
How to create a
Fun, Effective & Powerful
MASTERMIND GROUP
to Catapult YOU
to Exponential Success



DR MARC DUSSAULT

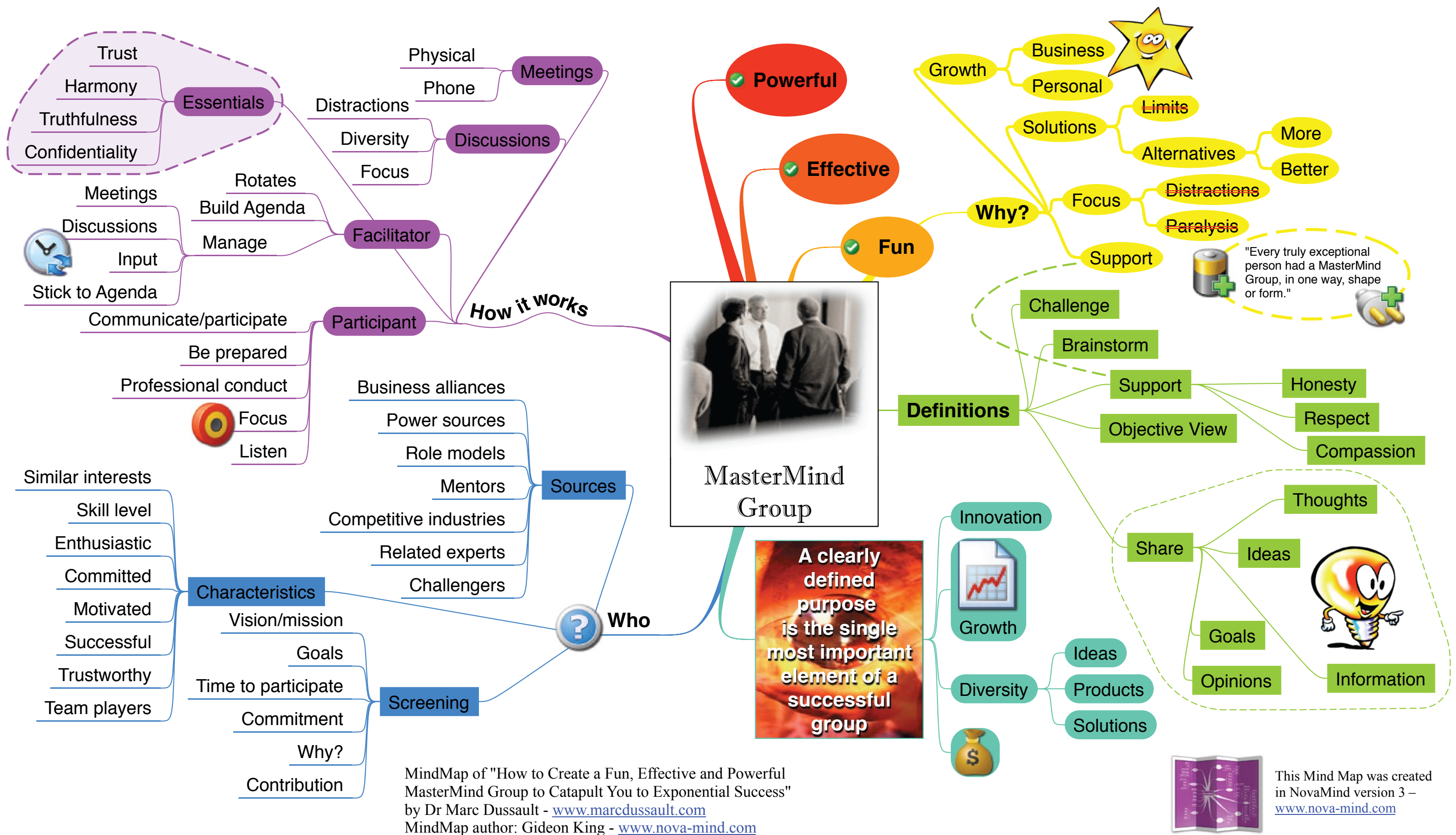
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"Today's dreams are the foundation for tomorrow's reality."
— Dr. Marc R. Dussault



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Introduction

**Have you ever read a book and thought
“yeah I get it” only to realise later that in fact you
weren’t even close?**

That happened to me the first time I read the book Think and Grow Rich.

I thought “yeah I get the basic idea, simple, easy to follow...” but somehow I totally missed the point regarding one of the key distinctions of success – the *critical* importance of a MasterMind Group.

It wasn’t until years later, at a Jay Abraham seminar in Los Angeles that it finally ‘clicked’ for me. There I was, in a room full of people who had spent US\$5,000, which in the early 1990’s was a lot of money for a Canadian who had to fly across the continent plus cop a 40% exchange rate “premium”...

Anyway, getting back to the seminar – there I was, in a room with 576 other energetic, empowered, driven and ambitious entrepreneurs who wanted to get rich as quickly as possible with the least amount of effort. We were like-minded and singularly focused on learning how to make as much money as we could by creating heaps and heaps of value for our clients so we could get paid bucket loads of money for it...

