

Possibility Groups

...or

- *Dare to Dream Teams*
- *Follow Your Dreams Groups*
- *Success Teams*
- *Mastermind Groups*

...whatever you call them, support groups to

*Create the Life
You Want to Have*

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Possibility Groups: *Creating the Life You Want to Have*

Definition: *A Possibility Group is a small group of people whose only goal is to help every member of the team get what he or she wants, to help each person create the kind of life that works for them. And of course, part of what a group does is help each person figure out what that kind of life is. Please note: I use the term Possibility Group (group for short) but they are called all kinds of things — from Mastermind groups to life makeover groups to success teams.*

Why do groups work?

- **Accountability**

- It's like the Weight Watchers concept: You have to weigh in. In a Possibility Group everyone has to report on how they did towards accomplishing the mini-goal(s) they set during the last meeting. It is often easier to justify to ourselves why we don't do something that would move us towards our dreams and we can keep putting it off. It is harder to keep facing a group of others and admitting you haven't done what you said you would do (what you know you want to do!)

- Report on Goals (the "Journal") Every member of the group writes down every other member's goals each meeting. That way:
 1. We can all visualize success for each other.
 2. We can all look for resources/contacts for each other.
 3. No member can come in and say they forgot what they said they were going to do — because we can tell you — we have it written down!

- **Expansion of Resources**

You are only one person with one set of ideas, experiences, contacts. By joining with a group, you access all the ideas, experiences, contacts of the other members.

...and the "Second Right Answer" — As my friend Sarah Richards says, we tend to get into "mind ruts." A group can think outside the rut for you. Where the one way you can think of may not work in the situation you are in, the group can help you out of the rut to find the Second Right Answer — and, if that won't work either, than the Third Right Answer... or however many right answers it takes to get you where you want to go.

...and Additional "Antennae." Since they all know your dream, your group members bring in resources, articles, contacts, and information for you that they happen to run across — information you might never have run across yourself.

- **Courage.**

The group provides a sounding board for your doubts and fears. They support you in pushing past those fears, in both practical and concrete ways, and at an emotional level. Sometimes group members physically go along to provide moral support during an especially challenging task.

- **Your Own Traffic Cop.**

Your group members stop you from getting off track. Once they know your dreams, they sometimes see more clearly than you do when you are taking on opportunities that don't fit in. And they call you on it. In fact, in one of my groups, we had one woman who kept taking on way too much — and taking things that didn't fit her dreams. So, for a time, we made her run all new commitments by us first. It worked!

- **Your own personal cheering squad.**

When you succeed at something, your group helps you celebrate. Mariah Burton Nelson, a former pro basketball player and author of "Victory: Life Lessons in Competition and Compassion," says women need more "victory talk." Your group helps you do that — to acknowledge and celebrate your successes — large and small. And, for the times you are feeling down, it helps to be around "up" people who can remind you that you won't always feel that way.

- **The Chance for Deeper Life Exploration.**

Doing various life exploration exercises and then discussing them with group members deepens your understanding of who you are and deepens your experience of life.

- **Possibility Thinking.**

As you see others move towards what they want and succeed, you get inspired and motivated to take action yourself. There really are amazing opportunities all around for all of us. The group helps you to see that — and to take action to move into new possibilities.

Okay...I want a group! How do I get started?

Where do I find my team members?

What should I look for?

Talk to people you know or people you meet about the concept. I happen to look for people who are enthusiastic and positive — whose "energy" I like. The most important thing is to find people: ☆ who want to figure out their goals and work towards them — people who want to be part of a Possibility Group.

How many teammates do I need? Five to six members is the best number — that gives enough synergy, energy and variety of ideas. If someone has to miss a meeting, you still have enough to meet. More than six and meetings can take too long. But you may need to start with eight. For whatever reasons, a few people will drop out after a few meetings — usually, because they can't manage to make the commitment of regular meetings.

What kinds of goals would I work on with my group?

- You might want to start by asking yourself these three questions

"What do you do as naturally as breathing?"

"What did you love to do as a child?"

"Is there somebody doing something you really admire?"

★ The "Magic Wand" Test: If I could wave a magic wand & grant you any wish, what would that wish be? Some of your goals might show up in the answer.

The bottom line is, it doesn't matter what your dreams or goals are — they can be personal, parenting, spiritual, physical, financial, educational. You might want to start a Bed & Breakfast, write a book, lose weight, or get your closets organized. Your goals can be small or large, short-term or long-term. The group is just a means to get — and keep — you moving towards what you want. And you have a lot of fun, laughter, and great conversations in the process.

The best thing about going for your dreams is what happens along the way. You grow into your best self as you stretch and grow and learn new things. By taking risks and experiencing success — and, yes, sometimes failure — you grow as a person. You become more fully engaged in this wonderful life. You live a conscious purposeful life rather than just letting life happen to you.

