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The Verdict on Business Huddles

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Portraits of women entrepreneurs.

Several weeks ago, during a [meeting](#) of our [business group](#), Susan Parker raved about huddles — short, daily meetings that help keep employees moving toward a common goal (here's [a guide to holding productive huddles](#)). She and her sister, who own [Bari Jay](#), started huddling at the suggestion of their business coach. Ms. Parker said the practice kept the entire team clearer about what needed to be done and helped the two owners focus on big-picture goals.

The business group members Jessica Johnson and Alexandra Mayzler were intrigued. In the weeks since Ms. Parker described the concept, both owners have given huddles a try. They shared their experiences with the business coach [Susan Martin](#), who joined the most recent meeting of the group.

Ms. Johnson, who owns [Johnson Security Bureau](#), said she “borrowed the huddle idea” with hopes of helping her employees see the big picture. “We found we were talking to everyone in the office, but no one necessarily knew what the other was doing or how it impacted the business,” she said. Ms. Johnson also used the huddles to ask key questions that helped the team focus on the company’s priorities, not busywork.

They had the desired result, Ms. Johnson said: “breaking down barriers and encouraging cross-functional communication.” For example, during one huddle the bookkeeper listened to the other team members’ presentations and suggested that she could create financial reports to support some of their activities.

Ms. Mayzler, who initially worried that huddles might be a waste of time, has also tried them at her company, [Thinking Caps Tutoring](#). Her team meets daily, Monday through Thursday, for less than 15 minutes. During the huddles, each person explains what they accomplished the day before and what they plan to do that day. If any employees are stuck, they can raise an issue to be resolved after the meeting.

“It’s been great,” said Ms. Mayzler. “I have a better sense of what’s going on, so I’m a little less crazy,” she said. The huddles have also helped team members share information. For example, one staff member mentioned that she was writing a learning plan for a student. This prompted another person to ask how to write one. On another occasion, a New York office employee commented that it was time to start summer planning, which reminded the Texas office to start doing the same.

Every Monday or every other Monday, during the huddle, one person presents what Ms. Mayzler called “a big question” for the team to consider. Recently, Ms. Mayzler asked everyone to brainstorm a new tagline for the company. Now that Ms. Mayzler has graduated from college, the company’s old one, “students teaching students” no longer fits.

“How have huddles helped you get to your big goals?” Ms. Martin asked.

“I know what’s going on without feeling like I have to micromanage stuff,” said Ms. Mayzler. “I don’t have to do that annoying check-in with everyone.” And now that her employees are talking more among themselves, they need not look to Ms. Mayzler for all the answers.

Noting that Ms. Parker has been huddling for the longest time, Ms. Martin asked her to describe her results.

“Similar to what Alexandra was just saying, I know what’s going on as does everyone else,” said Ms. Parker. Previously, certain departments at Bari Jay didn’t communicate with each other. “We were a disaster, and my sister and I were like the middle men,” she said.

“How has that helped you reach your goals?” Ms. Martin asked.

“I didn’t even have goals before,” Ms. Parker said. “My sister and I can’t do it alone. Otherwise we’d be a company of two people. So, now we have 17 people working toward the same goal,” which is to grow the business.

Have you tried huddles? If so, please tell us how they have worked for you.