

Don't-Do-It-Yourself

A lot of women these days are talking about getting all the support for their professional goals from other women. I think that's fine, up to a point. There's no question in my mind that women can and should be a primary source of support for each other, especially when they're just beginning to exchange old roles for new goals. Later on in this chapter, I'm going to give you a format for sharing goal-support with a friend—a format men can use equally well to make going for their goals less of a solitary struggle.

FAMILIES: TURNING RESISTANCE INTO SUPPORT

For women who live with men and/or kids, however, those people are very important and dear. No matter how much new emotional nourishment we're getting from women, we still need our families or lovers, too. It's sad to leave them, and it's sad to live with them in a state of armed truce, defensive about our goals and resentful of their demands. We really want them on our side. What we don't realize is that they want to be on our side, too, if we would only give them the chance. But we're so guilty and frightened about *putting ourselves first* that we've got our dukes up from the word go, expecting nothing but trouble. And people who expect trouble usually get it.

And what about the men who love and puzzle over women who are trying to change their lives? And the men (*and* women) who would like to liberate their talents and loves, but feel responsible for economic dependents? What about the male poet and teacher in the middle of a divorce who told me, "I

felt as if I had to do all the living, as well as all the earning, for two”? We know now that the rigid breadwinner/nurturer split along sex lines has been as oppressive for many men as it has for women. But it’s difficult to change any behavior that since childhood has spelled “love,” whether it’s clean socks or a regular paycheck. Here are some of the strategies—developed by my usual scientific technique, trial and error—for making it through the rough transition in roles with your sanity and your relationships intact.

Let Them Be Mad

When I decided to start Women’s Success Teams, I told my husband about it, with some trepidation. He scowled and said, “I don’t like that. I don’t like women working with women. It worries me.”

I panicked.

“What do you mean, you don’t like it? How can I go ahead if you don’t like it? What am I supposed to do now?”

He looked at me like I was slightly bananas and said, “Whatever you want!”

I said, “What do you mean, do whatever I want? You’ll be angry!”

He said, “So what? You get mad at me frequently, and I do what *I* want! Where did I get all this power to stop you from doing things? So I’ll be mad! The fact is, women working together make me nervous. I’ll get over it. Why do I have to love it right away?”

And I thought, Well. He’s right. How did I get to be such a sissy?

Just about every grown person still has a scared little kid hiding inside. That’s why we so often react to our mates as if they were our fathers or mothers. We give them much more power over us than any adult really has over any other adult. We don’t go home and say, “Hi, I’ve decided I’m going to be a veterinarian.” We’re afraid they’ll be mad at us. So instead, we say, “Can I be a veterinarian? Please? Is that OK with you? Will you still love me?” And then when we don’t get total, instant, 100 percent approval, we feel like we’ve been stopped. We say, “He won’t let me do what I want,” or “They’re forcing me to choose.”

I call that the “S/he won’t let me” syndrome.

If you think someone won't let you do what you want, take another look at yourself. Because *he or she can't stop you*. You are not 4 years old, and that person is not your parent. S/he's just a person and s/he's scared. The people who love you are bound to be at best ambivalent about the changes you're making in their lives. They liked having everything nice and safe the way it was, and change makes them nervous!

Of course, what's really killing you isn't so much that you have to start doing things for you. It's that you're going to have to *stop* doing certain things for them. In the time-planning chapter, we've already dealt a blow to the guilt many women feel when they stop taking total care of everybody from the cradle to the grave—and some men feel when they stop being the Iron-jawed Provider. But of course there's survival fear there too, very deep. We're afraid that if we stop delivering the way we've always delivered, they'll never love us again. That's why, if they get mad or grouchy, we overreact—with terror or rage.

What they really deserve is compassion. These are people you love, don't forget it, and they're in trouble. All of a sudden, this man and these kids have got to become aware of a few facts of life which, thanks to you, they never had to think about before—like, when you wear something or eat off it, it gets dirty, and then what? To make matters worse, they have been trained to associate *care* with *love*—at the price of feeling eternally guilty toward their mothers. And you've fallen right into the trap. You've been giving them lots of attention and service. Now all of a sudden a lot of your energy is going someplace else. That feels to them like you're going away. And when they express their apprehension in the form of resentment, all of a sudden you feel oppressed!

Or: all of a sudden this woman and/or these children have got to become aware of a few facts of life which, thanks to you, they never had to think about before—like, when you want something it costs money, and money takes work. And work is sometimes scary, hard, or dull, and then what? To make matters worse they may have grown up associating *financial support* with *love* at the price of feeling eternally guilty toward their fathers (and sometimes their mothers too). And you've fallen right into the trap, carrying the whole household on your shoulders. Unfortunately, most men endure this trap in silence till they crack, and then they run off with another woman who represents the free and romantic side of them.