You must be asking yourself – “where does a MasterMind Group fit in to this?”

Great question!

And you know what? That’s one of the key ingredients of a great MasterMind Group – having people asking and probing you with the right questions to transform you from a mediocre business person into a champion of industry.

...so back to the seminar in Los Angeles ... Anyway, we all left the seminar our heads buzzing with enthusiasm, energy and boundless opportunities.

What a feeling – I’m sure you’ve experienced it at least once.¹

Then one day, one, two or three weeks later it happens. You know...

You come crashing down to reality like a ton of bricks. You get that nauseating, sinking feeling in your stomach. You hit the wall so-to-speak.

You finally realise that you can’t do everything that you know you should be doing.

¹ *I reckon it’s one of the best feelings you can have with your clothes on!*

Worse! You don't even know where to start.

You start to think or act on one idea and then immediately get distracted that there must be a better, smarter alternative. You get completely and totally paralysed and ineffectual.

It's a devastating and debilitating feeling isn't it?

That's when somehow, magically I "knew" to pick up *Think and Grow Rich* and re-read the chapter on the MasterMind concept.

WHAM!

That's when it hit me like a slap across the face.

I was just as 'stupid' and powerless as the richest people in the world had been, but they did something I had never done – they had created a MasterMind Group to ENSURE they could move forward, grow and expand BEYOND their own limits.

WOW!

That totally rocked my world and changed my life. Or so I thought.

I had travelled to the Jay Abraham seminar on my own – no one else within my immediate circle of friends and acquaintances could afford it. My fellow business colleagues were slaves to their companies, chained and padlocked to their desks. They ridiculed me for spending US\$5,000 on a 3-day seminar.

There I was, alone in Montreal, knowing I desperately needed a MasterMind Group of 'like-minded' people to help me out of the quagmire of small business operational slavery, but didn't have anyone 'close to me' to build this group.

So I called upon the best people that I knew at the time. They were fellow graduates from Tony Robbins' Mastery University located around the world, and **local specialists that had never heard of Jay Abraham or Tony Robbins, but had skills and aptitudes that I needed to acquire, leverage or learn about** to get me to my ambitious goal of personal and financial independence.

I looked beyond my immediate contacts and became a detective of distinctions and got to know their originators and creators. If I didn't know anyone who had what I needed, I asked trusted friends and colleagues who *they* knew that could help me find that elusive 'key person' and so the journey went. I met some of the most fascinating people through referrals and recommendations and learned a lot more than I had bargained for.

I chose the 'informal' MasterMind Group model – most 'members' didn't know they were in a MasterMind Group let alone meet anyone else in the 'group'. I was the only one who knew it existed and why it existed (its purpose). I rotated people in and out and optimised when I would talk/meet/call them. I revelled in the creativity and the innovative spirit it triggered and fostered within me.

It was years before I formalised the concept and created a ‘public’ purpose with some of the structures and processes outlined in this guide.

It’s horses for courses, different strokes for different folks.

When I started I had audacious goals – I wanted to do it all.

Build businesses, make tons of money, travel the world, study at the highest academic level in *multiple* disciplines in *multiple* languages, travel the world’s exotic locations, teach at the post-graduate level, publish, consult *while* improving my health and vitality – ALL AT THE SAME TIME WITHOUT COMPROMISING PERFORMANCE OR RESULTS!

At the time I was too embarrassed to admit it ‘publicly’, but secretly I was totally committed and determined to live my dream to its absolute fullest.

I am proud of my accomplishments, but I didn’t do it on my own. I had the assistance, guidance, coaching and mentoring equivalent to hundreds of years of experience, knowledge and wisdom that I could never live long enough to acquire on my own.

It wasn’t and still is not about competing with others, it’s really about becoming the very best ‘you’ you can become.

Creating and evolving MasterMind Groups as you achieve each “milestone” in your life and/or career is one of the key fundamental distinctions for personal and professional success.

Every single truly exceptional person had a MasterMind Group, in one way, shape or form. They may never have called it that, but essentially that’s what it was.

Besides, if you do it right, it’s one of the most enjoyable aspects of personal development, growth and success. I would agree with Napoleon Hill – without it, the odds are against you – way, way, way against you.

So why don’t you sit back and invest the next 20 to 30 *minutes* to get your own breakthrough to creating a fun, effective and powerful MasterMind Group to catapult you to exponential success?

After all, you’re worth it and you do want to achieve your dream goal(s) don’t you?

I won’t tell a soul.

I promise.

