

How To Grow With Your Friends - Part 1



This blog piece “How To Grow With Your Friends” could change your life forever. It will teach you, through an easy to read story narrative, the whats, whys and hows of... ‘how you can grow with your friends’. Now, exactly what that means you will read about soon enough. The purpose of starting with this little introduction is simply to ask you to go into this article with the understanding that you are about to encounter a truly **POWERFUL** idea. As the idea becomes clear consider how much of an impact it could make in your own life... Enjoy!

I’d like to introduce you to Dani. Dani found an incredible way to infuse new energy into her life and to grow towards her goals in a way that she had never done before. I am sharing with you her amazing story. It could be that you will recognise similarities to your own life (regardless of whether you are male or female). What’s more, it could be that the epiphany that turned everything around for Dani and her friends may well be a solution that you too can use to energize and invigorate your own life and to actualise your personal spiritual goals in the most amazing way!

Dani’s story starts with her sitting in a McDonald’s restaurant, grazing on a Big Mac and feeling frustrated and despondent. Why? Well, 6 weeks previously Dani had gone to shul on Rosh Hashanah and had made a commitment to herself to give up McDonald’s and all non kosher restaurants in the new year. As she sat in that restaurant chewing her burger (not her first Big Mac of the year) she realised that not only had her goal to quit going to non kosher restaurants come to nothing, but that this was the story of her life! This was just one more in a long line of started but never completed goals. As she meditated on this reality she felt more and more pathetic.

“Why?!” Dani said to herself! “Why can I never complete anything?! ... I feel like such a loser!”

But as Dani pondered this thought she realised that it wasn’t completely true. Dani had done well throughout her schooling and now had a good job which she was also doing really well in. It was specifically her personal goals, her ‘spiritual’ goals which she had a hard time following through on... Goals like

cutting out those non kosher restaurants, cutting out her derogatory conversations, being a better daughter to her parents, putting a little more 'Shabbos' into her Friday nights and Saturdays... The question was why? Why had Dani always been able to follow through on her academic and career goals but not her personal growth goals. It's not as if her personal growth goals were any less important to her.

Dani finished her meal and then with this question buzzing around inside of her mind she lugged herself back to work. It wasn't until Sunday when Dani met her two friends Bianca and Jessica for coffee at Jozi Blue that the answer materialised... And it was this answer and the brilliant idea that came out of it that changed Dani and her friends' lives from that day forth (and that you may find could energize and uplift your life in the profoundest of ways too.)

"Why is it I can do fine at school and I'm doing well at work but I can't follow through on the most basic of personal goals?" Dani lamented to her friends that Sunday morning at Jozi Blue as they sipped their cappuccinos.

Bianca and Jessica just nodded their heads to show they understood from personal experience what Dani was feeling. They also had a long list of started but never completed personal spiritual goals.

There was silence for at least a minute as each of the young ladies just sipped their drinks in quiet contemplation. And then...

"I'VE GOT IT!" screamed Dani.

A few people turned around to see what Dani had got.

"I've got it!" Dani said again, this time more quietly, but with no less excitement in her voice.

"What? What have you got?" Bianca asked.

"I have the answer!" Dani simply replied. "I know why we were all able to follow through and do well at school and why we are doing well in our careers and yet we fail to follow through in our personal, spiritual goals!"

"So why?" Bianca and Jessica asked together with keen interest on their faces.

“It’s simple!” Dani began. “And now I know how we are going to turn things around in our lives from this day onwards too!”

“Nu! Let’s hear it!” Jessica urged.

“It’s like this...” Dani explained “You see, you can break every goal down into 3 stages...”

“This sounds complicated” piped Bianca.

“Its not. Just give me a moment... There’s a certain point I want to bring out... So... Stage 1 to achieving any goal is the inspiration stage. It’s when a vision of you having attained your goal, that thing which is important to you, flashes into your mind. So for example, you see yourself 10kg lighter or able to converse in another language or whatever it is, and that vision brings with it a tremendous feeling of excitement and enthusiasm to start pursuing that goal so you can truly achieve it and have it.”

“Yup. I’ve experienced those moments of inspiration.” said Jessica nodding her head. “But I don’t always follow through? What’s the secret of following through?”

