

# Meeting of the MASTER Minds

GET READY TO LEARN, GROW AND REACH YOUR GOALS! PARTNER WITH YOUR PEERS TO ACHIEVE YOUR FULL POTENTIAL — AND HAVE SOME FUN WHILE YOU'RE AT IT.

By JAN HOISTAD

**G**o-it-alone types know that solitude can be a mixed blessing. Sure, there's something appealing about the single-mindedness and sense of ownership that come from pursuing a big goal or project all on your own. But there are also times when a solitary effort can start to feel a bit like solitary confinement.

In the absence of outside input and fresh perspective, a big or long-term undertaking can start to feel daunting — or worse, dull. With no compatriots to bounce ideas off, and no collaborators to help you work through problems, your sense of direction and momentum can suffer. With no context for reporting progress or celebrating successes, your enthusiasm may flag. And with no one there to urge you back into action when your determination falters, you could very well end up stalling out altogether.

Even superambitious self-starters know that sometimes the best way to make headway is to get some smart heads together. That's the idea behind "Mastermind" groups.

Mastermind groups are handpicked collectives who connect on a regular basis (in person, by phone or online) to support each other personally and professionally. Typically initiated and maintained by a small number of motivated individuals, Mastermind groups provide a constructive forum for members to plan and execute their goals and dreams.

By pooling knowledge, expertise, resources and contacts, Mastermind group members leverage each other's strengths and experiences. In addition to guiding each other past external obstacles, members also hold each other accountable for making progress in spite of their own doubts and self-sabotaging tendencies.

Mastermind groups also provide participants with an invigorating sense of community and camaraderie — something tough to find in today's socially isolating environment of too-long commutes, too-busy schedules and too-passive entertainments. Plus, good news for inveterate overworkers: Even when they are formed for purely professional purposes, most Mastermind groups are also a surprising amount of fun.

## THE MASTERMIND CONCEPT

While groups of like-minded peers and colleagues have always gathered to support each other's endeavors, the formal concept of the Mastermind group is attributed to Napoleon Hill (1883–1970). Hill, a successful businessman and one of the first gurus of the self-help genre, was a great proponent of the power of intention and intuitive insight. He

was the author of many books, essays and even audiotape guides on how to achieve personal success through the discipline of positive thinking and creative visualization. His best-known works include *Think and Grow Rich* (first published in 1937, most recently reissued by Ballantine Books in 1987) and *The Law of Success* (first published in 1928, most recently reissued in 2004 by High Roads Media).

Hill held that individuals could create unlimited success by harnessing and nurturing their own mental and energetic capacities, but he also strongly encouraged people with similar goals to work together for greater achievements.

The concept for Mastermind groups evolved from what Hill called the “Mastermind Principle,” which he claimed to have gleaned from industrialist and multimillionaire Andrew Carnegie. The Mastermind Principle says that when two or

shops; some rent space; others connect online. Some groups are tight and intimate, others are surprisingly large, sprawling and only loosely or intermittently affiliated. Every group has its own personality, culture, habits and standards.

What all members of such groups generally hold in common, however, is a collaborative commitment toward helping members achieve their goals. Participants accomplish this aim by agreeing to connect on a regular or semi-regular basis. They may use a free-form format in which members check in, brainstorm and share advice. Or they may employ a more structured format in which a set amount of time is allocated to each individual member’s concerns. Participants might use their allotted time to define or refine a dream or goal, to report progress or obstacles, to seek strategic assistance or information from the group, or simply to receive observations and feedback.

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more people share common goals and work together wholeheartedly, a higher consciousness (or “third mind”) comes to the fore, enabling the individuals to achieve synergy and thus accomplish more together than they could on their own.

Hill defined the Mastermind as the “coordination of knowledge and effort, in a spirit of harmony, between two or more people for the attainment of a definite purpose.” It’s important to note, however, that within this “friendly alliance of minds,” Hill saw more than sheer brainpower and organized effort at work.

In addition to the considerable advantage offered by the “accumulated experience” of a group (that is, their combined knowledge, insight, influence and imagination), Hill believed that Mastermind groups benefited from metaphysical or synchronistic advantages. He acknowledged this aspect of the Mastermind was “much more difficult to comprehend,” but he explained it as a sort of “spiritual affinity” that accrued to those working together toward a common cause.

Hill also perceived great import and value in surrounding oneself with other people whose traits, values and personal capacities complemented one’s own, noting that people “take on the nature and the habits and the power of thought of those with whom they associate in a spirit of sympathy and harmony.”

### COLLABORATIVE CONNECTION

Many personal- and professional-development experts advocate concepts similar to Hill’s Mastermind group. For example, Barbara Sher (author of *Wishcraft* and *TeamWorks*) advocates forming a small-group support network she refers to as a “Success Team.” Many executive and life coaches encourage their clients to form co-coaching circles, as do some college fraternities, sororities and recovery groups.

