

SUBMISSION BOOTCAMP

BUILDING A SUPPORT TEAM

Writing can be hugely isolating. The fact you're reading *Mslexia* indicates you find inspiration and/or solace in connecting with other writers, and I agree wholeheartedly with poet, essayist and critic Katha Pollitt's assertion that, 'one of the very important ideas of feminism to me has always been women helping and supporting each other'. A quick poll amongst my writing friends reveals that we have all turned to fellow writers for wisdom, inspiration, support and the all-important kick-up-the-butt.

WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic, professor of Business Psychology at University College London and author of *Confidence*, argues that 'when you make your goals public, you're committing to them'. And research shows that we're more likely to stick to a goal if we have made ourselves publicly accountable.

In research published in the *British Journal of Health Psychology*, 91 per cent of people who planned to do more exercise by actually writing when and where they would exercise ended up following through, while those who didn't showed no increase in exercise levels. The conclusion? Intention can be more powerful than motivation.

So one way to optimise the chances of getting that novel finished or that short story sent out is to publicly state *when* and *how* you are going to do it. Connecting with other writers might be the incentive you need.

FACE-TO-FACE

Do you want to meet your support team face-to-face? I've been part of a writing group for over five years. Together, we've celebrated publication and competition wins, and commiserated on rejections. Meeting the group leaves me feeling happy and inspired. Research backs this up: Gretchen

Rubin, *New York Times*' bestselling author and blogger on the subject of happiness, writes that 'people who claim to have at least five friends with whom they can discuss important problems are 60 per cent more likely to describe themselves as "very happy"'. □

CREATING TOGETHER

You might like to take your support team one step further and create together. Anna Jefferson, award-winning playwright and founder of Broken Leg Theatre (www.brokenlegtheatre.com), co-wrote her latest play, *Three Generations of Women*, with writer Alice Trueman. She describes the process as 'enriching and challenging. We learnt that honesty is the key to writing together. And to not be proud or protective at the cost of quality.'

THE RIGHT LIGHTING

But perhaps you crave serious solitude? Susan Cain, author of the seminal book for introverts, *Quiet*, reminds us that 'the secret to life is to put yourself in the right lighting. For some, it's a Broadway spotlight; for others, a lamplit desk'. If the idea of networking or joining a writing group fills you with terror, social media - used wisely - is a potent tool for connection. Not only can you hold yourself accountable to your goals, but you get to personally 'converse' with writers you admire. It doesn't get much more inspirational than that.

ALL FOR ONE, ONE FOR ALL

When you succeed, you pave the way for other women to follow. Sharing successes without embarrassment will, I hope, one day be an integral part of women connecting. In the words of civil rights activist, Dolores Huerta: 'We as women should shine light on our accomplishments and not feel egotistical when we do. It's a way to let the world know that women can accomplish great things.' □

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TRY THIS

- ▶ Book a writers' retreat - check listings at the back of this magazine for ideas and set yourself the challenge of making three new writing friends whilst there.
- ▶ Got a big goal? Break it down into manageable steps, and publicly share *when* and *how* you're going to make each step happen.
- ▶ Pay good feelings forward on Facebook and Twitter by leaving positive comments and re-tweeting success stories.
- ▶ Join or start a writing group. Or start small by finding a writing buddy to help keep you on track.
- ▶ If you've read something you like, tell the author - it's a great way to make a new writing friend.
- ▶ Revel in the success of other writers. See it as a reminder that success is available and yours, too, will come.

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