Do you see what a crazy thing we're doing to people we love? We're adding insult to injury out of our own insecurity and guilt. We've got a new love in our lives, which is a threat to them for starters; we've stopped taking the old compulsive kind of care of them; we've thrown their lifestyle into total disorder—and on top of it, we're ready to kill them or leave them! Of course they're going to blame and resent our new goals, because it looks to them like that's where all the trouble started.

Don't give up your goals. Go ahead and make the changes. Come home and announce that you're going to be writing a novel or running for City Council, not making beds or folding the laundry any more; or that there will have to be some changes around here because Dad wants to get out of the wholesale sporting-goods business and become a college philosophy teacher. *And give them the right not to like it.* Let them be scared and mad. Let them sulk and throw tantrums. Instead of getting all up in arms, say "I know, it's rough." Give them some time to get used to it. And one day somebody's going to look at you sheepishly and say, "You know, this is kind of fun. I like it a lot better than I thought I would."

We all need to learn a new language for love—a language that speaks not in socks, pancakes, and paychecks, but in shared fascination with physics or poetry, delight in each other's uniqueness, and *mutual* practical and emotional support. If you think your family loves you for the role you play, there's only one way to find out. Throw the role to the winds and go right through the fear of losing love. You aren't going to lose it. All you're going to lose is some peace. And only sissies think they're the same thing.

Working It Out

I've been talking about the *emotional* turbulence of changing roles, and how you can anticipate and weather it. But what about the *practical* rearrangements? In any shared household, certain things have to get done. The bills have to be paid, food, clothing, and other necessities have to be shopped for, and somebody has to bring in enough money to pay for them. And while people can survive on a bare minimum of cooking, housecleaning, and laundering, life is a lot more pleasant if those things get done at least some of the time. If you can't afford a maid, who's going to do them?

There's been a lot of talk about drawing up marriage or living-together contracts in which each person's responsibilities are spelled out very explicitly. You can do that if you want, but in my experience, imposing rules doesn't work as well as *defining common dreams, needs, and priorities*—in other words, finding a shared touchstone.

Economics: The Family Goal Conference

What if you are the primary breadwinner in your family—man, woman, partner or single parent—and your goal involves a temporary or permanent drop in either the amount or the regularity of your income? Carl, a married cartoonist, wanted to give up his newspaper job and try to make it as a freelancer. Laura, a divorced teacher with two grammar-school children, wanted to make a living by marketing her own coloring books. Herm, the father of six, wanted to leave the real-estate firm where he was a vice president and take a lower-paying job with a nonprofit housing organization that got its funding renewed from year to year.

If that's you, the people you live with are simply going to have to make some changes. Either they will have to make their own economic contributions to the household, if they're old enough—like the teen-ager who takes a paper route to pay for her bicycle, or babysits to supplement his allowance—or they'll have to decide on what aspects of their lifestyle they are willing to economize. That sounds harsh. In practice, it's fun. If you sit down with your partner and/or kids and give them a full voice in the decision making, they're not going to feel deprived, threatened, or abandoned. They're going to feel like partners in an adventure.

Carl and his wife Sherry sat down and agreed that they would both actually enjoy the challenge of living more simply and self-sufficiently. They planned a move from their big-city apartment to a small lakeside town where rents were low and they would be able to catch fish and grow a vegetable garden. Sherry decided to contribute a little extra income by finding an outlet for her knitting and crocheting. That's a fairly extreme example of two people who were willing to make a major overhaul of their lifestyle. What if you're not? Laura stayed where she was, in a Minneapolis apartment; she and her daughter and son decided to bake bread and cook "from scratch" and exchange homemade Christmas presents—things Laura would have more time for when she worked at home. Herm's wife got her first paying job—

something she had been wanting to do for a long time—and his three youngest kids, who were in college and high school, gladly agreed to work summers for money instead of just for fun, so that their father could do what *he* loved.

The questions to ask when you sit down for a couple or family goal conference are very much like the questions you asked to arrive at your pared-down ideal day:

1. Which elements of our current lifestyle do we *need*? (Living space, health insurance, and—in some cities—private school might be examples.)
2. Which elements do we *want*? (An annual trip to the ocean, pets, a color TV? These items may be adjustable, or ingenious substitutions can be found by brainstorming.)
3. Which elements could we do without or economize on? (Our own washing machine, lots of eating out, second car, summer camp, private health-club membership instead of YMCA?)