10 Point Checklist

to Creating a Fun, Effective and Powerful MasterMind Group to Catapult You to Exponential Success

1. Start now.
2. Determine *why* you want to start a MasterMind group.
3. Determine what *type of group* it will be and the style of management you want to have.
4. Establish the group's protocol *before* the group is formed.
5. Be selective about *who you invite* as members in the starting group. Make sure they are the 'right people' for the 'right reasons'. It's better to start off small and build the group than to go for volume without substance.
6. Determine how to expel a group member if things aren't working out *before* forming the group.
7. Be true to yourself and your group - if you are not making a difference to the group or it's not making a measurable difference to you, it's time to leave and find another group that is better suited to your needs.
8. MasterMind Groups are *not* forever. Once you outgrow your group or it outgrows you, it's time to get a new one.
9. Have fun, otherwise you won't get the most out of the experience. It's as much about the journey as it is the destination.
10. Don't overdo the bureaucracy – let it flow more freely than you're accustomed exploring the fluidity of lateral thinking and exploration. You'll be amazed how effortless innovative thinking can become if given the chance to emerge.

“The thinking that got us to where we are is not the thinking that will get us to where we want to go.”

— Albert Einstein

Chapter 1

WHEN DID THE MASTERMIND GROUP CONCEPT ORIGINATE?

The concept of the MasterMind Group was formally introduced by Napoleon Hill in the early 1900's. In his timeless classic, "Think and Grow Rich" he was the first to summarise, consolidate and document the organising principles (distinctions of success) of the most powerful, influential and financially successful people of that era.¹

Nearly every great achievement or massive fortune in history has been the product of a team of minds united in achieving the same, pre-defined goal. The American Declaration of Independence was the result of a MasterMind group, so was man's first powered flight, as well as man's first flight into space and subsequently the moon.²

In his seminal book he defined the MasterMind principle as "The coordination of knowledge and effort of two or more people, who work toward a definite purpose, in the spirit of harmony."³ He goes on to explain "Economic advantages may be created by *any person* who surrounds himself with the advice, counsel and personal cooperation of a group of people who are willing to lend him/her wholehearted aid, in a spirit of perfect harmony."⁴ Furthermore, he introduces the key exponential construct behind the MasterMind principle as "no two minds ever come together without, thereby, creating a third, invisible, intangible force which may be likened to a third mind."⁵ This is due in large part to our predisposition as social beings to "take on the nature and habits and the power of thought of those with whom we associate in spirit of sympathy and harmony."⁶

Success is not a solo act. To get from here to there, you need other people. A MasterMind Group is an excellent way to interest other people in your vision of success.⁷

Our minds are like batteries...

Mr. Hill explains this analogy using the little known fact that a *group* of electrical batteries mysteriously provide more energy than a single battery of the same capacity. Similarly, Mr. Hill extols that our brains, when combined within a proper (MasterMind) grouping, will produce more brain power than each individually could on their own.⁸

So how do we get plugged in?

First, we have to define what a MasterMind Group is ... and is not.⁹

Several definitions abound and each has its merits.

*Our minds are
like batteries...*

Chapter 2

MASTERMIND GROUP DEFINITIONS

- There is synergy of energy, commitment and excitement that participants bring to MasterMind Groups. The beauty of MasterMind Groups is that participants raise the bar by challenging each other to create and implement goals, brainstorm ideas and support each other with total honesty, respect and compassion. MasterMind participants act as catalysts for growth, devil's advocates and supportive colleagues.¹⁰
- MasterMind Groups are like having an objective board of directors.¹¹
- MasterMind Groups share the basic philosophy that more can be accomplished in less time by working together. Comprised of individuals who meet in an open, supportive environment on a regular basis, a MasterMind Group's sole purpose is to share thoughts, ideas, opinions and information directed toward a pre-defined purpose, goal or outcome.¹² As individuals, members have the ability to see things from their own perspective or world view. By adding others to the mix, the group has a greater ability to share a combined intellect to see things from several new, different and contrasting perspectives in what Napoleon Hill and others have come to refer to as the "third mind." It is this collective third mind that processes and distils information down to its essence, crystallizing abstract thoughts and feelings into tangible ideas and actions that can

The beauty of MasterMind Groups is that participants raise the bar by challenging each other to create and implement goals, brainstorm ideas and support each other with total honesty, respect and compassion.

MasterMind Groups commit to showing up and contributing to each other's success. Members of the group become trusted confidants who rely on each other for priceless insights, candid feedback, valuable ideas, encouragement, inspiration and motivation.

be readily implemented for exponential advantage.

- A MasterMind is a group of individuals who are joined in purpose. All bringing their collective talents and experiences to the achievement of a common goal.¹³
- MasterMind Groups commit to showing up and contributing to each other's success. Members of the group become trusted confidants who rely on each other for priceless

insights, candid feedback, valuable ideas, encouragement, inspiration and motivation.¹⁴

- A MasterMind Group is a unique collection of people utilising MasterMind principles for business and personal goal achievement. The basic intent of a MasterMind Group is the coordination of knowledge and effort, in a spirit of harmony and for the attainment of a definite purpose.¹⁵

A MasterMind is a group of individuals who are joined to achieve a common purpose.

Chapter 3

WHAT A MASTERMIND GROUP IS NOT

- A MasterMind Group should not be confused with a leads group. Acquiring leads is not a primary purpose of the group; however, leads may be exchanged based on the relationships formed in the group.¹⁶
- A MasterMind Group is not a training class. Members may learn new information or skills through discussion; however, the group is not dependent on any one person's expertise. The format is highly facilitated.
- A MasterMind Group is not group therapy, although some meetings may produce therapeutic results.

