

Mastermind to the Next Tier

Ah, the mastermind group. At its best, it's a delightful gathering of people who agree to work toward the next tier, always staying positive and focused on what *can* be done—something that becomes much more creative (and productive) the more minds that are engaged in the process of brainstorming. Of course, at its worst, it's a group of folks who come together to bitch and moan about what's not working in their lives, turning into a steady stream of poison into the artist's soul.

There are some personality types that are better suited than others for starting up and maintaining a mastermind group. As you work through this PDF, if you begin to think that you might not be great at getting something going, please do try before concluding that. Especially equipped with the goodies in this module, you can connect with others who also wish to mastermind and have them take on roles that may not suit you as well.

Whatever you pull together, remember to ask yourself at every turn: Is this group of people gathered to coordinate "knowledge and effort, in a spirit of harmony, for the attainment of a definite purpose" or not? This definition has worked for followers of Napoleon Hill since 1937 and it's a great touchstone for keeping your mastermind group on track. Here are the four elements that ninjas around the world use to really power up their brilliant mastermind groups!

The Mastermind Mission

In general, your mission should be to meet regularly so that all members of the mastermind may grow, improve, challenge themselves, be held accountable (out loud, in front of others, because when you say you care enough about your show bible to update it, you're more likely to do so—or you'll have to admit it's not a priority to you, when you consistently don't do it), talk through issues in a positive way (again, you're not creating a group to come together and whine about what's unfair in this business), collaborate, improve clarity surrounding your own issues, be of service to one another, support and encourage one another while providing reality checks (never succumbing to the "yes man" syndrome but also never pooh-poohing harebrained ideas that just might work), and generally stay open to the way others run their actor business (from which you may learn a lot).

What's your mission statement? What goals do you have for your mastermind group? What would your ideal mastermind group members have as their shared purpose? What could you live without, if it were important to another masterminder? What is lacking in your regular practice as a self-managing actor that another person could bring to the table (certain information, creative solutions that evade you, relationships with targets, perspective from outside the industry, etc.)? Brainstorm some of the "mission statement"-like qualities you'd like to attract for your mastermind group, here:

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Whatever your particular mission as a masterminding actor, make sure the group's purpose and focus is clearly stated upon inception so that there's a value structure on which to fall back, when things get muddy or cloudy or busy or otherwise scattered (which *will* happen). Basically, this is your mastermind group's logline. Its intention. Its *raison d'être*. Hold true to this.

My ideal mastermind logline is: _____

Revisit and revise this over time. It's unlikely that you'll feel connected to the exact same mission statement year after year. It'll change shape somewhat as your goals evolve and as you tier-jump!

The Mastermind Population

In my mastermind group (not ones I lead for creatives, but the one in which I participate as a small business owner), we are each in different fields. I'm the only one whose business is focused on the entertainment industry. That all the other members are NOT in my world is of great value, because they share ideas that wouldn't necessarily pop up in conversation with showbiz types. They're able to ask me questions that prompt me to think differently about a situation I'm facing, because they don't necessarily know the "Hollywood rules," so they may ask why something cannot be done a certain way, and my answer may help lead me to a totally different way of thinking about a common problem. Similarly, I provide great value when someone in my group needs industry advice. For instance, when they need to shoot a vid for their small business's sales pages, I have referrals so they're not starting with the vast offerings of Google to get the job done right.

Most likely, for the mastermind group you're creating now, you're going to want to jam with other actors—or at least with other creatives, with other hyphenates. You're going to need to collaborate with those who understand this business and all its quirks. You need to be able to discuss acting coaches and headshot photographers and dropping a manager and taking a meeting and life as a bicoastal actor and navigating the pressline at Sundance.

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Where you do want variety is in the level of success you've each tasted. If you're all just now union-eligible—moving from copy, credit, meals gigs to those first paid gigs that will make you "must joins"—you won't have a lot of leverage in your weekly SHARES with one another. Now, you may wonder what a network costar looking to shift to guest star gets out of a mastermind group with a bunch of nonunion actors, and that's where I'll remind you that mentoring and giving back is a beautiful thing (and people at higher tiers know that—or they should). But don't make just ONE person in your group the heavy hitter. Go for *multiple* levels! A new-to-town theatre actor can inspire an "on the cusp of studio features" actor to remember why she got into this crazy business. Don't underestimate the value to that. Don't decide before you've even asked that a particular person would NOT want to participate. As long as you stress that his or her participation is not an attempt to play "pick your brain" all day, but instead a mutually-beneficial meet-up, you may be surprised at what could happen!