Like your adjusted ideal day, this strategy isn't meant to be a permanent compromise, or to prune life down to the bare essentials. It's meant to get your priorities straight—in this case, your shared priorities. If you love each other, one of the things that's important to you is to have each other be happy. So each of you should define those areas where you're willing to compromise and the ones where you can't and won't. ("I don't mind eating out less, but I refuse to give up going to the movies." "Mama, I'd rather babysit every weekend than stop my ballet lessons.") Now ask yourselves two more questions:

–What long-term goals do we have in common? (Each other's happiness, more money, a house in the country, a trip to Europe, etc.)

–What is each of us willing to do now to help reach those goals? (A small sacrifice, a part-time job, help with the housework, etc.)

Housework: How Not to Nag

Note that I said, "Help with the housework." One of the things men and kids are going to have to pitch in and do if they want a happy lady and/or a second income is a share of the shopping, mopping, dishwashing, and bed-

and dinner-making. And I promise you that they're going to make all sorts of noble resolutions at your family goal conference, none of which are going to get kept. What do you do then?

I think it's safe to say that the great majority of working women have tried to keep the peace by continuing to take the lioness's share of responsibility for the household. We usually justify this by saying, "If I don't do it nobody will," or "It takes more energy to keep nagging and reminding than to do it myself." But often what we're really doing is striking a bargain: "If you let me have my job (school, boutique, Literary magazine, painting class), I promise I'll still be just as good a wife/mother as I was before." In other words, we're keeping one foot in the old role just to be safe.

I think that's a mistake, because anyone who earns love doesn't believe in it when she gets it anyway. You've got to find out that you are loved just for being you. (Then you can cook an occasional meal or wash the dishes because it's fun and relaxing for a change, or because it's your turn.) I personally believe in making the change abrupt. If that makes you feel guilty and scared, *be* guilty and scared—you have the right to feel what you feel. But don't give in. Brave it out.

Your family wants a clean house? There are four strategies for dealing with that one.

Democratic Chaos. If you're cheerful and willful and can play blind like me, and step over debris, you can simply say, "You're absolutely right. Everybody should have a personal maid, including me. However, since none of us has got one, I guess we're just going to have to do the best we can."

Just think of yourself as one in a household of roommates who are muddling through. No one person is the foreman When you wake up one morning and say, "Oh, my God, nobody's got any clothes," the laundry has to be done, and somebody has to do it. You can fight over who's going to do it. Nothing makes a kid feel better than being able to say, "Hey ma, it's your turn to do the dishes, and you better do them!" It really brings it home to them that you're not that slave they used to feel so guilty about. Nobody's the "mother" in my house anymore. We were just three kids in a mess until I got married again; now we're four kids in a mess. We hassle over whose turn it is to walk the dog. It's a warm, noisy household.

The Compassionate Autocrat: What if you have a lower clutter tolerance than I do, and you need cleanliness and order around you to hear yourself think? Don't fall into the trap of doing all the housework yourself because it's easier and takes less time than getting them to do it. There is a way of getting them to do it that takes no time at all. Like this:

The dishes need washing. Instead of saying, "You never help me" or "You must help. That's the rule. This is discipline," walk up to the man or child who is reading or watching TV and say, "Please do the dishes. *Now.*"

He or she will stand up with a loud sigh, slam the book shut, kick the television, throw you an evil glance, and start moving toward the kitchen with about as much enthusiasm as if it were the guillotine.

At this point we usually say, "Oh, forget it."

We have so much trouble asking for help that when we finally do ask, we're hurt if we don't get enthusiasm! Well, you don't need enthusiasm. You just need the dishes washed. So use the key sentence from *Hard Times*. Say, "I don't blame you. I don't like to wash the dishes either. *You don't have to like it, you just have to do it.*" And if they grumble and swear all the way through the dishes, when they finally slam the towel down on the counter, you say just two words:

"Thank you."

I Need You to Take Care of Me: Here's what my days were like when I first got to New York: I got up at 7:00, made breakfast, made my kids' lunch, took them to separate schools, went to work, came home, shopped, made supper, and screamed at them all evening because I was so exhausted. That obviously wasn't working very well, but it went on for a few years, both because my kids were still quite small and because I needed to be this frontier mother to hold myself together.