“I’m getting there” Dani continued. “After stage 1, the inspiration stage, comes stage 2, the hard work stage. You see the inner motivation that floods our system with excitement and enthusiasm in stage 1 eventually dies down... When it has we are left to face the hard work of having to keep to our eating and exercise programme to lose those extra kgs or the hard work of having to knuckle down and learn those verbs and nouns to master the new language... but with much less inner motivation to push us through it. This is the stage where most people give up.”

“O.K. I hear that.” Jessica said. “So what’s the solution?!”

“Wait a second. Let me just complete the last stage... So... Stage 3 is reached when we have somehow pushed through with the hard work and have achieved and actualised what we had originally visualised, a better figure, being able to speak a new language... whatever it is... Now... the million dollar question is how do we get through stage 2, the hard work stage, when the inspiration from stage 1 is no longer flowing through us and motivating us to do what we need to do to push all the way through to stage 3?”

“Yes! That is my question!” said Jessica.

“Well...” Dani continued. “The answer is simply this... Why did you and I do well at school if school was so many years of hard work? How did we manage to hang in there day after day and do our homework and get our projects completed and learn the material for our exams when we so often didn’t feel like it and would rather have been doing other things?”

“Go on...” said Jessica.

“Well, we were compelled to do what we needed to do by external forces. My mom took me to school every day. Even if I felt tired or hadn’t completed all my work she MADE me go to school! My teachers didn’t give me a choice as to whether I wanted to come to class or not or do my projects or not. If I chose not to I would have gotten into a lot of trouble! All of our friends who were doing well at school contributed to an environment that pushed us to also strive to do well. We followed through until the end because we had EXTERNAL FORCES that pushed us even when we didn’t feel like it.”

“I hear it.” Bianca nodded.

“And now let’s look at our personal spiritual goals? You know what... I didn’t even tell one other person that I had made a goal to quit eating at non kosher restaurants. No wonder I didn’t get too far... When my initial inspiration had faded and I felt hungry and in need of a refuel and the McDonald’s was beckoning to me from across the street, I just followed my hunger pangs and followed the path my feet had travelled so many times before. If I would have told my kosher Jewish work mates about my goal and would have made a plan to go with them to the kosher cafés or restaurants that they go to for lunch it would have been a lot easier. They would have reminded me to come with them, pushed me, encouraged me!”

“So Dani...” Jessica clarified “Let me see if I understand what you’re saying... You’re saying that the way that we can ensure that we will achieve our personal, spiritual goals is by setting up an external infrastructure with external motivators that will push us and support us to follow through and achieve our goals?”

“Exactly Jessica... But it’s more than that... You see, like I said, I would have done better if I would have made arrangements to lunch with my Jewish colleagues who only eat kosher and asked them to help me and support my goal. I’m sure they would have been happy to. But the epiphany that I

experienced just a moment ago is something that I can use for every one of my goals... You see, WE meet more or less every Sunday morning for coffee. Right?!"

"Yes..."

"So, I want US to use some of our special time together each week to create a supportive, motivating environment for each other."

"What do you mean?" Jessica inquired.

"Well, I'm saying that each of us have personal and spiritual goals that we would like to pursue but that we are likely to fail in if we don't employ a new strategy... If we don't create for ourselves a constant positive, supportive environment to support us and motivate us to keep at our goals and to make us accountable to someone other than ourself... And, we are friends who meet each and every week... Let's use some of our time each week to be that supportive group for each other!"

"Wow!" Exclaimed Bianca. "That's a pretty interesting idea. Well, how would we do that?"

"Well, I guess the first step is for each of us to choose one specific personal, spiritual goal that we'd like to work on. We can share it with each other and say why it's important to us. Then, we will each need to formulate a simple, realistic plan for how we are going to achieve that goal. You know making a plan is not so hard. I know 3 simple steps that anyone can use to get them to achieve any goal."

"Wow! I'm curious to hear those 3 things!" chimed Jessica.

"Well, I'll tell you them! *[You can read them in part 2 – link at the bottom]* Anyway... After we each have our simple, 3 pronged plan, then each week when we meet we will take turns speaking out how we did following our plan for that week... What went well and what didn't... and for the areas that didn't, how we can tweak things so the next week they will be better... I think that if we will keep meeting every week and giving each other the space to reflect upon and talk about how we are doing in pursuing our goal and how we are going to tweak things if they aren't going as planned, then we will all achieve great things!

