



LIBBY GILL & CO

Assemble Your Own Customized Support Squad

Recruit allies, fans, and supporters before you need them.

By Libby Gill

Back when I was an entertainment executive, I used to attend management retreats at ritzy resorts in Laguna Beach or Palm Springs. The chairman would bring his team from business development, finance and marketing, who would gather to discuss company issues, ending each session with a rousing chorus of the boss' trademark chant, "Costs down, revenues up!"

While they were focused on the studio's problems, I'd fantasize about having my own corporate retreat attended by brainy folks dedicated to sorting out my personal and professional life. My very own Support Squad.

I'd picture myself at the head of the table wearing an Armani suit and Tiffany earrings (this is my fantasy, after all) while my team brainstormed business strategies, overhauled my fitness regimen, and advised me on my love life.

When I left the corporate world and decided to go it alone, at a time when most people thought I was too old to be publishing my first book and starting a business, I knew my Support Squad would help me prove them wrong. There was just one problem. I didn't have a Support Squad.

I decided to enlist a team to help me start my coaching and consulting business as I pursued my writing career and adjusted to single life. I started by asking my former boss, Andy, if he would serve as my business mentor. He immediately said yes, and only later confessed that he'd had no clue what I needed, but hoped I did. Emboldened by my first successful recruit, I added a financial adviser, a physical trainer, a landscape gardener, even a group of girlfriends.

Some, such as the financial adviser and fitness trainer, were paid professionals. Others, such as the gardening pal and the girlfriends, offered their support simply out of the goodness of their hearts. It wasn't always clear exactly what role each person would play, but as long as they were enthusiastic, or at least willing, to help me change my life, I knew we'd figure it out as we went along. And we did.

What kind of support do you need? Recruiting your Support Squad isn't difficult. Start by making a list of people who might help you meet your goals. And if you don't know what your goals are, clarifying them can be your team's first endeavor. Here's how to build your squad:

- **State your goal.** It could be, "I'd like to begin a fitness program," or "I want to start my own business."
- **Make your request.** "I'd like you to be my workout buddy," or "I want to hire you as my business coach."
- **Negotiate next steps.** Whether it's a paid professional or a friend, determine what form their support will take with regard to timing, location, length of commitment and payment, if any.
- **Evaluate.** If your goals are clear and measurable, you'll be able to determine if your team has helped you reach them. Add new members as the need arises.
- **Be sure to give back.** Volunteer to be a part of someone else's Support Squad.

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