

COLLECTIVE MAGIC

Success Teams Help Turn Dreams Into Reality

by Nancy Gerber, Professional Certified Coach

There's a sure fire way to accomplish any task, realize goals and turn dreams into reality. It's free, simple, powerful and available to everyone.

It's called a *Success Team*.

"Now wait a minute!" I can hear some of you groaning in protest, "I go to more 'team' meetings in a week than most people do in a year! They're tedious, predictable and usually a big waste of time. We never seem to accomplish very much, and the only satisfaction I feel is when they're over!"

Most people don't know how to tap effectively into the virtually unlimited energies and rich resources of the folks with whom they regularly meet. Others have had such negative experiences that they adamantly prefer to work and struggle alone. There are, however, specific techniques and guidelines that can transform an ordinary group of people into a team that can seemingly accomplish the impossible. These methods can be used with existing groups of every type, as well as a springboard to begin new teams. The overall intent is to create a "safe space" in which people can gather together to communicate with and support each other in accomplishing specific goals.

My current Success Team is a small group of five self-employed, home-based professional women. We support each other in growing our businesses to be financially, professionally, and personally rewarding. We've been meeting regularly since January of 1997.

Here are some ways to unlock the magic of this collective experience.

Make the group meeting time distinctive and set apart from the ordinary routine. Consistently start and end each meeting with a ritual. The veterinary practice I use begins their weekly staff meetings by reading their mission statement. In my team, we set up a circle of chairs, and when we're ready to begin, light a candle in the center. Someone leads the group in a short exercise to help us focus. When it's my turn, I simply suggest that everyone close their eyes and bring themselves mentally as well as physically into the room, temporarily putting aside other concerns for the duration of the meeting. I also remind us all to

appreciate ourselves, and each other, for taking the time and making the commitment to be present. Other focus objects can be used, such as flowers or plants, or any symbolic object significant to all (a book, photograph, paperweight, etc.). Different items can be added or removed from the circle's center for each meeting, and it's important to always have one object consistently remain there at every session.

Allow each person to feel an "ownership" of the team and the process.

Rotate responsibilities for each meeting. In our business team, we each take a turn having the meeting in our homes, and the host assumes facilitation responsibilities. Other tasks that can be shared include taking notes or minutes, timekeeping, and conducting the opening or closing ritual. Another way to enhance the feeling of ownership is for all members to participate in developing group guidelines – such items as how long and how often the group will meet, the specific goals of the group, how situations such as lateness or absences will be viewed and handled, and so on.

Agree on confidentiality. Even if the results and progress of the meetings will be reported to others, specific details of conversations should remain within the group. This is vital for building trust and a vigorous sense of ownership and autonomy.

Make sure every member feels heard. In any group, there are always those who tend to speak more, and those who tend to listen more. To create balance within these extremes, it's helpful to use a "talking object". In Native American and other traditions, a talking stick is an inherent part of any gathering. The person who wishes to speak asks for the talking stick, and while they are holding it, no one is allowed to interrupt. When they've finished they offer the object to the next participant who wishes to be heard. Any item can be used. It's challenging at first, for both the attention grabbers and the silent types, but with a little effort and practice, the talking object will be one of the most useful tools your team will ever use.

Monitor how long members speak to make certain that all have equal time. Instituting this kind of structure will encourage

people to be concise in their communication. At the beginning of each meeting, the facilitator can remind the group of how much meeting time is available, how many people need to be heard, and how many topics need to be addressed. The entire group can then come to a quick decision on how much time will be allotted to each person and topic. That week's timekeeper will make sure that these guidelines are maintained (It easiest to use an automatic timer, rather than a watch). This is a great way to reign in those folks who just love to hear their own voices without appearing punitive.

Have each person share what's working, what's not working, and what specific needs they have and challenges they're facing. In our business team meetings, each of us gets the undivided attention of the group for about five to seven minutes to "check in". Following each check-in, team members share information, feedback, ideas, and encouragement specific to the issues raised for a total of about fifteen minutes (using our talking stick, of course). Someone else takes notes so that we can concentrate on being "with" the group and have the information to review later on. Sometimes, one member has had a rough couple of weeks, and asks for a little extra time, which we're all happy to provide. This process not only helps to get members "unstuck", it's a wonderful way of discovering new strengths and resources in each other – and ourselves.

At the end of each meeting, allow everyone in the circle to express in a few

sentences what they got out of the session. In a team that is tied to a specific project, this ritual can be preceded with a review around the table of the tasks each person has committed to completing by the next meeting. My team stands up and clasps hands to start our "closing ritual". When everyone has spoken, there are usually a few moments of silence in which we all savor the energy and accomplishments of the meeting. We don't plan this, it generally happens spontaneously. We usually wind up looking at each other, grinning, raising our hands over our heads and exclaiming, "Go, team!"

Some of these suggestions might sound a little unusual, or feel awkward at first. They have worked for many people in numerous situations. Whether in the workplace, community and civic organizations, or to help accomplish personal aspirations, these ideas can have a significant impact.

In an ongoing group, start with one idea. Depending on your organization's structure, culture and politics, it might be wise to share your idea with the group's "official" leader first.

If you have a goal you've been longing to achieve, gather a small group together and propose that you all help each other reach for your dreams. There is magic and power in this kind of collective experience that can be found nowhere else. Try it for yourself and watch what happens.

Resources / References

Teamworks by Barbara Sher (out of print, available in libraries or on Internet rare book sites)

For a copy of a wonderful article with more ideas on starting and facilitating this type of group, send a self-addressed, stamped business-sized envelope to:
SteppingStones; Calling the Circle; 1604 Treetrail Parkway; Norcross, GA 30093

This is a revision of the article originally published in the June 1997 issue of the monthly newspaper Atlanta 30306.

© 1997- 2002 Nancy Birnbaum-Gerber. All rights reserved, but you MAY transmit, distribute, print or otherwise share this piece with anyone anywhere as long as copyright, credit and all contact and descriptive information below are included.

*Known as the "Conscious Communicator"™, Nancy Birnbaum-Gerber is Founder and President of **SteppingStones**, based in Norcross, Georgia, USA. She is a Professional Certified Coach, seminar leader, speaker, Certified Teleclass Leader and internationally published writer. Nancy has over twenty-five years experience helping people and organizations enhance their communication, relationships and community building. She's committed to providing practical information and ideas -- "The stuff they never taught us in school." In this age of increasing electronic connectivity, her mission is to help people deepen their human connections. To learn more about Nancy's speeches, seminars, coaching, writing, and other services, call 770-931-4514, e-mail steppingstones@mindspring.com, or visit www.sstones.com.*