“Hey! Dani. We have to do exactly this where I work.” Bianca commented “At work they call it a Mastermind Group. I actually have to meet with my Mastermind Group every week.”

“Hmmm... What do you do in this group?” Dani asked.

“Well... the group is there to help those who are in it with the various projects that we are each working on. We need to present our plans for how we are going to take our most important project that we are working on through to completion. Then every week we meet and present our successes and our difficulties with following those plans. The other members of the group will give positive feedback where we are doing well and help us think through where and how things can be tweaked in the areas that aren't going as well as they could be. It's really powerful. And besides the joint brainstorming regarding how to deal with problems I know that every week I will have to talk about my progress in front of everyone else and that makes me feel accountable. It really motivates me to do what I need to do during the week!

“Wow!” Dani exclaimed “That mastermind group is exactly what I'm talking about, except I'm saying to apply the concept to our lives, our growth! And you know what... If people in the business world use this type of thing to help them with business projects, why shouldn't we use it in our personal lives to help us with our personal growth?! I know that until now, when I have fallen regarding a personal goal I may have tried to get back at it once or twice, but in the end I always gave up. I know though that if I'm having a rough week or even a rough month and I achieve nothing that month regarding the personal goal I have set for myself, you guys will keep supporting me and I will eventually get back at my goal. Jessica, Bianca... I know that doing this will transform our lives!”

“Let's do it!” Jessica cried out “We'll call it our Growth Group!”

“I'm in!” Bianca committed.

And thus began what Dani, Bianca and Jessica called their Growth Group. And let me tell you... 3 months into it and it was bringing so much new energy and excitement into their lives... After 6 months they had each accomplished real, significant personal achievements in areas that they had never been able follow through with before. After a year they were still using their group to push themselves forwards in the areas that really mattered to them.

And where I'm going with this?

Well... If Dani, Bianca and Jessica can form a Growth Group and benefit so much from it, so can you!

Now I know that the idea might be something that you've never done before and it might be a little outside of your comfort zone and it might feel strange, but so what! It REALLY works! It can help you strive forwards in the areas that are most important to you! You CAN do it!!!... You CAN form a group with a few like minded people. If they are not your closest friends that's still fine. We don't have to reveal our deepest secrets... we just need to pick a personal, spiritual goal that is meaningful to us and our group will help provide the supportive environment that will keep us moving forward with that important personal goal.

In part two of this post (link below) I have written the practicalities and details regarding how Dani, Jessica and Bianca ran their Growth Group so you can get an idea of how you might effectively run one or be a part of one. But those are the details... The question to ask yourself right now is: Who do you want to form a Growth Group with?

How To Grow With Your Friends - Part 2

This is part 2 of How To Grow With Your Friends. If you haven't read part 1 yet you can do so [here](#).

O.K., so Dani made a Growth Group with her two good friends Bianca and Jessica. Hopefully you have decided with one or more people to form your own Growth Group, or, at least, you are thinking about doing so. If so... FANTASTIC!!!

Now, on the year anniversary of Dani, Jessica and Bianca's 1st meeting they looked back on their incredible year and they were filled with emotion. All three of them cried as they spoke out what they had achieved over the past year.

So how did they turn their goals into realities? Well, in this blog post I am going to tell you the specifics of what they did that worked. They had a very

simple formula. It worked for them and it will work for you too. And do you know how I can be so confident? A bunch of Growth Groups popped up as friends of Dani, Bianca and Jessica heard about what they were doing and wanted to do the same thing for themselves. A number of male groups were also formed (one such group being Dani, Bianca and Jessica's husbands). They all used this simple formula and it worked for all of them.

So I will give it over to you in as short and as clear a manner as I can so you can learn it, know it and apply it too.

To begin with, just before I give over the 3 step model for achieving any goal you choose, here are a few basics to consider...

How many people?:

Some say that a group consisting of 3 – 5 people is good. If you can only start with one other person, go for it!!! You may be able to include another when your Growth Group is up and running... Or... two people, you and someone else, might be perfect for you.

The time:

Find and SCHEDULE IN a time when you will be able to meet. Ideally the same time each week. If it isn't scheduled in it probably won't happen. And even when it is scheduled you have to make sure that you make that time a PRIORITY so it doesn't get pushed aside when things come up!!!

