

Essentials for Starting a Women's Group

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Essentials for Starting a Women's Group

**** Excerpt ****

for your review

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Introduction: Our Vision

From Our Small Group to the World

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

-MARGARET MEAD, US ANTHROPOLOGIST

Pat's Story



For many years, I had a seed of an idea in the back of my mind about starting a women's group. I believed, and still believe, that women know how to nurture and add value to other people's lives. Yet we are trained to use our ability to nurture others rather than receive it from others. In a women's group, we can do both. Giving and receiving support from others changes who we are and those around us.

In February 1997, I invited a group of friends to my home with the intention of creating a group of women who help and support each other with daily living. I knew then that women are fantastic at helping others and thought, why not use this wonderful resource to create a better life for myself and others?

I asked my friends to invite their friends for the initial meeting. I brought out the easel and a large pad, and we talked about what we wanted the group to be. I had absolutely no idea how to build a strong group, but what I did have was a strong desire to bring women together. I didn't understand group dynamics and can tell you I made a bunch of mistakes, but I knew that women are stronger when they are connected with other women. Our strength is a beautiful gift we give the world.

Since we were still in the early stages of forming the group, we allowed the membership to grow to more than fifteen people. This wasn't the right number of members for us as it was too noisy and didn't provide enough time for each member to be heard. It was a great process for us because, eventually, the uncommitted drifted away and the group narrowed down to eight wonderful, committed women. Today we have five active members and four honorary members who, when they come into town, are greeted with pleasure as members of the group.

The group evolved into its current meeting structure — one that supports us as equal members of the group. Because of the equality of group members, I had to relinquish my desire to control the structure of the group and go in the direction the group wanted. Over the years, I've learned to tame my need to have the group work in a certain way and now accept and enjoy it for the value it adds to my life. It was about recognizing that what I did was important – starting the group. Now all the group members own the flow and process. Over time I've moved from the Visionary role and become an equal member of the tribe.

Ideas and dreams are important ingredients to growing a wonderful women's group. Trust your desire to start a group, for it offers so many gifts to you and others. I'm grateful I followed my idea because I am fortunate to have strong, wonderful, loving women in my life who have taught me so much, helped me through challenging times, celebrated joyful occasions with me and are a large part of who I am today.

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Karen's Story



And I am one of the exceedingly lucky beneficiaries of Pat's initial vision.

Way back when, at the beginning of this enterprise, I was invited to Pat's house to attend a gathering of women. I had no idea what Pat had in mind, but being a close friend, I, of course, chose to attend to see what it was all about.

I remember Pat with her magic markers standing in front of her living room writing down all of the ideas we had regarding what we might want to do at this group. I enjoy bouncing thoughts off of others, and I get more creative when their thoughts are added to my own. Brainstorming was definitely fun.

Of course, I wasn't sure of all the women who attended. Many of them I did not know at all, but a few of them were familiar faces. Not friends, but I had seen them at Pat's annual Christmas open house. They seemed smart, creative and possibly people I might like.

I continued to attend Pat's meetings, and I do admit that although they were terrific while I was there, I had to make an effort to attend. Mentally, I was attending out of respect for Pat and her efforts more than for my own commitment to the group. My life was full, my work was draining, and going out in the evening was just another pressure added to the list.

What's interesting about my story is that somewhere along the way (not too far along), not only did the feeling of having to be there out of some level of obligation vanish, but it was replaced by an excitement and a longing to be with the group again, and even more often than our usual meeting time. I was hooked, and the group took on a life of its own.

I told everyone about our group – my friends, my family and even my co-workers. And to this day, I have never stopped talking about the wonderful, fulfilling bonds and sharing that have happened over the last 14 years. It is a group of women who didn't start out as my friends, but who have become some of the most wonderful people in my life.

It is and has been one of the most wonderful gifts I have ever received. Thank you, Pat, my dear and beloved friend.

The Big Picture

Think globally, act locally.

–PAUL MCCARTNEY

This book was created because we see the big picture. We envision what it would be like if small hubs of women all over the world come together. How would a hundred, a thousand or a million small groups of women influence the world?

We believe that when women come together for whatever reason, they make the world a better place to live. Enough small groups of women will have a significant impact on the health and well-being of the world.

As women come together and treat each other with respect, help each other find solutions to everyday living, and provide guidance and knowledge, they impact each member of the group. This influence shows up in each individual's life as they go back to their friends, family and communities and share what they've experienced with others. Eventually, it helps change the world.

This happens naturally when women come together. It's no small feat, yet it happens because of a Visionary who has a simple desire to bring women together.

We believe each group of women can help build a better world by coming together. When individuals open up to the possibility of changing their lives, connecting with others, and building respect into their interactions, the world changes. Being able to encourage other women builds confidence, which, in turn, pours into all aspects of that woman's life. Her family and friends will be blessed by her deeds done with the confidence received by such an encouraging group.