Also vary the ages, castable types, number of years in the business, primary focus (theatre, commercials, voiceover, network TV, new media, studio films, gritty indies) of the actors involved. Be sure there's a content creator in the bunch. Someone who loves to write his own material. Maybe he'll write something for you. Include someone who has a historical perspective of the changes in this industry and who can speak to the trends and whose show bible has years more data than yours. Make sure one member is brand new to town, filled with all the optimism you miss having. Don't just assemble your five best friends and call it a mastermind group. That's rarely gonna be a good fit, long term.

You'll need different levels of success, personalities, types, values—but everyone will need to agree to the mission of the group. I can't understate the importance of VETTING your mastermind group. Because you're going to want to be plugged in about opportunities for one another, because you'll become a sounding board for one another, because you'll "yes, and..." with some great ideas for one another, and because you'll all hold one another accountable, your differences will make you stronger. Endure the odd personality conflict to get to the gems you'll discover, by connecting with someone you'd otherwise never encounter.

Let's interview your strengths and weaknesses, to see where your best—most complementary—fellow masterminders might line up. Don't turn this into an opportunity to beat yourself up for what's missing. See this as a pie chart with some slices cut out. They're out there somewhere. We just need to fill 'em in from others' pies! Delicious!

<u>I Rock At</u>	<u>I Struggle With</u>	<u>Notes</u>

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Based on this homework, ideal mastermind group members would have the following qualities, relationships, connections, statuses, experiences, etc. (don't forget folks a tier below you, too):

Remember Jim Rohn's quote: "You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with." Make your masterminders a varied group!

The Mastermind Structure

Using the mastermind mission as your guide, make some decisions about the structure of your mastermind group. You may want to make the first meeting of your masterminders one in which you pull out this PDF and discuss each of these issues to determine what will work best for everyone. Finding out how everyone would answer these questions might be really helpful! After having these convos, get your structure locked down. Be open to the flow that could change your chosen structure for the better as you work together over time, but make sure to stick with what you've outlined until predetermined checkpoint moments, at which points you may try to shift based on feedback and trial and error.

Will your group be led by a mentor, by you, by another member, or will it be fully collaborative and led by each participant, rotating leadership duties per meeting or within some other system? How many people will be in your group? My small business mastermind has five members. The mastermind groups I lead for actors are capped at four participants. I've seen some industry mastermind groups that have 15 actors. Some welcome more than 20 people. That just seems excessive to me. It also makes it less of a mastermind and more of a power group. This was a structure popularized via The Actors' Network in the early 1990s. There is nothing wrong with creating a power group, it just has a very different structure and function in the artists' lives. The

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amount of time totally focused on each person is a lot less. The feeling of tightknit accountability to the population can be low. The ability to blow off a meeting (since so many others are there, few will notice if you're not there) is high. That's not masterminding. Not at all.

Will you meet monthly (this is good for high-achieving folks who really just need a wee bit of check-in to stay on target 12 times a year), biweekly (this gives time for implementation without too much time for getting stagnant between meetings), or weekly (this is great for those who need to kill off any "shiny new thing" tendencies and get focused)? Will there be a penalty for absences or tardiness? Will there be a fee for participation (whether it's to cover meeting space rental, purchase of the cheese plate you'll share, or to have "skin in the game," making you more likely to follow through due to the "gym membership" component of having put money into it)?

How many minutes will each person have the floor to share his or her issues? How much time will be spent in feedback by the other members of the mastermind group? Who will be in charge of monitoring the allocated time? Will you change up the location each meeting, to serve everyone geographically? If a mastermind participant is out of town, is Skyping in for the meeting an option? If several of your mastermind group members are not based nearby, is conducting the entire meeting virtually okay? Will you use Google+ Hangouts or Group Skypes? Will you use a service like Instant Teleseminar to hold group calls when the Internet makes vid connections choppy? Will you hold a quarterly in-person meeting in some fun location to do mastermind days or weekends?

In each meeting, will you include time for sharing good news? Celebrating bookings? Socializing? Discussing inspiring books or plays or films you've each consumed? Will your mastermind experience include attending plays or open mic nights or karaoke jams together once a month? How about having "show bible day" during which each of you walks the others through your show bibles, so everyone can get new ideas about formatting and data collection? Heck, while you're in there, share the data you've each amassed! Talk about a powerful use of the hive mind! Will you set 100-day challenges every few months? Will you engage in Brandprov drills? In one of the mastermind groups I facilitate, we are working through *The Artist's Way*. Its structure lends itself beautifully to the mastermind rhythm and there are great tasks and exercises built right in!

Who will keep "minutes" of the meeting so that there's actual accountability behind the statement, "By next meeting, I will have my demo reel uploaded to Actors Access and IMDb"? Will there be an online forum or even a secret Facebook group at which masterminders have ongoing support and connection between meetings? Who will moderate that space?