Then one evening I looked at my 8-year-old and 5-year-old, who were watching TV, and I thought, Hey! I'm working two full-time jobs, staying up half the night, and here are these two strong healthy kids who aren't doing anything. I opened my mouth to lecture them, like I usually did, but then I shut it again. I thought, You know . . . I'm complaining, but it really gives me a wonderful feeling to make their lunches because I know it makes them

feel loved and not lonely. But what makes *them* feel that good? My God. They're being cheated. *They need to make my supper!*

So I ventured, "I'm so tired when I come home from work at night. It would really make me feel good if you made my supper."

And they lit up! They went to the supermarket the next day and shopped, did all the cooking, set the table, and when I got home from work and they saw my face, they felt like a million dollars.

During the years we were alone together, those kids were what kept me going, and they know it. They cooked my dinner, they made my lunch, they even occasionally cleaned house. And they felt valuable and loved—and proud and protective, because I was just one little lady, and I needed them to look out for me. They say, "You'd never have made it without us."

I am convinced that that's one of the major reasons why those kids grew up OK. Somebody needed them. We don't give that to our children. We give them everything else, and then we wonder why they're not satisfied. I think it's because they need to feel needed. They need to know that they are truly important to someone they love—helpful, capable, and necessary.

Love Your Life: The most important strategy isn't a strategy at all. *Be really happy at what you're doing.* That's when you're irresistible to your family, because you're off their backs, and you're cheerful, enthusiastic, and loving. That's when they start willingly cleaning the kitchen, doing the laundry, cooking dinner. They don't cook, clean, and wash *first* and then say, "OK, now you go to school and work, and we'll take care of everything." It's the other way around!

All they really want is your loving attention—in any form. They want to feel needed, involved, and included. Therefore, the best and simplest way to have both love and success is to let your people help you with your goal. Let them pitch in with practical help and emotional support. Instead of a rival that divides you, make your goal a shared project that brings you closer together.

Sharing Ownership of Your Plans

Sharing your goal may require a little bit of psychological judo, especially at first. It took me a while to figure this out. I used to walk into the house with

my jaw stiff and my boxing gloves on, and announce, “I’ve got a fabulous idea. I’m going to start a worm farm and make lots of money!” Then if anyone just said, “But do you really think that will work?” I’d burst into tears and say, “See? See? I never get any support,” and stomp out and give the idea up. That was very unfair of me. I was shutting them out completely, and then expecting them to smile and applaud like I paid packed house.

When you walk in with a flawless plan, *everybody feels left out*. I know I do. When somebody says, “I have the most fabulous idea,” no matter how helpful I’d like to be, I start thinking “What has that got to do with me?” but if somebody says, “I have this idea, but I don’t know if it’s going to work—so-and-so hated it,” I roll up my sleeves and say, “OK, what is it?” Then I’ve got a place.

That’s very important to do with your family—and your friends and co-workers, too. *Share your hopes, fears, and failures, not just your triumphs*. Triumphs always shut people out, no matter how much they’d like to join. So don’t try to sell them the positive aspects of your idea. Say, “I have an idea, but it’s only half-baked. I think anybody can shoot it down, and I don’t know what to do about it.” And let them talk you into it!

This is where you can really put negativity to work for you. It isn’t a trick, because those doubts are there. Don’t try to hide them, use them! It works like a charm. Judy, 29, told me, “This had never dawned on me before; I always thought I had to present a confident front. Instead, this time I went home and told my husband I’d been thinking about starting my own craft gallery, but I was afraid I wouldn’t be able to pull it off. I expected him to criticize me. And what do you know, just like I’d pushed a button he said, ‘You can do it. Here’s an idea. Why don’t you try . . .’ ”

As you saw in Chapter 7, other people have so much to offer once you invite them to get involved. Men—husbands, lovers, colleagues—love giving suggestions and help. They often have skills, experience, and connections women don’t, and being asked to share those things with us makes them feel big and kind and wise, like older brothers. They’ll write your resumé for you, photocopy it in the office, teach you corporate strategy, get their friends to write you references on impressive stationery. Kids are especially fabulous at ideas and legwork. Their heads and feet are quick. They’ll come up with brilliant solutions to problems that had you stumped, and they’ll run around on their bikes sticking notices up on bulletin boards. Trust them to

help you with actual procedures, and to figure out their own ways of doing the jobs you assign them. This is very important. The more problems you give people to solve on their own—unsupervised—the more commitment and enthusiasm you get.

It doesn't have to be done the hard way. People will give you all the help and support you need if you just give them a place in your garden.

