support your efforts.

Remember though, in the end you are the CEO of your life, your career and your business. **"If it is going to be, it is up to me."**

Determining a purpose:

For MasterMind group objectives I tend to eliminate exchanging sales leads as the purpose for such a group. There are many fine organizations like www.BNI.com you can join for that purpose. That said, sometimes business just flows naturally as relationships grow.

There are many different reasons why your MasterMind group may meet, ranging from career planning, growing your business, building a stronger team, improving business profits, to establishing broad spiritual or life connections. Be very clear on what you are trying to accomplish and the more specific you are, the more productive you will be - Build an understanding about the purpose for the group and how it will work.

Selecting members

Core values in selecting members may include:: tolerance/understanding, cooperation/growth, good communication skills, caring/commitment, synergy/mutuality, but most importantly, trust and respect.

If the group is business-related, then seek out those from complementary not competing businesses, perhaps at a similar level within their organization, and sometimes, if possible, of a different business discipline. One of the successful groups I formed was to have all owners of non-competing SME's in the group, and in another situation participants were all c-level executives from larger businesses.

If the primary purpose for the group is life planning or spiritually related, then perhaps select members high in positive energy.

Establishing guidelines

- Group Size – I recommend 5-7 only. Any smaller and it is hard to keep the group going if one or two members have prior commitments. However, the Mastermind group should be their primary commitment, and if someone is absent I get them to chair the next meeting. Any larger than 7 and the group becomes too impersonal and does not allow sufficient time to focus on each person.
- Frequency, time date and place of meeting. It does take time to sort this out because of conflicting schedules. Allow for social time, or a social event after the meeting.
- Establish a meeting theme in advance. Figure out a way that you will all have an opportunity to bring something new to the meeting. Maybe it is an article, book, tape or a news story relevant to your group.
- Focus on goals and not telling stories - keep to the time limit and end the session on a positive, upbeat note.
- Bring forth solutions rather than problems or obstacles.
- Ensure members share time and do not dominate. We all need to be active listeners. Alertness from both sides equals mutual success.
- Create an atmosphere of confidentiality and respect.
- Encourage members to jump in with support and positive ideas for the person who is talking. No criticism is allowed.

Picking a Leader

Obviously the two approaches are either fixed term or rotational. I prefer the rotational approach. It ensures a more constant flow of new ideas and themes and in the unlikely event that you have a dominant personality in the group this can provide a counter-balance.

Each member of your group should be well-versed in operating within your meeting guidelines so they can be more effective as the group leader. Remember, you only have guidelines, not rules. The group should be a relaxed fun place even though there is a serious purpose.

Meeting Focus

- Sharing individual successes. Celebration time is a very powerful way to start a meeting.
- Embark on the meeting theme. Have the theme leader bring copies of material for all and lead the discussion.
- Devote 10-15 minutes to members who need help with a particular opportunity or problem. Not all will at each meeting.
- Provide an opportunity for people to share ideas on resources which have proven invaluable, and why that resource was invaluable. It may have been an online newsletter, a vendor or a professional advisor.
- Make time for social interaction. Definitely a great way to grow the partnership, by having a meal or a cocktail hour afterwards.

Meeting Tips

There is an element of personal surrender with your partners and it will take time to build trust and confidence between partners. Initial meetings therefore should not centre on close personal situations.

I believe all participants should provide an honest report on how they are doing, or how they did in relation to last month's goals.

Allow social time before/after meetings or at separate events to help relationships flourish. I find social time is better after, rather than before the meeting.

Finally, notes should be taken. Not formal records but a record in particular of goals or progress towards goals that each group member plans to undertake.

In my words: "Focus and Follow-through."

If It Stops Working

It is perhaps time to try something different or inject new blood. Maybe members have gone stale, changed their personal goals or now have larger priorities making them less frequent attendees of your meetings.

Honesty between members in recognizing the need for change will ensure you retain a healthy vibrant group.

Results

No need for a disclaimer here, "Results will vary according to..... etc." You are in a group of highly motivated people, and these are people who achieve.

I have been in different MasterMind groups and my results have included valuable input on the purchase of a business and as to whether or not the founder-seller was really motivated to sell or was lonely and just enjoyed my company; suggestions for growing a business which subsequently received a sales award; career planning suggestions and suggestions regarding relocating to another country.

I have seen others break out of personal relationships, get married, buy and sell houses, get suggestions in relation to dysfunctional work teams and in other cases build community involvements.

Conclusion:

The late Jack Boland and Napoleon Hill laid down some universal principles which still hold true today, and which you should bear in mind when forming your own MasterMind group:

"(a) Align yourself with a group of as many people as you may need to create and carry out your plan or plans.

(b) Before forming your MasterMind Alliance, decide what advantages, and benefits, you may offer the individual members of your group in return for their cooperation. No one will work indefinitely without some form of compensation. No intelligent person will either request or expect another to work without adequate compensation, although this may not always be in the form of money.

(c) If your goal and the goal of other MasterMind group members is the accumulation of wealth arrange to meet least twice a week, until you have jointly perfected the necessary plan or plans for the accumulation of money.

(d) Maintain PERFECT HARMONY between yourself and every member of your MasterMind Group. If you fail to carry out this instruction to the letter, you may expect to meet with failure. The MasterMind Principle cannot obtain where PERFECT HARMONY does not prevail.

Keep in mind these two facts:

First, you are engaged in an undertaking of major importance to you. To be sure of success, you must have plans [develop and implement] which are faultless.

Second, you must have the advantage of the experience, education, native ability, and imagination of other minds. This is in harmony with the methods followed by every person who has ever accumulated great success."

As your MasterMind group starts you on a great journey, remember life's balance:

“Don't get so busy or live so fast that you cannot listen to the music of the meadow or the symphony that glorifies the forest.”

- Dale Carnegie