So many of us (especially women) feel our dreams have to stay on the back burner until we finally live in the place we desire, until the kids are grown and out of the house, until we become motivated. But this isn't true. We can all move towards what we want - with help. Your group is the best vehicle for receiving that help.

How do we run an effective meeting?

First, please realize that these are all just suggestions. The reality is that each group decides how they want to have their meetings work. Your group will evolve. These are just ideas based on research about groups as well as my own experiences. You can use them as a starting point or for discussion at your first meeting.

- Frequency: at least every other week for momentum and so you don't have to always be "catching up" with everyone. It is best to keep it the same day and time so that everyone can plan ahead and schedule other things around the meetings — i.e. First and Third Thursday of each month from 9-11.

- Location — you can alternate homes, go to a restaurant, use a club room or church meeting room. The easiest is a public place (with enough privacy like a separate room) which is open (restaurant, library or church meeting room) so no one individual is responsible for it being open, for cleaning up, etc. But it's fun to meet in everyone's home at least once because you get to know them better. I've been part of groups that have met at a Denny's type restaurant with a separate meeting room. We didn't have to pay for it; we each just got tea or coffee and occasionally something to eat. I've been in groups that met at a cafe with a separate room. (The separate room is important so you can laugh and cry and be loud and feel safe saying whatever you want to say without fear that others are listening in.) I've been in groups that alternated between member homes (harder to coordinate but we wanted the intimacy and comfort.) I've been in groups that always met at the same person's home that was the most central. Figure out what works best for your group.

- Timing — Start and end on time, so people can plan and everyone gets a chance for input to their dreams. We use a kitchen timer and give everyone a certain amount of time to report on what they've done since the last meeting, present anything they want ideas/help on — and then a set time for brainstorming that issue. That may be too structured for some, but we found it keeps any one person from "hogging" the whole meeting — something we otherwise might all be guilty of without meaning to.

- Leadership — It's a good idea to have a leader facilitate each meeting to keep things on track. Some groups just have natural leaders. For most of ours, we tend to rotate that responsibility. My current group rotates leaders each time. It's the responsibility of the leader to send an email reminder about the meeting, facilitate the meeting to keep it on track and on time, and to bring in a new life exploration exercise to assign at the end of the meeting.

- And, oh by the way, you don't have to call it your Possibility Group. The group can choose whatever name they want to. My group in Corvallis called ourselves Big Group because we wanted to learn to live BIG! So create a name. That makes it your group!

Possible Problems

1. Pleasure v. business — You get to be close friends almost immediately, even with complete strangers. The tendency is to spend a lot of time socializing. We found it best to plan purely social events with the group outside the set meeting times so we could keep the meetings for really working towards our goals. And the reality for us has always been that the first half hour is spent in getting tea and catching up a bit.

2. Infrequent meetings — If you don't meet frequently enough you lose the energy, synergy and forward momentum. That said, it still "depends." One group I know meets twice a year for a weekend and that works well for them.

3. Absenteeism — If someone misses meetings regularly and you have other people who want to join (you'll find others will want to join when they start seeing how excited

you are about your group), it is important to approach the person who keeps missing. Tell her you want her to be part of it, but part of that is being there to share ideas and resources and support. If she can't commit to doing that, maybe it just isn't for her right at this time.

4. Losing/ Adding members — As someone who has moved frequently and with part of my groups sometimes consisting of other mobile individuals, many of my groups have had frequent turnover. Each time someone had to leave the group due to a move, we would have group members (often the one leaving) suggest someone they would like to bring in as a replacement. We would all discuss each new person and agree as a group before bringing her in.

5. Emotional Problems — This is not a therapy group. None of us are counselors qualified to handle severe emotional problems. If an individual has problems that are beyond the scope of working towards goals, we might help them find resources to go to, but we would have to ask them to take those problems elsewhere. That is not the purpose of this kind of group.

6. Confidentiality — You should discuss up front that everything discussed is confidential unless you get permission to share the information outside the group. You want people to feel comfortable being as open as possible.

7. Distance — One of my groups finally disbanded — not because we wanted to, but because we all lived too far apart to get together as regularly as we had wanted to. We all wanted to make the meetings and we did at first in the initial excitement of the group, but the extra travel distance and time just made it too difficult to sustain in our already full lives. You might consider that as you form your group.

8. Friends or Strangers? — I'm sure you can form an effective group from all of your already close friends. But one thing to consider. Our friends sometimes, without meaning to, can limit us in our thinking. They already have an idea of who we are and what we are capable of accomplishing. Strangers don't have any of those preconceived ideas. I think it's great to have a mix. It's also really great to have a real mix of backgrounds and experiences — really expands the brainstorming. I don't think it's a good idea to have members who have too close a connection through the office or your spouse's office — that can limit how open you feel comfortable being. (Oh, and as to those "strangers." You'd be surprised how quickly and deeply you get to know one another when you are sharing life dreams.)

What do we do at our first meeting?