As far as I'm concerned, the goal of goals is a system in which you and the people you love act as each other's mutual support team. There are only two problems with it. One is that it takes time—and turmoil—to get there, and in the meantime you need something to keep you moving toward your goal. The other problem is that it doesn't work for people who live alone. If your family or partner is still in the throes of adjustment to the new order, or if you happen to be single, what do you do?

You call your friendships to the rescue.

In particular, you find someone who's in more or less the same bind as you (and believe me, we're all in some version of the same bind), and you make a compact to help each other out—a conspiracy to succeed together. I call it the Buddy System.

THE BUDDY SYSTEM: TEAMING UP FOR SUCCESS

The Buddy System is a way of creating your "ideal family" in miniature. It's the most compact and efficient way I know to give you the kind of support system I've been describing throughout this book. Its principle is simple: you and a friend make it your shared goal to meet both your individual goals. It works because it's about a thousand times easier to have faith, courage, and good ideas for someone else than it is for yourself—and easier for someone else to have them for you. So you team up and trade those positive resources: your buddy provides them for you and you provide them for her or him.

How do you pick a buddy? She or he can be a close friend or roommate, but doesn't have to be. A new acquaintance or a neighbor can be just as good. This is an action-oriented arrangement first and foremost, and an intimate friendship only if you want it to be. Your buddy will be giving you

emotional and moral support, yes, but for a purpose: to keep you in motion. In fact, if you are close friends, you're going to have to keep the rambling, heart-to-heart talks out of the business part of your relationship, and save them for after hours.

Almost the only requirement for a buddy is that she or he be someone whose mind and values you respect and whose ideas and goals intrigue you. His or her goals don't have to be in the same field as yours, or even in a field you know anything about. I know a concert pianist and a department-store buyer who helped each other reach their goals! On the other hand, I also know a husband and wife, both book editors, who are each other's informal "buddies." (You can make a family member your buddy; I'm just putting the system in terms of friendship because they are often a firmer and steadier source of support, outside the emotional fireworks of intimate love.) So there are no rules. Just be aware of picking someone who intimidates you, who is considerably more advanced in his or her career than you are, or who never admits to being doubtful or down. The buddy system, unlike the mentor system, is a relationship of equals.

You and your buddy will be able to give each other three overlapping kinds of help:

1. First and most important is *expectation*—the knowledge that someone is waiting to hear whether you did what you said you'd do and how it went. A buddy fills the need for that vital someone outside you who steadfastly believes in the importance of your goal and expects you to stick with it, as if you were doing it for him or her and not just for yourself. It's like my Ideal Environment fantasy of a boss who would make me do what I really want to do even when I don't feel like doing it!

Each week, you will tell your buddy exactly what steps you've scheduled for the following week, day by day. And s/he will tell you what's on his or her schedule. (See *Weekly Business Meeting*, below.) The next week, you'll report in and tell each other what you did or didn't do. It's as simple as that—and it makes all the difference in the world.

Elaine, the English teacher who wanted to be a mystery novelist, decided to start writing her first book at the rate of ten pages a week. She knew she was going to be meeting with her buddy every Thursday night, and she couldn't walk in there empty-handed. So as often as not, those ten pages got written

on Thursday morning. But they got written. And at the end of eight months, this woman who had dreamed of writing for years but never done it had produced a 350-page manuscript.

The buddy system *works*, where attempts at “self-discipline” usually end in self-loathing. Alone, you can always find good excuses for falling off your schedule, but the minute you’ve got somebody else to answer to, it becomes a lot harder to fool yourself. Your buddy isn’t your externalized “conscience” so much as the appointed representative of your best self. Once you’ve empowered her or him to keep you on the track, you don’t have to try to sustain constant enthusiasm. You are free to be human sometimes lazy, sometimes ornery, sometimes depressed—and still get things done.

2. You and your buddy will give each other the emotional support so necessary for staying with any plan: a sympathetic audience for HARD TIMES when you’re down, someone to hold your icy hand when you’re in the throes of stage fright, and above all, companionship in the enterprise of goal pursuit. Help over the rough spots is a necessity, but sharing the positive excitement of goals is a delight, as women and noncutthroat men are just beginning to discover. You can’t always get that from your mate or kids, at least not at first when they may still perceive your new goal as a rival. With a buddy, you can share not only the weight of your problems, but the crackle of ideas, the camaraderie of work, and the festivity of success.

