

New Year's Resolution? Get a Little Help From Your Friends

We've all had New Year's resolutions that we've broken. One year, I resolved to learn how to touch-type instead of hunting and pecking for each key. How'd that turn out? I am hunting and pecking this right now. Another year, I vowed to take piano lessons; I didn't make it through January. Time and time again when I went for it alone, I'd get busy or just let it go.

But the resolution I kept? Two years ago, I was with my childhood girlfriends for New Year's Eve and said I wanted to keep a journal of the milestones in my children's lives. One of them suggested that I share some of it with them every month. They held me accountable, cheering me on when I sent entries and reminding me when I fell behind. A year later, I was still going strong.

This is the idea behind [Lean In Circles](#) -- small groups of women and men who meet regularly to share and learn together. Research has shown that we are more confident, learn more, and accomplish more when we work in small teams; everything from book clubs to professional organizations to health groups have demonstrated the effectiveness of peer mentorship. For women in particular, having the support of others can make a real difference, in part because we consistently underestimate our abilities.

Today, there are more than 21,000 Lean In Circles in over eighty-four countries -- each one helping its members pursue their dreams. Their focus, like their membership, is all over the map. In Delhi, a Circle of female computer science majors are encouraging more women to go into this male-dominated field. At Harvard, a Circle of Asian-American men are tackling the cultural challenges they face. In Montreal, a Circle of moms helped a member fulfill her dream of becoming a writer. In Palo Alto, a Circle of Latina immigrants work together to learn English and find jobs. And an online Circle of bloggers proclaimed their mission by naming themselves "Breaking Glass and Kicking Ass."

As different as these Circles are, what they have in common is that the members are there to support one another. They build one another's confidence to set ambitious goals and work to achieve them. Eighty percent of Circle members credit their Circle with a positive change in their life -- from taking on a new challenge to building better professional relationships to negotiating for what they deserve. Caroline Jureller, who leads eight Circles at American University, said that Lean In shifted her from asking "Why?" to asking "Why not?"

I've had the opportunity to meet with Lean In Circles all over the world and see firsthand how these amazing groups are leaning in together. I met with women in Beijing who are pushing back against the idea of *shengnu*, which stigmatizes them as "leftover women" since they are over 27 and not married. I sat down with female military leaders in Minnesota who are creating mentorship programs to encourage women officers within their ranks. In Miami, I spoke with rescued victims of child sex trafficking about the trauma of their pasts and their plans to build new futures. Circles of working women from Dublin to Seoul to New York have told me how they have changed jobs, asked for and

gotten promotions and raises, and changed their expectations for partnership at home. Circles of students report that they have applied for jobs they had been afraid to compete for, taken classes they previously thought were too hard, and stepped up to new leadership roles.

As we head into the New Year, we asked a few of our Circle members what they plan to accomplish in 2015. Carolyn Vreeman, in Maple Grove, Minnesota, has resolved to hone her public speaking skills -- and will practice with her Circle. Hannah Schlacter, a student at the University of Illinois, wants to do a better job of managing her stress and plans to have weekly "take our temperature" check-ins with her Circle to make sure she's being open about how she's feeling. Chong Eng, in Penang, Malaysia, is starting Lean In@Penang to raise awareness about how to live a fulfilling personal and professional life. And Kevin Linskey in Connecticut is using his Circle to help him focus on balancing career and family.

And me? I am going back to the resolution I have failed to keep for the past several years -- to meditate for ten minutes every day. (Okay, maybe five minutes a day five days a week.) This time, I am doing it with the support of my childhood girlfriends, who are now my Lean In Circle. They have made New Year's resolutions too, and we plan to use our monthly check-ins to share with one another how we are doing.

As we start a new year, I encourage each of you to join or start a [Lean In Circle](#). Surround yourself with peers who will help you dream big -- and then take the steps that will allow you to realize those dreams. Find people who help you stop thinking "Why?" and instead ask "Why not?" Support them as they support you. Whatever your New Year's resolution may be, you are more likely to keep it if you lean in together.

Sheryl Sandberg is the COO of Facebook and the founder of LeanIn.Org.

Learn more about how to join or start a Lean In Circle today at [LeanIn.Org/Circles](#).