



Mastering the Mastermind: Making the Most of Cross- Mentoring Groups

Try this approach and see undreamed-of results.

By **Elizabeth McCormick**

A mastermind is a group of individuals devoted to mutual support, a sort of mentorship in the round, where each member plays the role of both mentor and mentee. The principles of a mastermind can apply to any group aimed at continuous improvement and personal development. The focus is on reciprocal benefit – enabling the success of others while in turn drawing on the resources of the group for yourself.

The mastermind concept comes from Napoleon Hill's *Think and Grow Rich*, but the idea adapts to many forms of networking, not just entrepreneurs as originally foreseen. The philosophy of the mastermind suggests a new approach to group dynamics over traditional methods. The idea is to form an alliance whose common goal is to counsel each other, celebrate each other's successes, and serve as a sounding board, providing support in a safe and confidential environment.

Before you look at how to invest in a mastermind, look at four distinct takeaways an effective alliance can offer.

1. Community. The most effective masterminds bring together people with both like and unlike backgrounds. The result is a new and diverse community that wouldn't exist otherwise. It's a community of intent, not chance, with members invited in for the strengths they can offer as much as for the benefits they can receive.

2. Collaboration. Being a nonprofit leader can be lonely. Where do you turn to express doubt or bounce ideas? A mastermind collective presents a safe sounding board for expressing concerns, doubts, and options, while providing input, feedback, and advice.

3. Consolidation. Networking is generally accepted as a key to growth, yet the processes required are often uncomfortable and many of us don't do them well. It's first-date syndrome; there's not enough time at a networking event to relax and be yourself. The mastermind structure checks that in a couple ways. First, everyone is there by strategic invitation. Next, everyone around you is interested

“Being a nonprofit leader can be a lonely position.”

in your success as well as their own, for the good of the mastermind group. Opportunities to build effective cross-promotions don't have to develop on the fly in a couple hours. When you connect with a network partner on a deeper level, you're closer to their network now too, in a way a business-card exchange just can't match.

4. Motivation. Ongoing inspiration and motivation may be the two biggest benefits a mastermind has to offer. There are probably other sources for the new information you're learning through your mastermind group. But there's nothing like getting excited about an idea, direction, or plan that's then reinforced at the next meeting of your alliance. Think of it as an inspirational pep pill, keeping you nourished, nurtured, and invigorated on a regular basis.

No matter if you're joining a group, expanding an existing one, or starting your own, whether you succeed or fail, there's experience to be gained. Each mastermind can be enriching, even if it's not what you were expecting. Part of the process that's most valuable is that you're opening yourself up to other people and other experiences. Ultimately, while a mastermind is a group experience, you'll find the rewards are deeply personal. Good luck on your adventure!

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Think and Grow Wise

Apply the mastermind principles with these articles from NonprofitWorld.org:

Creating Breakthroughs (Vol. 26, No. 4)

Eight Steps to Managing Conflict (Vol. 20, No. 4)

Cynicism Rx: Authentic Communication (Vol. 24, No. 6)

Face to Face (Vol. 14, No. 1)

Manage for Today, Mentor for Tomorrow (Vol. 23, No. 5)

Creating a Values-Based Road Map (Vol. 23, No. 2)

Grounded Visioning: A Quick Way to Create Shared Visions (Vol. 26, No. 4)

Think, Dream, and Do (Vol. 28, No. 6)

Take It Up a Notch: Using Kaizen for Continuous Improvement (Vol. 37, No. 2)

Powerful New Communication Tool for Your Meetings: Engaging Both Sides of Your Brain (Vol. 26, No. 3)

Zen and the Art of Team Building (Vol. 20, No. 1)

How to Create Your Own Mastermind

List a few people you think would be good members of your mastermind. They may all be part of your workplace or drawn from other organizations or other parts of your life. You can begin with just one other person and grow your group slowly from there. You don't need more than two people, because the magic of the mastermind is that putting two minds together creates a powerful, intangible force that Napoleon Hill in *Think and Grow Rich* called a "third mind." He noted, "When a group of individual brains are coordinated and function in harmony, the increased energy created through that alliance becomes available to every individual brain in the group." By blending two or more minds into one, he said, "we can find the solution to a great variety of problems."

Examine your list. Ask yourself: What expertise does each person have? Do the group members include a variety of skill sets? Do they represent where you'd like to be in your life and career? And the two most important questions:

Do their core values resonate with you?

Will they encourage, inspire, and support you, helping you follow through with your goals and always having your back?

Invite your chosen group members to meet. Send them this article to explain what a mastermind is and what they will gain from joining.

At your first mastermind meeting, discuss the overarching plan and purpose of the group. In addition to mutual support and growth, what specific goals do you want to achieve? Give the group a name related to your purpose.

Ask each person to commit to coming to meetings, giving their full support to the group and its members, and sharing their expertise.

Set meeting dates. Plan to get together with your mastermind frequently, twice a week at first. It's essential to meet face to face, either in person or via Zoom. Between-meeting texts and e-mails are fine, but you won't create the bonds you need unless you see each other face to face.

Each time you get together with your group, spend time telling stories. These personal anecdotes can be about mistakes you've made and what they taught you, insights you've had, things you've experienced for the first time, or projects you've been working on. Listen carefully to other people's stories and help them see lessons and patterns in their lives. Include silly stories as well as the profound. Although the mastermind has a serious purpose, it's always good to laugh together, too.

Don't appoint a leader. Each person in the group will step forward and lead at certain times when appropriate, but everyone is a peer. If one person takes a dictatorial role, the collective brainstorming ability of the group will be severely compromised. 

—from *Think and Grow Rich* and *Think and Grow Rich for Women* (PenguinBooks, penguin.com)