Today, the popularity and variety of such groups are on the rise. They come in all shapes and sizes and are formed around all types of interests, industries and endeavors. Some groups are formal and highly structured; others are loose and low key. Some groups meet in homes or coffee



The nature of a given group is determined by a host of variables, including how and why a group was formed; how long and how often they meet; the mix of backgrounds and personalities; and so on. In virtually all cases, however, a Mastermind group is characterized by the passion of its participants to learn and share, and by their commitment to harness the experience, expertise, energy and generosity of each and every member. →

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If you're interested in starting or joining a Mastermind group of your own, consider the following:

**WHILE MOST** Mastermind groups revolve around professional goals, others form around interests like health and fitness, hobbies, or social agendas.

**NATIONAL AND LOCAL** business organizations (speakers' associations, chambers of commerce) organize Mastermind groups. Check local industry groups, organizations and association Web sites.

**MASTERMIND GROUPS** usually consist of peers at similar or compatible levels of experience and success. Most are formed by two or more members and then expanded by invitation only, usually by unanimous consent. Many groups choose to limit their size.

**MEMBERS OF A GIVEN** group may be in different industries, but they often share spheres of influence, a common clientele or linked ambitions.

**SOME MASTERMIND GROUPS** encourage members to challenge each other and offer emotional or spiritual insight; others eschew "sharing" and stick to a pure business agenda.

**COMMITMENT AND CONSISTENCY** are key: Most groups ask members to attend regularly — and to leave when they are no longer motivated to actively participate. ●

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WEB

[www.naphill.org](http://www.naphill.org) — The Napoleon Hill Foundation.

[www.passionforbusiness.com/articles/mastermind-group.htm](http://www.passionforbusiness.com/articles/mastermind-group.htm) — Tips on starting and running a Mastermind group, plus commercial offers for teleclasses and audiotape guides on the topic.

[www.successnet.org/files/teams.pdf](http://www.successnet.org/files/teams.pdf) — Download a guide on how to form your own Success Team, modeled after Mastermind group principles.

BOOKS

*Think and Grow Rich* by Napoleon Hill (Ballantine Books, 1987)

*The Law of Success in Sixteen Lessons* by Napoleon Hill (Wilshire Book Company, 2000)

*Napoleon Hill's Keys to Success: The 17 Principles of Personal Achievement* by Napoleon Hill (Plume Books, 1997)

*TeamWorks* by Barbara Sher and Annie Gottlieb (Warner Books, 1991)

# GATHER YOUR GROUP

**IMAGINE THE POTENTIAL SYNERGY** of a group in which each member is committed to maximizing each other's success. Sounds great, huh? It can be, but gathering a Mastermind group is challenging, too. It demands focused collaboration, clear expectations, good chemistry — and it tends to work best when you have a group of high-capacity people who are committed to showing up and sharing their very best.

Ready to give it a go? Below are a few tips to get you started. For more advice, see the Resources sidebar.

## PICK YOUR PARTICIPANTS

■ **In choosing group members**, seek out people who fit with the group's mission, who click with the group socially, who have like values and who will generously share their knowledge and expertise.

■ **Consider how** (or whether) you will invite additional members to join, and on what basis. Are there specific criteria for becoming a member? How will you agree on whether a given candidate is invited to join?

■ **Establish clear expectations** for attendance and participation. Keep in mind that without consistency and commitment from all members, groups tend to go downhill fast. Have a graceful way that people can choose to exit (if it's no longer a good fit, for example, or if they just feel ready to move on). Decide under what circumstances the group may ask a member to leave.

■ **Are there size limitations?** The larger the group, the more time-consuming each session is likely to be (or the less time will be available for each individual). Larger groups can be more challenging to schedule.

■ **Will outsiders or guests be invited** to join occasionally? Can a person who's thinking of forming his or her own group come "just to check it out" or is the group open to members only?

## KNOW YOUR MISSION

■ **Clarify with your fellow members** your primary purpose or mission. Are you there to help each other move toward specific goals, or just to share knowledge, experience, contacts, etc.? Is this about career growth, personal growth, social fun, or all of the above?

■ **Clearly identify** responsibilities and boundaries. Are any topics or requests off-limits? Consider drafting a mission statement and some basic expectations you can all agree on. Decide if there will be a group leader or other formal roles, and whether those positions will rotate on a regular basis.

■ **Set aside** a realistic amount of time and establish sessions at frequent enough intervals to support your stated objectives. How often will you meet? Will all meetings be the same length, or will you occasionally hold longer special sessions for planning or guest speakers?

## SET YOUR STRUCTURE

■ **Have a set date**, time and place for each meeting. Most groups find it helpful to establish standing dates (every other Tuesday, for example, or the first Friday of each month).

■ **Agree on** scheduling and attendance guidelines. Is attendance mandatory? Under what circumstances is skipping or rescheduling acceptable?

■ **Establish a format** for regular meetings and stick to it. Will you devote a portion of each session to specific activities, such as check-ins, brainstorming and problem solving, or will you keep the whole thing loose? Will each person be allotted a certain amount of time?

■ **Start meetings** on time, run them according to your agreed-upon format and establish a set ending time for the formal part of the meeting.

■ **End with food or drink** and some loose time for socializing (you can extend social hours, if you like).

■ **Before closing**, confirm the next meeting date, time and place.