

Who's On Your Team

By Ramona Creel

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It can be hard to run your own business without sacrificing your personal life. You have so many responsibilities, huge dreams, and a limited amount of time in which to accomplish it all. But there is no reason why you have to do it all yourself! Rather than trying to wear every hat in your business, consider putting together a team of professionals to support you in your efforts.

WHY DEVELOP A TEAM?

To become a truly successful entrepreneur, you must understand that your success is limited when you rely entirely upon yourself. By involving other professionals in your business, you have the opportunity to MULTIPLY your efforts -- a group of three or six or twelve can accomplish exponentially more than just one. As you work together toward a common goal, you also begin to feed off of each other's ideas -- creating thought processes that could never have existed without the benefit of group dynamics. The right team will encourage you toward more creative thinking and mental breakthroughs unlike any you have experienced before.

And with a diverse team on your side, you can also experience an amazing phenomenon called "cross-pollentaion." When you only interact with others from your same profession, you face the danger of running into the same ideas over and over again. But when you commiserate with folks from a variety of backgrounds and professions, you may find yourself looking at the world from their perspective -- thinking outside your own little box. The greatest ideas for building my organizing business have come from the most unlikely places -- Mary Kay sales people, an executive director of a nonprofit, and a massage therapist!

WHO SHOULD I RECRUIT?

Each person's team will include a different mix of professionals -- depending on the size of your company, the activities in which you are involved, your own personal talents, and your business goals. For example, I have a talent for -- and enjoy -- building websites, even though I am a professional organizer. So when I decided to start a web company, I had no interest in bringing a web designer on board. But I have no experience preparing corporate tax returns (nor did I want to learn how!), so I thought it best that I include a CPA on my team. The choice is entirely yours -- but you might start out by including:

- an accountant, tax-preparer, and/or financial planner
- an attorney (one with experience in contract and business law)

- a printer, graphic artist, and/or website developer
- a publicist, marketing specialist, and/or PR agent
- a business coach or business development specialist
- an administrative outsourcing professional and/or virtual office assistant
- any energetic, creative colleagues

Remember that your needs may change over time. What seems like a good team today may appear inadequate in a year. The printer you chose at the start of your business may not be able to handle your needs as you move into self-publishing or the printing of trade show banners. A team of professionals is a dynamic, shifting creature, so don't fall too much in love with a particular slate of individuals.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT PEOPLE

Your team members may come from a variety of different fields -- in fact, it's a good idea if they do. You are certainly welcome to include some members of your profession -- assuming that you work in a collaborative rather than competitive field. But regardless of who you recruit, every member of your team should all share three basic qualities:

- CREATIVITY -- your team members should be able to think "outside of the box" and approach a problem from a new direction; don't worry if you have some dreamers on your team, people who always seem to think of the big "pie-in-the-sky" ideas; they can be very valuable, as long as you balance them out with a few detail-oriented people

- INVESTMENT -- your team members should show a genuine interest in seeing your business succeed and have a personal stake in the outcome of their work; if your team members aren't invested in your company's activities and don't realize a benefit from your efforts, they won't last long

- CONGRUENCE -- each of your team members should have a personality and a work style which "click" with yours; although don't mistake "congruence" for "acquiescence;" the goal is not to bring together a bunch of "yes men;" it can be good for your team members to disagree with each other, as long as they can do it constructively.

WHAT WILL MY TEAM HELP WITH?

When choosing your team members, you should start with a clear idea of exactly what you want these people to help you with. Ideally, you should consider folks who can provide you with a balanced mix of the following activities:

- CONSULTATION -- these professionals may be called upon when you have a question or run into a problem; they are happy to offer suggestions, allowing you the responsibility for follow-through

- BRAINSTORMING -- some of your team members may be especially good at helping you plan for the future, think your way through new ideas, and work toward expanding your business

- SERVICE PROVISION -- you might ask some of your colleagues to take on actual projects on behalf of your company, like doing your taxes, writing a press release, or preparing a contract for

you

Of course, you may only want consultation in some arenas - choosing to do the manual labor yourself. In other spheres, you may need someone who can get their hands dirty on your behalf. The LEVEL of service you ask for is entirely dependent on what you and your team members are comfortable with.

DEFINING YOUR RELATIONSHIP

The first question most entrepreneurs ask when confronted with the idea of attracting a team of professionals is, "How much will it cost?" Don't think that assembling a team has to break the bank. You can always offer to barter with your team members if you can't afford to pay them outright. I've gotten a ton of great publicity by trading organizing with a fabulous local PR agent -- and she's thrilled with how efficient her office is now! Just make sure that you set up a well-defined and mutually beneficial agreement ahead of time. Lay out every detail on paper -- how many hours of your services will be traded for how many hours of the other person's services, the length of your agreement, and the dollar value of your trade (in case one person can't fulfill their obligation and simply wishes to pay the balance off. There is nothing worse than getting caught up in an uncomfortable barter relationship where one party feels taken advantage off.

The second concern, as you develop agreements with your team of professionals, is to create a mutually beneficial relationship -- both give and take. Don't just call on these folks when you need them to "do" something for you. Put together regular planning retreats once or twice a year, or schedule a quarterly "brainstorming" session with your team. Buy them pizza and beer and ask for help hashing out some of your more challenging business concerns. And offer to reciprocate if they need any help with their businesses. You might find that the best solution is to turn "your team" into a "mastermind group" that works equally on all of the members' concerns. With a little planning and a dedicated group of individuals, everyone can benefit from this arrangement!

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