Well, again, you may create something different based on who is in your group. Here's one easy way to start. Have everyone do the Ideal Life Exercise (a version of this is available to download free at my website. Just click on the Writings button and download the Ideal Life pdf.) Have each member read what they wrote as a result of that exercise. This will do a few things. 1. You'll hear people's dreams. You'll be able to pull out goals for each to work on. 2. When you hear other people dream big, you'll feel encouraged to really dream big yourself. We often limit ourselves in the possibilities we think of by ourselves.

Then, take three different colored highlighters.

1. Highlight what's in your Ideal Life description that you already have in your life. And take steps to keep those things in your life.
2. Highlight descriptions of your ideal environment. Get your group's help to figure out how you can add pieces of that environment into where you live right now. Change your daily experience of life right away.
3. Highlight goals that are really important to you. Break them down into steps and a plan. This is where your group can really help you with brainstorming and accountability.

Once you've done the Ideal Life exercise, you are well on your way to knowing each other's dreams and helping them work towards them. Some groups use that as a base and spend each meeting working towards the dreams by: having each person report on the mini-goals they set the meeting before, getting help with brainstorming an issue or something they want to do but don't know how to go forward, setting new goals for the next meeting.

Other groups continue to us exercises to help members figure out their dreams, to figure out how they want to live their life. You gain a lot from hearing how others respond to exercises and to the discussions that evolve as a result. I've had groups use exercises from books like *The Artist's Way* and *Vein of Gold*, both by Julia Cameron, from *The Path* by Laurie Beth Jones, from Barbara Sher's *Wishcraft* and her many other books, from Cheryl Richardson's *Take Time for Your Life* and *Life Makeovers*. In some cases, we've made up exercises. I share some of those in my workbook *Jump Into Life* (available on my website under Products.)

Other groups choose to add in creative exercises like making masks or creating treasure maps or doing finger painting.

Once again, each group evolves differently. My latest group is focusing a lot of our "search" on spirituality issues. And we are committed to help each other stay on our chosen path towards simplicity, away from a central focus on materialism and professional accomplishment. I've been in other groups where the focus was on professional accomplishment. I think our groups evolve by what we need most at the time.

And of course, groups may also disband when those needs have been met or the needs of enough members have changed. The thing that I love is that, even when groups have disbanded, due to moves or distance or changing lives, the connection continues in some way. We continue to connect periodically and bring in ideas or resources or encouragement. I feel like I have all these supporters out there all over so I'm not doing this life alone.

I've also learned I don't ever want to be without a current group. Email and phone calls don't make up for the need for hugs and looking in someone's face when they describe something. My group members can see when I'm getting off track by the way my face and body look, and they can hear it in my voice as I speak.

I guess you can figure out this life on your own; some people are disciplined enough to do so. I'm not. I know that. I want the support — and the fun — of a group.

This is what I wrote about groups during a creative writing exercise. Kathie

The BIG Group
By Kathie Hightower

Walking into comfort
Smiles, hugs, open faces,
chatting happily as we get coffee and tea,
Settling in, Checking in,
Going deeper.
I feel most “seen” at my weekly Women’s group
The BIG Group,
We all want to live BIG.
We’re all supporting each other
Listening to dreams,
Providing feedback and inspiration,
Ideas and resources and courage,
Cheering, laughing, crying
They immediately see in my face,
hear in my voice when I’m getting off track,
Listening respectfully
And then calling my bluff — in one voice
In many voices,
Different views and perceptions
Creative solutions to impossible obstacles
Pushing me right out of my comfort zone.
Holding the net.
Expanding my vision
Supporting my growth
Holding my disappointments and setbacks,
Pushing me out once again.
Debating, discussing, dissecting options.
They hold me accountable.
And they hold me.
My woman’s group is juicy & playful & artsy
My woman’s group is powerful magic.
How do you do your life without one?
How would you open your heart and find your soul?
Maybe there is another way...
But it can’t be as much fun.

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Recently I read another fabulous book about groups, *Girls' Night Out: Celebrating Women's Groups Across America*, by Tamara Kreinin and Barbara Camens. They interviewed womens groups of all shapes, sizes, ages and longevity. The book is full of inspiration and great ideas for anyone starting a group and for groups already in existence.

A Bay area group who's been meeting for years really captured the importance of these groups. As they describe it:

"We come together on a regular schedule with the intention of creating a structure, which allows us to nurture our goals, both together and individually. Our meetings are a retreat from the busyness of our lives, allowing us to step away from our daily responsibilities to a place that is both wider and deeper — a regular reminder that life is much bigger than our day-to-day concerns."

Your dreams are waiting for you!
Kathie

P.S. I'd love to help you with your group. I'm working on a book about this concept with anothe woman... and would love to add your story to the mix. So email me your questions and your successes. I'm good at brainstorming ideas and finding resources and contacts for people. And I love to see others going for their dreams!