Chapter 4

DEFINING A PURPOSE FOR YOUR MASTERMIND GROUP

Great minds don't always think alike. That's why leaders and executives turn to MasterMind Groups - a growing business phenomenon attracting successful professionals who seek objective advice, motivation, group synergy and different perspectives to accomplish their most important goals.¹⁷

It's easy to feel isolated in a leadership role. The higher you rank within an organisation, the less objective feedback you receive, the more difficult it is to find peers who understand your challenges and issues. Small businesses are well suited to take advantage of MasterMind Groups. With the growing number of individuals starting and running small businesses, the need to connect with other peers is even greater.

"Micro businesses," those operated by one person with a couple of employees and home-based businesses are especially well served through MasterMind Groups.¹⁸

In line with the need to define a purpose, there are countless reasons you'd want to start a MasterMind Group.¹⁹

- Business diversity
- New product/service idea generation
- Problem solving
- Share best practices
- Research and development of ideas (innovation and creative thinking)
- Personal (financial) gain
- Professional growth

It is imperative that the reasons or need to start a MasterMind Group be harmonious with both the type as well as the constitution of the group created.

A MasterMind Group's sole purpose is to share thoughts, ideas, opinions and information directed toward a pre-defined purpose, goal or outcome.²⁰ The establishment and agreement of a clearly defined purpose is essential in the genesis of an effective MasterMind Group.²¹ The following questions can help you get clarity and achieve

... a clearly defined purpose is essential in the genesis of an effective MasterMind Group.

“definiteness of purpose” that Napoleon Hill professes is a key ingredient to personal success.²²

When creating or joining a MasterMind Group, it is crucial to establish a clear-cut sense of purpose. Everyone in the group must “buy into” the purpose.²³ There should be no “hard sell” necessary to attract any member to the group, otherwise that reluctance will show up later on and in extreme cases that reluctance or lack of buy-in or commitment can inhibit or even destroy the fragile and critically important group dynamic.

The early stages of development of a MasterMind Group are critical to the group's future success.²⁴ If everyone in the group had a different expectation to start off with, the chances of success are significantly diminished and disaster quite likely.

- What is the purpose/mission/goal/outcome of the MasterMind Group?
- Is it a group or personal outcome?
- How will you know if the purpose has been achieved?
- What are the measurable or observable milestones you can determine from the outset?
- What skills, aptitudes, knowledge and/or skills are required to achieve the Group's purpose?
- Is the purpose compelling, engaging and motivating enough for the time and effort to be invested?
- Is the purpose bold or grand enough?
- Are there other dimensions to the purpose that we might want to explore?
- Is the purpose too general or too specific? Or conversely, not general or specific enough?

FIRST MEETING OF A NEWLY FORMED GROUP

- If possible, have the first meeting facilitated by someone who has been in a MasterMind or similar group or someone with identified group process skills.²⁵
- Have members introduce themselves - name, business, number of years in business, number of employees, type of business, brief business overview, issues they plan to bring to the group. (Allow 10 minutes for each person.)
- Go over MasterMind guidelines and rules of engagement.
- Discuss future time, day and location for meetings.
- Choose a group facilitator and go over his/her role for the next meeting.
- Create a list of group members and choose a liaison to be in contact with the MasterMind Group coordinator.
- While the guidelines address these issues in a general way, each group develops its own focus and culture so it is helpful if the group makes conscious choices about what they want. At the first or second meeting, discuss issues such as those noted below.

If possible, have the first meeting facilitated by someone who has been in a MasterMind or similar group

PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

- Describe your ideal MasterMind Group.²⁶
- What will the group look like?
- How will members benefit?

*Brainstorm or MindMap
your thoughts
and feelings so you at
least have a sense
of direction.*

- What kind of culture do we want our group to have?
 - What are our reasons for participating in this MasterMind Group?
 - What are our expectations and needs that cannot be met or cannot be met as well elsewhere?
 - Describe our MasterMind Group as we want it.
- What are the main purposes of our group?
 - What kinds of benefits and results do we want?
 - What kinds of activities do we want?
 - How do we want to do what we do?
 - Do we want to develop statements of vision, mission and purpose?

Chapter 5

MASTERMIND GROUP TYPES

Essentially, the various types of Mastermind Groups are only limited by your imagination.²⁷ Each MasterMind Group has a personality of its own with specific, agreed upon, interests and objectives.²⁸

MasterMind Groups may be structured a variety of ways. Some are professionally facilitated; others are self-organised. Groups may be global, national or local.²⁹

You should match the MasterMind Group type with its purpose, your personal style and situation.

Some MasterMind Groups are industry-specific. Other groups are broader based, with representatives from different businesses joining to brainstorm ideas on a variety of topics. Groups can address professional or personal issues or both. Striving toward success and creating a positive, dynamic learning environment allows members to embrace their new-found "community."³⁰

When designing your MasterMind group, be sure to think through both "what it is" and "what it is not".³¹ For example, a MasterMind group is typically not a leads network nor should it be a therapy group.