3. Finally, you and your buddy can provide each other with lots of *practical help*. You’ll be each other’s core brainstorming and barn-raising team. When either of you has a tough strategic problem to solve, you can put your two very different heads together and they’ll be twice as good as one. Your buddy will lend you the unused paints and brushes in her closet, or her fur coat when you need to look rich. You can role-play her for her upcoming interview—and even make phone calls and pretend you’re her if she hates the telephone more than anything on earth. He’ll get his sister the journalist to write an article about your dance studio; you’ll get your lawyer uncle to give him a reference for law school. You can share whatever ideas, contacts, materials, and skills will help you both meet your goal of mutual success.

The best format for all this give-and-take is a regular one: the *weekly business meeting*—supplemented whenever necessary by the *three-minute booster phone call*. First, though, you’ll need to have an initial get-together to share your plans and set a joint target date.

Bring your flow chart, goal calendar, and the coming week's calendar to this first meeting—unless you prefer to do some of the detailed planning in this book together with your buddy. In either case, get a broad overview of each other's plans and a sense of the major time blocks for each of you. The later of your two target dates will become your *joint target date*—the day when both of you will have achieved your goals. Make a verbal contract to stay together until that date. Like all target dates, it is tentative and can be readjusted any time the circumstances warrant, but you've still got to set it. When that day arrives you can have a party—and then renegotiate whether you want to stop or to stay together because you've got six new goals to work on!

Now pick an afternoon or evening when you'll both be able to meet at the same time every week. It's important to be in frequent, regular touch—a contact you can count on and look forward to. And it is very important to make these business meetings an open, official, high-priority part of your life—not something you just sneak in when you have time. *The commitment to your buddy is a commitment to yourself and your goals.* It doesn't have to take up more than an hour a week, but family demands and social activities should be planned around it, not vice versa. If you're out of town or you have a sick child or some other good reason why you can't make it, you will report in to your buddy by phone at the regular time.

Before you end your setting-up meeting, go over your next week's calendars with each other. You write down what your buddy is planning to do each day. If either of you thinks you could use a “booster” phone call on a particular day, write that into your schedules too: “You call me Wednesday evening to find out whether I called the director of the museum. I'm going to call you Friday noon to see if you wrote your poem.” (Note: don't always wait for your buddy to ask for a “booster” call. You ask him when he thinks he might need one. A little loving push every now and then is very much a part of the buddy system. So is the snarled reply, “For Chrissake get off my back!” Because you'll be urging each other to do things that are uncomfortable, an occasional flare-up of resentment is inevitable. It's just Hard Times. Handle it with awareness and humor.)

Now for your weekly procedure.

Weekly Business Meeting

I call this a business meeting because it is exactly that. It is not a kaffee klatsch; it is not a beer-and-football party; it is not a consciousness—raising group. It is a goal-oriented strategy session, and the minute it turns into anything else, it's not going to work.

The problem is, you're friends. You like each other. And it's very hard for people who like each other to get down to business, because they have such a good time together. On top of that, you may not be used to practical talk about goals, achievements, plans and problems, all of it taking place "between friends." Sometimes we have a lot of trouble taking ourselves and each other seriously in that dimension. Women especially tend to slide over into the realm of feelings, personalities, and relationship, where we feel at home and can go on for hours. To prevent this from happening, you've got to make your business meetings stick to a couple of rules.

1. Be on time. This sounds like a small thing, but it's the essence of self-respect. You try not to be late for an appointment with your doctor or your boss, because you respect them and you want the feeling to be mutual. Well, your weekly business meeting is an appointment with your future—with the person you can become. So no matter how you feel on the meeting day, try hard to be on time. And expect the same from your buddy.

2. Use a clock or a kitchen timer. This will structure the meeting and help you keep to the point. Each of you gets a maximum of half an hour, divided up roughly as follows:

5 minutes: Report in. Tell what you did—didn't do—in the past week, and if you did it, what were the results. Your buddy will have it all written down from the previous week and will expect a report on each item. If you haven't done any of the things you said you were going to do, that isn't the worst thing in the world. You just come in and say, "I didn't do anything." But usually you did do something; and you just don't realize it. You start out, "I didn't do anything. Oh, well, I did call so-and-so, but he wasn't in." And so you get the confirmation you can't always give yourself that you've really done a great deal. (Here your buddy is fulfilling the same report-in and feedback function that an Actions & Feelings Journal fulfills when you're working alone.)

20 minutes: Problems and solutions. Now tell about any problems you ran into, and invite your buddy's suggestions. But watch out: if the problems you bring up have an emotional ingredient, air it out in a Hard Times session first, or your attempts at problem-solving will be a spectacular failure. Here's where you'll have to be alert and attentive to each other. You can't always pick up on the need to complain in yourself, but there's no mistaking the "yes-but" game or that heavy, dragging tone in someone else's voice. Try to have fun with Hard Times. Complain until you feel lightened and ready to go on, but *set yourself a limit of 10 minutes*. Even bitching and moaning can be done efficiently in the service of your goal. Then get down to brainstorming and barn-raising.