Deciding what to work on:

>> In your 1st session:

Make a list of 5 things (potential personal spiritual goals) that you'd really like to work on.

Try and prioritise your list, no.1 being the one you think will have the biggest impact for you that you are able and keen to work on now.

It's often best to start off with something very tangible. Things like 'being a more positive person' or 'loving oneself more' are great things to work on BUT they are internal and without proper guidance working on them can be difficult. A few examples of tangible and concrete goals might be: Shabbat –

Keeping kosher – Honouring one’s parents – Speech that builds rather than destroys – Praying...

Once everyone has finished making their list of goals that they’d like to pursue, each member should share and discuss the no. 1 goal that they’d like to pursue right now and why it’s important to them.

By the way, after Dani, Bianca and Jessica each selected the goal that they each wanted to work on they took turns sharing it and why they had chosen it. It sounds crazy but each of the three said that just speaking out the goal that they had chosen to another, why it was important to them and what they hoped would come from it was an incredibly powerful and empowering experience. For each of them it was the first time that they had ever spoken out a specific personal spiritual goal that they wanted to pursue to others who cared about their success and who wanted to support them.

The 3 pronged strategy to work towards your goal:

So... Dani, Jessica and Bianca and many other Growth Groups that were created saw that there are 3 essential ingredients to practically and effectively pursuing and reaching any goal. Let me explain these 3 ingredients through the prism of Dani’s, Bianca’s and Jessica’s goals...

For Dani, her goal was simply becoming kosher. That’s a very specific and concrete goal. For Bianca her goal was to take time out once a day to pray, for herself, her family and various others. This is something that she had never properly been taught to do. Jessica decided to work on what she initially called ‘being a better daughter to her parents’ but as she learnt more about it she began to refer to as ‘the mitzvah of honouring one’s father and one’s mother’. Now here are the 3 ingredients that they used to pursue and reach their goals...

[1] GET UNDERSTANDING

[2] TAKE THE NEXT STEP

[3] GET ASSISTANCE FROM ABOVE

1. GET UNDERSTANDING (the how & why)

O.K. What does this mean? Well, let’s look at Dani’s goal of only eating kosher. In order to accomplish her goal of being someone who only eats kosher she had to learn the “how’s” of keeping kosher and it also helped her a lot from a motivational perspective to be clear on the “why’s” too.

Dani who is not at all a big reader got herself a series of MP3 classes that went through the ABC's of keeping kosher... Bloodspots in eggs, cleaning cabbage from bugs, not mixing milk and meat etc. She would listen to these lessons in her car on the way to work and back. When she finished the series she started listening to it from the beginning again to review it. When she had a question regarding something that wasn't clear she asked Chana Levin, one of the ladies at her work who's husband was a Rabbi. Usually Chana was able to explain things well. For one or two questions Chana asked her husband to record the answer for Dani and to send it to her.

Within a few months of learning and reviewing the details of keeping kosher during her commute to and from work Dani had a much clearer understanding of how to keep a kosher kitchen.

Dani found the relationship she formed with Chana, who was quite a lot older than her, to be amazing. Dani saw her Growth Group as a beautiful group of supportive friends and Chana, who Dani came to see as an incredibly wise and perceptive lady, as more of a mentor than just a friend. Chana was able to give Dani perspectives and insightful observations that her growth group, as supportive as they were, at this point in their lives couldn't.

So... this idea of learning the how's and why's is the first step of the 3 pronged strategy. Jessica who's goal was to upgrade the way she behaved towards her parents found an amazing book on the subject called My father, My Mother and Me which explained everything clearly and included over 170 stories to really make the information real. This book was actually recommended by Chana Levin who met Jessica and Bianca through Dani and who became a mentor for them too.

2. TAKE THE NEXT STEP

We all know that a journey of a thousand miles starts with 1 step and that of course such a journey cannot be walked in 1 day or 1 week. For example, one cannot go from being totally non kosher to being totally kosher in 1 week. What one can do, however, (and the only way to complete such a journey) is to take one small step at a time. Dani started her kosher journey with just one step – choosing to buy her meat from kosher butchers. This was a hard step for her as she noticed the increase in price. However, through talking about it and laughing about it with her friends and with her mentor Dani she eventually accepted the price increase and felt comfortable getting her meat from places like Moshe's, Maxi's and Nussbaum's.