Some questions to ask include:

- How large will the group be? Groups typically have less than 10 members.³²
- How will meetings be structured? Some are structured with a facilitator or chairperson and an agenda, others allocate equal time to each member, some simply focus on the most pressing issues.³³
- Who is the "ideal" member for your group? What are their characteristics? What is their expertise? What value will they add to the group?

Chapter 6

IDEAS FOR SELECTING THE MOST EFFECTIVE, POWERFUL AND ENGAGED CONTRIBUTORS FOR YOUR MASTERMIND GROUP

Don't forget, finding "ideal" members is the goal. Warm bodies do not equal "ideal" members.³⁴ Some places to look for "ideal" members – your existing network, professional or trade associations, Chamber of Commerce, your place of worship, Internet bulletin boards or networking groups. You can also ask your trusted advisors – your accountant, lawyer, suppliers, clients or family doctor to join or refer you to someone they respect or admire.

The type and purpose of your MasterMind Group will determine the type, profile and quantity of members you'll be seeking. The following should help you decide what the ideal group membership should look like.³⁵

*Don't forget:
Since you can add
and remove
members you don't
have to make a long-
term decision.*

- **Related Experts:** People you respect in related fields.
- **Competitive Industries:** Establish a trusting and safe environment by selecting members outside your immediate industry or geography.
- **Mentors:** People who can help guide your career or business by providing opportunities to learn the ropes with a minimal amount of pain.
- **Role Models:** People whose success, achievements and professional behaviour stimulate your own creative juices. These are people you look up to and respect.
- **Power Sources:** Clients, prospects or friends who refer you to additional sources of information and connections. They get you qualified introductions.

*People you trust who will
not 'YES' you to death.
They will question you
and test you to go the
distance.*

- **Business Alliances:** People in business who advise you of opportunities and encourage and promote your visibility to other businesses and with whom you work closely. They may fit into previous categories.
- **Challengers:** People you trust who will not 'YES' you to death. They will question you

and test you to go the distance. Also called 'mis-matchers' who constantly see the other side of the argument, see problems instead of opportunities, have a view of

the dark side that you don't want to see. They are valuable as long as they contribute to the process and do not impair momentum and conversational flow. Often, mis-matchers are abrasive, argumentative and more trouble than they are worth, however, a well managed or well mannered mis-matcher can be a priceless addition to a MasterMind Group.

You want people who:

- Have a similar interest (such as a group for self-employed people, a group for spiritual thinkers or a group for people in a certain corporation or industry)
- Have a similar, different and/or higher skill and/or success level (depending on the type of group and outcome sought)
- Have the desire and inspiration to make this year extraordinary
- Want a supportive team of MasterMind partners
- Want to reach or exceed their goals
- Are ready to let their desire to be passionate about their life and work overcome their fear of change
- Are strongly motivated³⁶
- Have achieved success in a particular field or role
- Are open to different perspectives and feedback
- Have a positive outlook and are generally optimistic
- Will be committed to the group
- Are trustworthy
- Like to have fun and be challenged
- Most importantly – they get along with the other group members!

*Go with 'your gut feel'
and trust your
instincts.*

Chapter 7

SCREENING POTENTIAL MASTERMIND GROUP MEMBERS

Before agreeing to let any new members into your group, it's important to screen them to make sure they'll fit into the existing (or expected) group and that their commitment level is sufficiently high. Decide in advance how many people should be in your group and only allow new members into the group with the unanimous consent of everyone in the group. Some questions to ask potential MasterMind Group members include:

- Do you have a personal or business mission or vision statement?
- What are your one, five and ten-year goals?
- How will you find time to participate in the MasterMind Group?
- What is your commitment to moving forward in your business and personal life?
- Why should you be chosen to participate in this group?
- What do you think are your most important assets/skills/aptitudes and/or knowledge that you will contribute to the group?

Even with a screening process a MasterMind Group is likely to run across people who say that they're committed but then don't participate or who say that they're honest but then fail to keep the trust of the group. Be prepared to ask people to leave the group who are not participating up to the group standard and do it quickly once the poor behaviour

The higher you place the bar of admission and conduct, the greater the rewards. However, when you are starting your first group, don't place the bar too high – you can always raise it as you go.

becomes evident. A slacking member will bring down the energy, fun and trust level for the whole group.

Members of a MasterMind Group must learn quickly that they must leave their ego at the door. Problems can occur when some members have unrealistic or erroneous expectations of the group or they don't grasp the concept of collective, lateral group-based thinking.

Some members may expect the group to solve all of their business or personal problems, or they may want to use the group meetings as therapy sessions. There is a fine line separating group therapy and brainstorming sessions – as long as there is constructive movement toward the group's purpose, an effective MasterMind Group will embrace remaining close to that proverbial line of demarcation whilst monitoring it closely and advising the group and members who might indulge in inappropriate behaviours.