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What's the tipping point for this world change? It's about starting small and showing up each day to your commitment of bringing women together. The tipping point occurs when enough women follow their ideas or dreams and are willing to take the steps to make it happen. The mix between Visionary and members is powerful and as the group becomes strong and acts as a whole, the world starts to change.

We want this ebook to travel around the world, helping women follow their dreams, and to bring together other women, one step at a time. If you feel the desire to start a women's group – just do it! You provide the vision while we provide the steps by which your vision will come alive.

Help make this world a better place by following your dream and sharing it with other women

Let's Recap: It's About You: The Visionary

Groups make the world a better place by encouraging women to feel better about themselves and thus, spread their confidence and joy to those around them.

Now it's time for you to put your vision into action. If you've completed the previously mentioned ACTION STEPS, you've already been brainstorming and making lists, but let's make this official.

A Visionary is _____

My Visionary Toolkit: (Complete the following sentences)

My purpose for starting a group is...

The focus of this group I plan to start will be...

My "must haves" for this group are...

The things I could be flexible with in regard to this group are...

Here's what I see when I visualize my group... (remember to include place, number of people and group dynamics)

My Vision Statement is _____

Chapter 7: Organize the First Meeting

Each friend represents a world in us, a world not born until they arrive, and it is only by this meeting that a new world is born.

—ANAIS NIN

Create Your Vision of the Group

You have been successful in gathering a group of women together, and now you are facilitating the first meeting. It's important to keep your vision in front of the group since you will probably be the leader for the first few months.

You chose the date, time and the place for this meeting and extended the invitation to potential members. Right now the group is all yours, so you get to control these pieces, along with the actual structure of the first meeting. Later on

Hold your vision for the group and be open to discussion with other members who may want to implement changes and make improvements.

the group as a whole will decide how often to meet, afternoon or evening, weekday or weekend, and the type of location.

In this way, the group will eventually morph into what all of the members want, but for now you are the leader, the one who started the ball rolling, and it's your show. Hold your vision for the group and be open to discussion with other members who may want to implement changes and make improvements.

You should expect your first meeting will last somewhere around two to two and a half hours. It will follow the general Structure of a Meeting (see Chapter 6), but

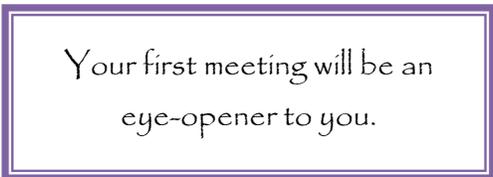
there are some very important items that must be taken care of at this first meeting. You have to introduce yourself, speak of your goals, let your guests introduce themselves, and give your guests the basic ground rules before getting to the featured topic of the meeting.

For now, let's concentrate on getting started. Your first meeting will be an eye-opener if you remember these tips.

Set the Mood

The First Meeting should convey a sense of “no pressure” to your guests. After all, this will be the first time some of them have ever participated in a group of any kind. It may be a bit scary for

them. They may be sitting in a room filled with strangers, wondering if they even should have come. Keep the meeting light and present calm surroundings to set everyone at ease.



Your first meeting will be an eye-opener to you.

Decide on any mood assistance you may want like music or scents, and decide where you will locate. Wherever you choose, remember to create a circle so all members can see each other easily.

Chapter 11: Taking Care of Business

Group Solidarity Meeting

At the beginning you bring your vision to a group of women over the course of a few meetings. Some women have come back each time. Others have come and gone. Still others have been brought along by your members to experience what's starting to gel here. And that's exciting.

A Turning Point

There comes a point during this process where you've got a group of women who seem to want to be continuing participants. They are ready to commit to the group and to acknowledge the importance of this gathering. They are ready to attend on a regular basis and to contribute to its success.

Now it's time to celebrate your bonding together, the fact that you are about to become a cohesive group and to make an official start to "your women's group." We suggest you create a written Women's Group Agreement, hand it out and ask everyone to sign it. It is simply a way to get everyone on the same page. A celebratory toast, some special goodies or the like might be appropriate at this time.

Each woman is an important part of the group's development and when each member comes together with a desire to contribute and build a group, it is successful.

Chapter 13: The Challenges

Any change, even a change for the better, is always accompanied by drawbacks and discomforts.

—ARNOLD BENNETT

We'd all like to think that everything will always go according to plan and that everyone will always play by the rules and be accommodating to others in the group. A nice thought, but things do come up. Having a strategy ahead of time to deal with uncomfortable issues gives you the ability to move through them without causing great upset in your group.

Some challenges must be handled with care and others just require a simple rule to be in place so that everyone knows what's expected and can be held to it.

Things That Might Go Wrong

Interrupting the Speaker

When you're going around the room during your opening introductions or Featured Topic section, if you use the talking object to signify who has the floor, the issue of interrupting should be minimized. If someone does jump in and interrupt, it should be the responsibility of the Hostess or Timekeeper to remind the member gently that someone else has the floor. And if your members just can't help themselves, well then maybe your next meeting's Featured Topic should be all about Listening Skills.

Having a strategy ahead of time to deal with uncomfortable issues gives you the ability to move through them without causing great upset in your group.