Five minutes: Scheduling. Update your master list of unscheduled actions, adding any suggestions from your buddy that you want to act on, and then lay out your next week's plan of action: what you're going to do on what day. Be sure to write in any booster calls you're expecting from your buddy, because knowing those calls are coming in will keep you on the ball. Your buddy should write down a copy of your schedule, including the times s/he's promised to call you. And then it's his or her turn.

After this basic one-hour business meeting is over, you can do things like rehearse an interview or draft a resume (you'll be very up for it); you can sit around and fantasize about how great it'll be when you both have your goals; you can open a bottle of wine and gossip all night; or you can go home. I really want you to experience what it's like to walk out and say, "I'll see you next week and tell you what happened—and I'll talk to you Wednesday on the phone."

The Three-Minute Booster Phone Call

A phone call from your buddy in the middle of the week can give you a shot of courage and motivation when you need it most: just before you've got to do something difficult, or just after you've done something difficult, or both ("Are you ready to leave for your interview? OK, I'll expect you to call me the minute you get out of there and tell me how it went"). I don't mean only those calls you've promised to make at your weekly business meeting, but also an occasional impulsive holler for help, advice, congratulations, or just to touch base. If you and your buddy make it part of your verbal contract to be available to each other over the telephone, it will help both of you not to

feel alone. But like any other mutual-aid arrangement, it can get out of hand. If the person you team up with has any “baby” tendencies at all (see Chapter 7), after a while you’re going to cringe every time the phone rings. Again, the best preventive is a rule.

No call should be more than three minutes. Besides being cheaper, this three-minute limit will remind you to value both your own time and your buddy’s. Now that you have a goal, you are living in a *time frame*, and for women and other former nonwinners that’s a whole new ballgame, one that’s going to take some practice. People who don’t live in a time frame have nothing to do but pour out their concern for each other and take care of each other for years, but people in a goal-directed work situation have to distinguish between linear time, which is for getting things done, and free or “global” time, which is wide open for play and feeling. Linear time has to be used efficiently; global time can be squandered, like “mad money.” You can call up your buddy, say “This is the business call I said I’d make,” talk for three minutes, and then call back and talk all night if you like. Just so you get it into your head that business is business.

One more suggestion. If your buddy ever calls up and starts going on and on in a negative way, remember, whatever you do, *don’t try to fix the problem*, or you’ll never get off the phone. If s/he says, “My husband/wife doesn’t love me, I’m too fat,” don’t offer help. Saying, “Oh, no, you’re not too fat, maybe you can get another wife/husband” will only trigger the “Yes-but” game. Just listen a little more and then say, “What can I do to help? You tell me.” That little sentence is magic. If more people knew about it, Ma Bell might go broke.

Intensive Care

I don’t know where you first heard the term “the buddy system.” I picked it up in grade-school swimming class, where you had to keep an eye on another girl and she had to keep an eye on you to make sure neither of you drowned. There are times when your success buddy can be a bona fide lifesaver, too.

I mean those bad moments when there’s something you’ve got to do and you know you can’t do it. The very prospect of calling a Montessori school and asking if they need a teacher’s aide gives you appendicitis. Or you’ve got a

thesis deadline coming up and you've got that sinking sensation that you're not going to make it; your mind goes blank when you so much as look at the blank sheet of paper in the typewriter. Or you're supposed to go in for an interview and you have a strong feeling that when you reach the door you're going to turn around and go home and eat a whole bag of Fritos. What you have to do is just too hard, or you're mysteriously and horribly blocked.

This is known as a *crisis*. Sooner or later it happens to everyone, and there are three danger points in the pursuit of your goal when it's particularly likely to happen:

Crisis Point 1: At the beginning, when the field you're venturing out in—or maybe directed action itself—is new to you, and you have no solid experience of success to counteract your fantasies of disaster.

Crisis Point 2: Whenever you have to do something you don't want to do in order to get to something you do. No matter how ingeniously you've done your brainstorming, almost any goal you head for is going to require a few steps you don't much care for. Like practicing scales when you want to play jazz improvisations. Like taking a calculus course when you want to be a marine biologist. Like finishing your thesis. (Nobody wants to finish a thesis.) These can cause major crises of inaction, because in the short run it feels nicer to sit behind the roadblock and daydream about your goal than to grapple with the roadblock so you can go get your goal. A roadblock is also handy to hide behind if the idea of actually getting your goal is still a little scary. I'd wager that most chronically unfinished theses owe their long lives to a combination of these factors.