A group who has self-centred, dominant members may self-destruct if the group allows that behaviour to continue without sufficient enforcement of the rules of engagement. Members who are unwilling to relinquish power can undermine the true purpose of the group's formation and its overall effectiveness. A member who tries to overpower the group should first be mentored, then warned and if the contrarian behaviour continues, should be asked to leave or be voted out of the group.

HOW MANY MEMBERS SHOULD YOU HAVE?

Each group should begin with a minimum of three people. Groups typically have less than 10 members.³⁷ Ideally, the group should not exceed 10 or 12 members. Scheduling becomes difficult as numbers increase. Also, it is difficult to give adequate attention to each member during a meeting if numbers grow beyond a handful. The counter argument for a larger group is that *quorum* is more easily achieved if there are more members.³⁸

BENEFITS FOR MASTERMIND GROUP MEMBERS

Attracting the best MasterMind Group members is important. Several benefits exist as noted below.

Successful MasterMind Groups ensure that ALL members benefit from the experience.

- New ideas, perspectives and points of view and opinions³⁹
- Support for your business development
- New alliances, improved networking although this is not the goal of a MasterMind Group, but an indirect benefit
- Motivation and synergy
- Higher levels of success with reduced effort
- Experience, skill and confidence⁴⁰
- Real progress in your business and personal life
- An instant and valuable support network
- A sense of shared endeavour - there are others out there trying to do exactly what you are attempting to achieve!
- Design things to be the way you want them to be, not as you've been told they should be
- Your MasterMind Group is like having an objective board of directors⁴¹
- Better decision making and problem-solving⁴²
- Accelerated business growth
- Increased personal effectiveness
- Smarter strategic thinking
- Increased accountability
- Safe and non-judgmental place to discuss challenges
- Expanded professional network and improved life/work balance.
-

Sometimes the benefits are intangible and need to be reviewed and members reminded of them otherwise motivation may wane and attrition become problematic.

Chapter 8

HOW DOES A MASTERMIND GROUP WORK?

Your peers give you feedback, help you brainstorm new possibilities and set up accountability structures that keep you focused and on track.⁴³

You will create a community of supportive colleagues who will brainstorm together to move the group to new heights.⁴⁴

MasterMind Group meetings are not like other meetings – they need to be fluid, engaging and fun while remaining focused.

MasterMind Groups can meet in person, on the telephone, or via online message boards. For those groups that meet in person or on the phone, typically a once-a-month meeting is scheduled.

Because of the group nature, a commitment is required. Look for highly-motivated people who are willing to ask for help and support and are willing to offer help and support to other people.

In a MasterMind Group, the agenda belongs to the group and each person's participation is key.⁴⁵

TRUST AND HARMONY – ESSENTIAL BUILDING BLOCKS OF EFFECTIVE MASTERMIND GROUPS

The success of a MasterMind group is built on the foundation of trust and harmony.⁴⁶ As some members explain, the process of building trust can take as long as a year before group members feel comfortable with each other. That comfort comes from sharing information and ideas and learning to accept opinions openly and willingly. If only safe, polite comments are shared, nothing is gained, nor is the feedback valuable. Members don't benefit from a group of 'yes' people. An effective MasterMind Group must encourage a diversity of opinions that are constructive in nature with value-add criticism and analysis that enhances the ultimate outcome or

*Without absolute trust – there is no 'third mind'.
Get rid of the mistrust immediately. If necessary, start all over again.*

purpose sought. Well managed confrontation and debate is healthy and should be explored and entertained with the understanding that it exists to yield an optimal result.

Gary Ralston, senior business consultant at Ralston Consulting in Columbus, Ohio, says that trust deepens as the group forms.⁴⁷ "Confidentiality, like a water-tight bond, is the most important part of MasterMind Groups," Ralston says. "Everywhere else, you want your business to look good to the rest of the world, but in a MasterMind Group, you can admit anything without being penalised because everything discussed stays in the group."

Without absolute confidentiality and trust, a MasterMind Group is quickly reduced to a glorified chat session. Ralston adds that "we (each) live with our own blind spots. MasterMind Groups allow us to accurately locate reality." Furthermore, MasterMind Groups are a unique multi-faceted lens that allows each member to inwardly focus with varying degrees of scrutiny self-assessment as desired. Nowhere else is this depth and breadth of introspective analysis possible. It can be as brutal as it can be beneficial. No pain, no gain.

SUSTAINABILITY – THE ULTIMATE COMPONENT OF SUCCESSFUL MASTERMIND GROUPS

Mike Benz, executive director and CEO of United Way Services in Cleveland, Ohio, has for the past four years been a member of a group of executives that has met monthly. Few members have come and gone from the program during that time, but Benz explains, it is

Sustainability is a 'nice to have' component – but not a 'must have'. Some of the most successful and powerful MasterMind Groups exist for short periods of time.

critical to select the right people. "Not just anyone can come into the program. They must be invited to become part of the group." The first year, he explains, focused on developing trust. Between the second and third year, the group hit a few bumps in the road, which were ironed out. By the fourth year, the group established its momentum. "You have to make a commitment to yourself and your group members that you're in it for the long term," Benz adds. Seeking feedback from group members keeps the group productive. Ralston points out that his group always ends its meetings by asking each person to reflect on

what worked and what didn't in the meeting and how the group can improve the next meeting. It keeps the group focused and on track.

