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Ask Jill
By Jill Kanter

Peer Coaching—Professional Support And So Much More...

Dear Jill,

I recently started an independent consulting practice, after 15 years of working in large firms. I'm pleasantly surprised to be quite busy, but really miss input and feedback from co-workers. I didn't realize how much value that kind of support brings. I've thought about looking for a business partner, but I'm not sure I want to do this. Do you have any suggestions?

Carol

Dear Carol,

Congratulations on your new business' successful launch—most people in your shoes are just trying to build their client base! There's no substitute for colleagues' feedback, and fortunately you don't have to be employed somewhere to get it.

I suggest you consider forming a peer coaching group—a small “team” of self-employed individuals who give each other professional support. Here are some suggestions for starting a group:

- Keep the group size to four or five members, and invite people who you trust, respect and believe can help you! It's also best to choose members who you think will like each other—peer coaches can develop superb comradeship.
- Schedule an introductory meeting to plan how the group will work—participants can choose to join or opt out after this initial discussion.

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- Try to meet at least once a month for two to three hours:
 - dedicate your first meeting to learning each other's professional backgrounds, business objectives and respective hopes for the group;
 - structure subsequent meetings to allow 30 minutes for each member to describe his/her challenges and to receive feedback, ideas and support from other participants.
- Conduct an assessment after your second meeting to define what's working well and what needs improvement—this can be a critical step in any group's healthy development.

You're wise to think carefully before forming a business partnership. Your peer coaching group could be an excellent resource to help you think this through!

Transforming Procrastination Into Productivity

Dear Jill,

I've always been a procrastinator, but I never miss deadlines and it hasn't really been a problem. I'm working closely now with two colleagues whose success is highly dependent on my work. They are not procrastinators and often need things from me before they're due (which, in most cases, is a fair request). My days are filled with interruptions, and I'm having difficulty finishing things quickly enough. After years of procrastination, how can I become more efficient?

*Thanks,
Andrea*

Dear Andrea,

I'm sure that most people who read this will feel your pain—there's a bit of a procrastinator in each of us. They say the less time we think we have to stop and get organized, the more we need to stop and get organized! Here are some suggestions that may help:

- Think of your deliverables for your colleagues as the sum of several smaller tasks—then “chunk each up” accordingly. Each time you have an extra 15 minutes (before a meeting, waiting for the train, etc.), ask yourself which small piece you can complete. This habit can improve your productivity dramatically.
- Start each day with a new “to-do” list, including pieces of these deliverables, as well as more urgent items. Number each entry in the order that you're going to do it. “Number 1” should be the item that when finished, will provide the most value (in terms of achieving your highest priorities).
- Keep in mind that work usually expands to fit the time allotted. Schedule shorter time slots for tasks, and consciously manage to them. You'll be amazed at how much more efficient you can become—in almost no time!
- Pay attention to your body's natural rhythms. Is your mind sharpest in the early morning, late at night, etc.? Schedule creative tasks during times when your mind is most alert and more routine work for your “lower ebbs.”
- Try to be disciplined about “accepting” interruptions. Designate periods of private time in your day, and close your door, let your voicemail/email receive messages—even leave the office, if necessary, to avoid interruptions. If someone enters your workspace, stand up and remain standing to signal your unavailability to sit and chat.

I admire your objective perspective and desire to become more efficient. Both bode well for your future success!

If you have a question about a leadership or team issue in the workplace, please write to AskJill@womenandbiz.com.

Jill Kanter is a management consultant, speaker and writer with expertise in leadership development, team effectiveness and organizational change. She brings a strong practical approach and highly developed intuition to projects incorporating executive coaching, team development, workplace improvement and career empowerment.

Jill has worked extensively with clients in large, dynamic organizations in the financial services, hospital, healthcare, telecommunications and high-tech industries, as well as institutions of higher education and a variety of non-profits. She founded her firm in 1990, after earning her Ed.M. from Harvard University. You can reach Jill at 617-469-0100 or jdk@jillkanter.com. For more information about Jill Kanter, visit her website at www.jillkanter.com.

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