

*Hélène T. Stelian*  
**COACHING**



**Guide to  
Accountability Partnerships**

# What is an **ACCOUNTABILITY PARTNER** and how does she help?

I am a big advocate of reciprocal accountability partnerships. This powerful combination of cheerleading and challenging, with of course the commitment to action, is the perfect recipe for progress against your goals.

**In fact, a study by Dr. Gail Matthews out of Dominican University and Dr. Stephen Kraus out of Harvard University showed that those who had accountability achieved 44% more of their goals than those who did not.**

I practice what I preach! I partner with other women coaches to support each other on our goals. We meet monthly to share progress updates, brainstorm ideas, problem solve, share resources, encourage each other, and commit to our goals for the coming month.

In thinking about the power of my own experience, I wanted to encourage you to consider an accountability partnership as well.

When choosing a partner, I suggest that you NOT choose a friend or family member. Those closest to us may have their own agendas for us and may not be invested in some of the changes we'd like to make. Because they care about us, they may be "too nice" and be reluctant to give us difficult feedback. Or they may feel too free to be judgmental or critical.

Whoever you end up choosing as your accountability partner, it's helpful to get clear on best practices to maximize the success and enjoyment these partnerships provide.

# DOS

*and*

# DON'TS

## **Choose one goal.**

Each of you should work on one critical objective only and make that the focus of your accountability partnership. Multiple goals will reduce the chances of progress against them and make it challenging for your partner to support you adequately. Watch the Choose Your One Big Goal Challenge in the Classes in this portal for help set your priorities.

## **Spell out your goal.**

Follow the P-U-R-E model as outlined in both the Choose Your One Big Goal and the 8 Secrets to Reach Your Goal classes in this THRIVE portal to make sure your goal is Profound, Unique, Realistic, and Explicit. Get specific on your goal's next steps so your partner can hold you accountable to these, week by week.

## **Give AND take.**

This is meant to be a two-way relationship. You get the benefits and you provide them as well. You are here to help each other succeed. So make sure you share openly AND make the time and space for your partner to do the same.

## **Be dependable.**

Schedule regular meetings and show up every time, on time. Make these an absolute priority. In between meetings, be available for brief interactions as needed. Be engaged and committed to the relationship.

## **Be respectful.**

Listen without interrupting. Lead with kindness and compassion. When you wish to challenge your partner, ask for permission. Then provide feedback respectfully.

## **Be a cheerleader.**

Encourage your partner's action taking, celebrate her successes and her strength in the face of setbacks. Show her you care about her and are proud of her.

## **Brainstorm solutions.**

Obstacles are bound to come up on your partner's journey. Help her come up with creative ideas to overcome them. Share your knowledge and resources generously.

## **Try to fix things for your partner.**

It's very important for your partner to maintain agency and ownership of her action steps. You may provide suggestions or introductions but it's up to her to make decisions and do the work.

## **Betray your partner's confidences.**

You are in a position of trust and should plan to keep private whatever your partner tells you. Always ask for permission before sharing anything about her with anyone else.

## **Present yourself as perfect.**

Share your struggles along with your successes. This will make you more relatable and easier to talk to.

## **Let your partner off the hook.**

There are times when she may not be able to complete her commitments, with good reason, but if you are seeing a pattern of excuses, have a frank discussion about this. Each of you must take responsibility for your mistakes as a way to grow and learn.

## **Be judgmental.**

You can ask probing questions and gently challenge your partner, but it's not your place to draw conclusions about her or put labels on her. Lead with empathy.

## **Phone it in.**

Demonstrate your commitment to your own goal by taking action against it, consistently. And demonstrate your commitment to your partner by showing up ready to listen and focus, eliminating other distractions.

# Starting Out

Set up a first meeting to gauge whether you are a good match and, if so, to agree on how you'll collaborate. In that first interaction, discuss the following topics, allowing time for each of you to share:

## Goals:

What is the goal you are working on for which you are seeking accountability? Is your partner willing and able to support you on this goal?

## Expectations:

What do you need from your partner? Do you need cheerleading, tough love, advice, or something else? What does support look like to you? How do you prefer being challenged? It is your responsibility to articulate your needs clearly and to be honest about whether you can support your partner in the way she desires.

## Duration:

How long do you expect to be working on this goal and/or wish to have an accountability partner? If your partner's goal is expected to take 3 months to achieve but your timeframe is closer to a year, this may not be an ideal partnership. You may wish to set up a trial period to work together, then recommit or choose to part ways.

## Availability:

When are you available for regular accountability meetings? What days/times work best? Make sure your time zones and schedules allow for times that work for both of you. How often would you like to hold these meetings? I recommend weekly meetings but some may prefer to go longer in between sessions (but make sure to meet at least monthly). You may also choose a hybrid model with a daily email or text check-in and twice monthly calls/Zooms. How long would you like each meeting to be? This may depend on the frequency: For weekly check-ins, 20 minutes (10 minutes each) may be sufficient while for monthly meetings, an hour (30 minutes each) may be necessary.

## Communication:

Do you prefer to meet on phone, Facetime, Zoom, or in person? How will you contact each other in between meetings? Email, text, phone? How often are you ok hearing from each other?

# Regular Check-Ins

Here's a structure for your regular check-ins:

Take turns being on the "hot seat," for half the time allotted to this meeting.

When it's your turn, share a progress update since your last meeting, including wins and challenges, ask for support from your partner (questions, brainstorm, problem-solving, advice, options, etc.), commit to next steps, anticipate obstacles you may encounter as you move forward and strategies to address them.

When you're on the receiving end, listen carefully, give feedback, help ideate solutions, and make note of your partner's commitments and how you'll support her.

It's a good practice to email each other your commitments so you both have them in writing for the next meeting.

# Hitting Your Stride

As you work together, you'll get to know each other and your strengths and needs better. You'll hopefully continue to make progress toward your goals, supporting each other every step of the way.

Be patient, letting the partnership evolve as you make progress toward your goals. You may need to adjust your needs and schedules. Be flexible whenever possible.

# Ending the Partnership

If you feel at any time that the relationship has served its function or is not working for you, let your partner know and either renegotiate your partnership or choose to end it cordially. When possible, take some time, in your last session, to validate each other's progress and thank each other for the support you each provided.

*Here's to supporting  
each other  
on our journeys!*

*Hélène T. Stelian*

**MIDLIFE MENTOR**

**HeleneTStelian.com**