Group members determine how often the group meets. Members who are physically located in the same city might meet monthly. Others, who may be located in the same state, may opt for bi-monthly or quarterly meetings. Members of national MasterMind groups opt for meeting about twice a year. Some MasterMind group members choose to meet by telephone to keep in touch until they can meet in person, using bridge line teleconferencing. The duration of meetings depends on the group, but most meet for two to four hours; others who meet less frequently may opt to meet for a half or full-day. The group decides. Often, if a MasterMind group has achieved the goals it set in the beginning, it may disband. For others, the group may meet with the same people for a decade or longer.

Chapter 9

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT FOR SUCCESSFUL MASTERMIND GROUP MEETINGS

MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

Everyone in the MasterMind Group needs to understand that there is a development curve in forming any group, especially a unique and special group like a MasterMind Group. While a group is ramping up, members need to have open and honest conversations about group norms and expectations. These conversations solidify buy-in, begin to build bonds and lay the foundation for trust.⁴⁸

EMBRACING DIVERSITY OF EXPRESSION WHILE MANAGING FOCUS AND MINIMISING DISTRACTIONS

Avoid discussing controversial topics such as politics, religion or any other subject that is touchy. Avoid introducing *any* subject that will weaken the cordial and cooperative spirit of the group in order to maintain trust and confidence between members of the group. All discussions must be treated as confidential. Initially, set guidelines to address methods for dealing with unacceptable conversation topics so that a strayed conversationalist doesn't feel barraged by complaints. Often, a simple "time out" signal is enough to refocus conversation. Agree that when a person has the spotlight, others will not engage in cross talk nor take the spotlight.⁴⁹

Embracing diversity of expression while minimising tangential discussions is the biggest challenge to overcome – trust your instincts and choose to err on the side of flexibility.

NEW MEMBER INTRODUCTIONS

During your first meeting, decide if, when, why and how new members may be added to the group. If allowed, it must be a unanimous decision. All new memberships should be selected to ensure harmony with existing members.⁵⁰

WHO LEADS THE GROUP?

A popular suggestion is that chairing the group should be rotated from time-to-time, allowing each member the opportunity to be the chairperson. The function of the chairperson should be to allow every member of the group the opportunity to speak,

without dominating the conversation. The chairperson will maintain the integrity of the group's chosen format and assure that the time format is followed. A kitchen timer helps with timing.⁵¹

A MasterMind Group reminds you and constantly proves how well it pays to use brains other than your own - while you offer to lend your mind to others. It is essential that each member remain open to recommendations, ideas and new ways of thinking without dismissing them outright. The MasterMind principle espouses critical, creative and lateral thinking outside the square.⁵²

FACILITATOR RESPONSIBILITIES

- Develop agenda with input from group members⁵³
- Conduct meetings
- Leads/facilitates discussion
- Rotates responsibility among members

Experience has shown that the role of facilitator is crucial in keeping MasterMind Group meetings focused and productive and in setting a tone of respect for members' needs and group process. In some groups the role of facilitator is rotated every month, in others, the facilitator may keep the job for two or three months. The most effective facilitators do the following:⁵⁴

- Contact members 3-5 days before the meeting as a reminder and to develop an agenda for the meeting (finding out if members have an issue, problem or questions for the meeting, what it is and approximately how much time they need for it). You may have to spend a little time on the phone previewing potential issues to help members come up with agenda items. On occasions when no one has anything for the agenda, you may select a generic topic such as: Business Updates, Goals for the Year, Coping with Stress, How You can Make Your Business More Fun, What is Your Business Mission? etc.
- Develop the agenda before the meeting, prioritise issues on a first-come, first-serve basis or by determining its relative urgency or its relatedness to other agenda items. Include time limits. Some facilitators make copies of the agenda for the group so everyone can share responsibility to adhere to it.
- Don't bring up your own agenda item or take up much time with your own input when you're the facilitator. Your responsibility is to the group process and you can't do that job well and also take care of your own agenda. If you have an immediate need for the group's input, ask someone else to serve as facilitator for the meeting. You can share your feedback, experience or opinion if it's asked for, but keep it short so that you can keep your focus on the group task.
- Ask the person with the agenda item to define what he/she wants from the group. As the group responds to the issue, if they veer off on tangents, can keep the group focused by coming back to ask if he/she is getting what he/she wants. By frequently asking, "Are you getting what you want?" you will help clarify his/her needs and help the group avoid wasting time with unhelpful feedback.

