

WORK & MONEY

LIVE WELL & LOVE WHAT YOU DO



Business owners (from left) Cozy Friedman, Dorothy Devlin, Anne Maxfield, and Robin Baron push each other (in the nicest way).

Join the accountability club

These four women are letting us in on the *real* secret to their success: each other! Their accountability club—think Weight Watchers for work goals—will inspire you to round up your own dream team. By Sandy M. Fernández

It's just before 8 a.m. on a Tuesday morning, and four women are settling into a corner table at an almost-empty New York City diner. The waiter hustles over with coffee and tea before the notebooks and iPads even hit the table—the women come in every two weeks, so he knows their orders. There's five minutes of chatter about a trip to Mexico that Cozy Friedman, the founder of the salon Cozy's Cuts for Kids, just took. Then the group gets down to business.

"Dorothy, it's your turn to start this time, right?" asks interior designer Robin Baron. "I think so," says Dorothy Devlin, who cofounded the events and communications company DevlinHair Productions Inc. "I made a list of business goals and a list of personal goals." After she reads them, Anne Maxfield, the creator of The Accidental Locavore, a foodie website, asks for copies. "Email them to all of us so we have them," she says. They then start to tackle the first



Groupthink: Over coffee, the women brainstorm ways to overcome their business obstacles.

item on Dorothy's to-do list: figuring out how to better incorporate new technologies like the iPad into the training programs she plans.

Welcome to an "accountability club"—where people meet up regularly to share their aspirations and, more importantly, push each other to see them through. The idea is to counter the everyday craziness of our work lives that makes it easy to back-burner our personal career dreams, like starting a catering biz or a nonprofit. These face-to-face meetings may seem like a throwback in a world where everyone crowd-sources their problems on Facebook, but they're catching on. "Since the recession, there's less of a stigma about wanting help with your career from colleagues," says psychologist Lynda McDermott, an executive coach and the author of *The Power of Peer Coaching*. Examples are everywhere. In Los Angeles, actress Karen Forman has standing Monday-night meetings with four friends who are also in entertainment. Since they began helping each other rebound from the nonstop rejection that's a trademark of their industry, Karen has booked a small role on NBC's *Parks and Recreation*. For Sandra Cohen, a lawyer in New York, the members of her monthly group support one another as they try to make partner. "We're able to help with work questions that no one else would understand," says Sandra.

The same goes for Cozy's group. "All of us own our businesses, so there's no one above us to say, 'Hey, remember that thing you said you were going to do today?'" she explains. "It's easy to put things off, but when you bring a goal to the group, you have to

40-something women described themselves as "very ambitious." These clubs are all about putting your dreams out there—without fear.

Back at the diner, over egg-white-and-veggie omelets, each member gets about 20 minutes to talk through her goals or nagging office problems. If any next steps are agreed to, like hiring a Web designer, everyone writes them down so they can follow up. And they collaborate freely, providing one another with resources and references: Anne recommended the woman who is now the COO of Robin's business. "Last year I branched out from doing just interior design, and I needed to hire someone to help me expand," Robin says. "I asked for suggestions, and Anne knew someone. Now I'm selling home decor on three websites, I have two licensing deals, and I'm doing a ton of web TV and videos. I couldn't have done that alone. The group saw what I needed and even found the person to do the job!"

At today's meeting, Cozy mentions that she has opened a braiding bar at one of her salons. "Do the creeps have it yet?" asks Robin, jokingly referring to Cozy's competitors. Anne wants to know if Cozy has copyrighted the idea. "What about turning it into a pop-up shop?" Dorothy says. Cozy scribbles furiously in her notebook as the women throw out more ideas. "How amazing was that?" she says after the meeting wraps. "I had no idea when we started what an incredible resource this group would be." Anne agrees: "They are three crazy-smart women who have my back and want to see me achieve all that I can. There's zero competition. It's business, but a pretty good description of what you want from a friendship, too." ❊

Your dream-team checklist



KNOW WHOM TO PARTNER WITH

Pick no more than four people, and make sure you share at least one thing in common: industry, career level, or work style. Some people feel more comfortable with friends, while others think objectivity from strangers is best. What's key: respect and discretion.



COMMIT

Most groups get together at least once a month, and this time has to be sacred: no missing meetings, and limit re-scheduling or things will fall apart fast. After the first few sessions, check in to see how the group is jelling and if the schedule still makes sense.



USE ONLY THE FIRST 10 MINUTES FOR NON-WORK STUFF

Chitchat can easily take over if you've got close friends in your club. Want to bring up that cute thing your kid said last night? Talk about it while people arrive, but switch to work mode once everyone settles in.