In the mastermind groups I lead, we set up time for each person to report in on accountability since last time, list issues to cover this time, this is followed by idea time, which is followed by accountability declarations. There is a timer and everything! Of course, there's time built in for transitioning between participants and we allow for fluidity because you never know when a topic

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gets everyone really rolling—making the need for strict timekeeping a little less important to the whole of the convo. Make sure you've made a plan for all of this, as you bring your structure together.

I've given you a LOT of ideas for potential structure, above. Either take a highlighter and hit the things that clicked for you or sounded really cool or use these lines below to list off some of the things you'd like to attempt to weave into your ideal mastermind group. Or both! :) And remember, you don't have to create a mastermind group that does *all* of the things that appeal to you. Just the ones that feel most important to create the results you crave.

Again, setting your group's structure up either ahead of time or in your first meeting makes for a much more successful experience, long term (which is what you're going for, of course). And on that note...

Long-Term Success of the Mastermind Group

Most importantly, you need a plan for when things go astray from your initial plan (which they will). Will there be regular check-in dates along the way to determine if everything is working as planned? (For the groups I lead, we do a three-month re-evaluation period, at which time folks who aren't clicking can be shifted to other mastermind groups or can head off to implement on their own, with awareness that this was always a part of the plan.) Will you have an agreement in place with all members for how to evolve the group when necessary? And will everyone agree on what those terms are? If there's a financial element, how will money be collected (PayPal, checks, swipe of the credit card on the Square app, cash in a hat) and how will you deal with things like bounced checks or slow-to-pay folks in the group? How will you handle members who outgrow the mastermind? What happens when your pre-paid location falls through?

Consistency is key, here. Even if you don't lay out every single possible "what if" and plan for it before you launch, you can have a successful mastermind experience if you map out a few of the potential elements you'll face, and have a plan for at least a few of them. No matter what, keep showing up. Keep at it for whatever amount of time you've laid out as "the first run." Even if

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attrition comes into play and your group goes from six participants to two, those two of you who *do* show up will be upping your game by staying the course. Stay committed.

Yeah, that's a lot of work, it's a lot to have in mind, it's a lot of balls to keep in the air over a long period of time, if it's done right. But you can do it. :) Masterminding is powerful even though it's a lot of work (and that right there is why so few people do it, long term). The work is *sooooo* worth it, though, as those creatives with whom I've been jamming long-term are really seeing results. Especially if they stay connected between meetings, stay on top of their accountability declarations, and stay positive about controlling those things they can control in this beloved industry of ours!

Wherever you are and with whomever you jam, start as soon as you get a few of the homework items above DONE (don't strive for "the perfect mastermind situation" before you begin) and then just keep doing it. You will move forward in areas of your career you never imagined possible in such a short time. Stay plugged in. Stay accountable. Stay open. Keep masterminding!

Please submit your questions for our follow-up Q&A MP3 immediately for the interactive subscription of **SMFA Essentials**! Send your email to: ninjaassistant@cricketfeet.com with the subject line: **Masterminding Question**, so we can easily get you in the queue to help out with your questions, before we head into next month's awesome interactive **SMFA Essentials** module. We'll be announcing next month's topic soon, so stay tuned. Meanwhile, stay ninja!

We are ridiculously lucky to have a life in which we get to live our dreams, every day. Being blissed out, confident, and capable of achieving your every goal along the way is totally do-able. Unless you're SURE it's impossible, every little dream you hear whispering to you is absolutely, totally attainable. The *Self-Management for Actors* principles **work**. **Bonnie Gillespie is living her dreams by helping others figure out how to live theirs.** She casts SAG-AFTRA indie projects such as the zombie smash hit *BITE ME*, which made the leap from web to TV with *Lionsgate*. Bonnie's weekly column, **The Actors Voice**, runs at Actors Access and her podcast, **The Work**, is available on iTunes. Her books include *Casting Qs: A Collection of Casting Director Interviews*, *Acting Qs: Conversations with Working Actors*, *SMFA: The Ninja Within*, and *Self-Management for Actors: Getting Down to (Show) Business*, which has been named one of **The Top Ten Best Books on Acting Ever Written** and featured at the Tom Cruise actor resource blog. Bonnie coaches and facilitates seminars based on this top-selling book and has traveled internationally—to demystify the casting process and the business side of pursuing an artistic career—as a guest instructor at colleges, universities, actors' unions, and private acting studios. Bonnie has been featured on *Good Morning America*, *BBC Breakfast*, UTV-Ireland, ARD-1 Germany, *Sunrise* Australia, CBC Radio One, BBC Radio 5, E! Online, and in the *LA Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*. Stay plugged in with a visit to BonnieGillespie.com.



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