*A MasterMind Group
is about a group, not
any one individual*

- Scan the group frequently and invite people to share who are not or who tend to be quiet. For example, "Mary, do you have anything you want to add to this?"
- Focus those who ramble. "Could you summarise your idea?" "What is the key point you are trying to make?" "We need to move on." "We're taking too much time with this topic." "We seem to be rambling."
- Stop side conversations. "Can we get everyone's attention?" "We have two conversations going on at the same time."
- Bring process developments to the group's attention. "Mary has been interrupted several times."
- Keep discussion within planned time frames. "We have only two minutes to conclude this subject."
- When the conversation goes off on a tangent and the group seems invested in the discussion, get them to make a conscious decision. "Do you want to discuss this

Diplomacy and tact are necessary to manage group meetings effectively – proceed with the belief that everyone is there for the common purpose of the group.

issue or put it in the issues bin?" Or, go back to the person whose agenda item was being discussed and ask, "Are you finished or do you want to pursue you issue some more?" Or, say to the group, "It seems we're getting off track. Is this what you want to do?"

- When someone arrives late, acknowledge them, but don't stop the discussion. You don't want to punish the group because someone is late and you don't want to reward late behaviour.
- Bring the group back to its task when several people are speaking at one time. "Let's hear from one at a time." Or, state the obvious. "Several people are talking at once."
- When the group jumps in with advice and feedback before the person with the agenda item has finished expressing herself, come back to her and ask, "Mary, are you ready for feedback?"
- When a member is being overly negative or critical of an idea, ask them what they would propose as a solution. Get them to propose a solution. "What do you think would work?"
- When someone becomes upset, stop problem solving and offer support.

MASTERMIND GROUP PARTICIPANT RESPONSIBILITIES

- Inform facilitator in advance if unable to attend a meeting⁵⁵
- Inform facilitator in advance of desire to have some time on the agenda
- Attend regularly, avoid missing meetings
- Arrive at meetings on time and prepared
- Behave professionally
- Treat fellow participants with respect
- Participate and contribute
- Commit to keep group discussions confidential
- Take responsibility for helping facilitator conduct an effective meeting

- Stay focused on one person/issue at a time
- Hear out the member who has the floor before responding
- Respond to expressed needs
- Keep feedback constructive
- Do not engage in side conversations
- Remain aware of "air time"
- Take responsibility for own participation
- Identify the problem, question or idea
- Ask for the type of input wanted from the group (encouragement, critique, advice, brainstorming, support)
- Give and receive feedback and support
- Grow, have fun, help others do the same

PLACING A TOPIC ON THE AGENDA

To place a topic on the agenda, members must provide the following information to the facilitator:⁵⁶

1. Topic: descriptive paragraph
2. Type of feedback desired (must be specific)
3. Range of time needed
4. Sensitivity Scale (1 - 10) with 1 is least and 10 is most sensitive

A carefully planned agenda is critical for any productive meeting. A carefully planned agenda helps to keep the discussion focused and on track ensures that topics are chosen

Your agenda could be that you just want to have a free-wheeling brainstorming session with no particular items or constraints.

rather than 'drifted into' and allows participants to plan for the discussion as well as target benefits to be gained. An agenda also provides a tool to help the facilitator conduct an effective meeting providing a business atmosphere for the discussion and allowing the allocation of time for the meeting amongst the different agenda topics.⁵⁷

Developing the agenda

The facilitator for a specific meeting is responsible for that meeting's agenda. Group members are responsible to help develop the agenda by suggesting topics or offering to present a topic, thus requesting time on the agenda. The facilitator ensures that an agenda is planned, written and distributed. Distributing the agenda to each participant prior to the meeting is suggested.⁵⁸

Source of agenda topics

1. Group member concerns⁵⁹
2. Group member suggestions
3. Items from the issue bin
4. Resources available to the group
5. Other sources as identified by the group

Remember – all meetings must remain “on purpose”.

The agenda provides a structure for the meeting. Groups can use a 'standard' agenda as a guide for putting together their specific agenda. A standard agenda does not take the place of planning an agenda for each meeting. Stick with the agenda. On rare occasions, it might be necessary to change the agenda. When necessary, make a formal decision.⁶⁰

ATTENDANCE REQUIREMENTS

During your first meeting, establish attendance guidelines. Consistency in attendance maintains the integrity of the group. Although your group may elect to allow absences, they are not to be taken lightly. In advance, determine if fatigue or schedule conflicts are acceptable reasons for absence. Decide if all members must be present for each meeting or if you prefer a predetermined *quorum* of members to call a meeting.

*Most groups
operate on a
quorum basis*

MEETING LOCATIONS

Meetings usually take place at a member's home or office or a designated meeting room at a public facility such as a library, university or community room. Make sure there is ample surface to spread out and work on – simply sitting in a circle will not allow you to take notes or effectively present your ideas to the group. Restaurants are not recommended unless there is a quiet, private room. Confidentiality with waiters milling about is compromised and serving meals is usually an unnecessary distraction unless well managed in advance of the meeting's commencement.⁶¹

MEETING TIME AND FREQUENCY

Most MasterMind Groups meet a minimum of once a month for two to three hours. Your group may choose to meet more often. Some MasterMind Groups schedule quarterly retreats with a specific purpose and format based on group member needs and milestones.

*Match the group's purpose
and intensity with the
frequency of meetings.*

Appendix

ENDNOTES

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If you have any additional information or references you'd like to share or contribute, please feel free to contact me at www.marcdussault.com



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