Crisis Point 3: When you face the jump to a new level of risk or visibility. I know a burgeoning writer who had a field day with her first steps, but froze up on the day she reread what she'd written and realized that not only was she serious about her work, she was actually good. And Andrea felt very comfortable with her camera after three months of taking pictures on her own, but the day she made an appointment to show her prints to a professional photographer, she freaked out. That's only natural.

I've told you the story of Matthew, the man who hadn't painted for twenty years and whose goal was to get back into it for his own pleasure. He progressed without a hitch from making sketches on his own to taking

private drawing lessons in his home, and finally to life drawing classes at a small art school. Heartened by that triumph over timidity, he enrolled in a painting class at a prestigious art school—and he crashed. He walked in and walked out again and said, “I can’t do it. Everyone in there can paint but me.”

The first thing I said to him was, “You can’t stop now. When you’re through being scared, that’s different. Right now you get to panic, you get to feel lousy, you get to hate yourself, but you don’t get to stop painting!” And that’s the first rule for you, too, any time you hit a crisis. Never, *never give up or change your goal when you’re feeling scared, discouraged, or depressed*. Once you get past the rough spot and you’re feeling good again, you are free to change your goal if it really isn’t doing much for you. But *not while you’re down!* When you’re down what you need more than anything else is to keep going, but it’s awfully hard to do that alone. You’ll make it if you have someone to hold your hand every step of the way. That’s *Intensive Care*.

What Matthew did was to get a buddy to go with him to that painting class every night for a week. To be more precise, his friend Sharon dragged him to class and to make sure he went in the door. Sharon would be waiting for him two hours later when the class was over, and they’d go out and have a stiff drink together. The second week Matthew went to class on his own—a little unsteadily, but he went. He met Sharon after class a couple of times, but mostly he just checked in with her on the phone right before class to say, “Here goes.” At the end of those two weeks Matthew called Sharon up and said, “Thank you for making me do it. You couldn’t drag me away from that class now.”

You don’t have to be working in the buddy system to set up Intensive Care for yourself, though it helps. But in a pinch you can ask a good friend or family member to see you through a crisis. It’s important for them—and you—to realize that this isn’t a full-fledged nervous breakdown. It’s just a temporary case of stage fright, and you need somebody to shove you lovingly out under the lights. With that understanding, if you’re facing a difficult interview or performance, you can have someone come with you right to the door and be waiting to give you a big hug and a hot bowl of soup when you come out. You can also ask for *crisis calls*.

Crisis calls are indicated when you can just feel that you've got a bad week coming up. You might say to your buddy (or appropriate substitute), "Help. I've got a thirty-page proposal to write this week and I can't." Or your buddy might spot the signs of an impending crisis. So she or he says, "All right, I want you to call me at nine every morning before you sit down at the typewriter. I need to hear from you at eleven with at least one paragraph written. And then I want to hear from you at four." In a crisis, your buddy gets to give you orders just like a school teacher. (Remember s/he is "the appointed representative of your best self.") That way, when you're blocked, you're not alone with it. You have someone to get you started in the morning and someone to report to at the end of the work day. Frequent crisis calls also help to break up an imposing task into manageable units: one paragraph, one page, one phone call at a time.

You won't need Intensive Care very often. In fact, once may be enough. Once you've had the experience of keeping going through a crisis, the world will be a different place for you. You'll have a solid, tangible achievement to be proud of, and you'll be less afraid of your fears—if they couldn't stop you this time, why should they ever stop you again? But to crash through that barrier the first time, you need help. Matthew needed it. I needed it. And I still want a loyal team on my side whenever I've got something grueling or scary to do—or something wonderful to celebrate.

Let the lone cowboy walk off into the sunset. He's a movie myth and the director is yelling, "Cut!!" Real cowboys rode the range in twos and threes, so they'd have somebody to help them out when a cow got stuck in the mud . . . and someone to drink coffee and play guitar with at night. Sharing goals works. It's based on the way we are.

I ran into Matthew about a year after he successfully weathered his crisis, and I asked him, "How's your painting going?"

He said, "You know, thanks to Sharon, I really did what I wanted to do. I carried a sketch pad around with me all the time, and I filled our apartment with canvases. I've got to put some of them in storage now to make room for the piano. That's right, I'm buying a piano! I've found someone to give me lessons. Of course, I'm scared to death."

"But I know now that I can do anything."