So, this part of the 3 pronged strategy is putting one of the things you have been reading about into action. What you consider to be the next step. One obviously can't take on everything at once. Additional steps can be added gradually over time when the time is right to add another step.

Generally smaller steps taken over longer periods of time are more likely to stick than big steps taken in rapid succession. Bianca who's goal was to pray every day worked on a new part of the Shemoneh Esrei (Amida prayer) each week. It proved too much too soon. She commented how fortunate she was to have her wonderful Growth Group to support her as she had felt like throwing in the towel after her burnout. Her friends, however, had been there for her. They had listened to her and supported her and helped her rethink her approach. Chana Levin's practical advice was also invaluable.

[3] GET ASSISTANCE FROM ABOVE

This third and last part of the three pronged strategy turned out to be a very meaningful part of Dani, Bianca and Jessica's day. Even when breaking things down into small steps, growth can be hard. It involves us doing things that we weren't doing before. It can require courage and willpower.

This last prong is to pray each day in your own words for your success (for help, strength, focus, whatever you need to pursue and achieve your goal). And because you are part of a group who want to support each other, to also pray for everyone else in your group! The prayer can be as short as 10 seconds so it can be done pretty easily at any time (although if it can be scheduled in to be done the same time each day, it is more likely that it will become a habit).

So, this is the 3 pronged approach to achieving any goal....

1. Learn about it, the how's and whys
2. Break it down into steps and take 1 small step at a time
3. Pray for your own and everyone else in your group's success

Now, there's just one last thing to know for you and your growth group to experience success. You see, this 3 part strategy explains what to do 'during the week' when you are working towards your goal – it doesn't explain how to conduct the actual Growth Group meetings or what to do when you, or any of the members experience bad days, bad weeks or even burn outs. In order to recover from one's bad days and not throw in the towel and in fact to learn

from one's failures and to use those lessons to propel oneself forwards there needs to be a strategy. This strategy was called by our group: Tracking, Sharing and Tweaking. It is actually what their Growth Group meetings were built around. Please click on the link below to read the final part of this How To Grow With Your Friends series where you will find out about Tracking, Sharing and Tweaking and thereby complete your understanding of this system so you can use it with your own Growth Group.

How To Grow With Your Friends - Part 3

TRACKING, SHARING AND TWEAKING

This is part 3 of our 3 part series for How To Grow With Your Friends. If you haven't read part 1 you can do so [here](#) (and part 2 is [here](#)).

O.K. so in the previous post we talked about what Dani, Bianca and Jessica did in their first session, (choosing and sharing their goals) and we also talked out the 3 step strategy that they used to pursue their goals (daily learning of the how's and why's, focusing on one small step to work on at a time and praying for one's own and everyone in one's group's success). Well, there's one more thing that I need to share so your Growth Group can be amazingly successful and it's to do with how Dani's group and other groups that formed conducted their weekly meetings... Dani called it Tracking, Sharing and Tweaking... Let me tell you about it...

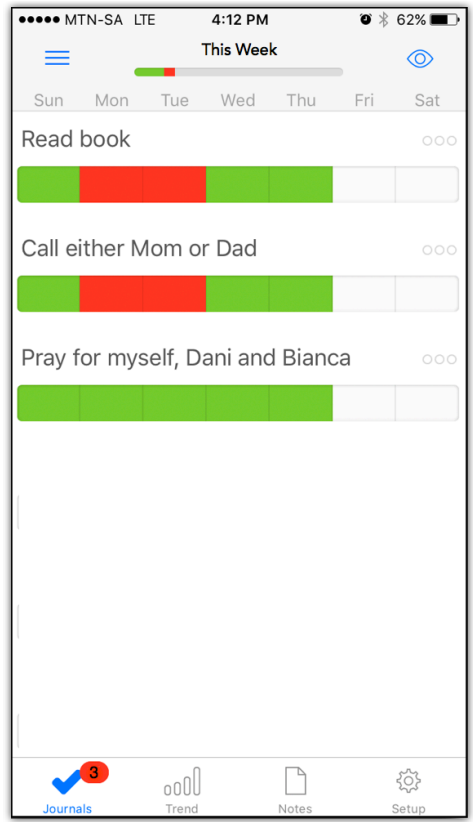
TRACKING

So, Dani, Jessica and Bianca would start their meetings by, one by one sharing their successes and failures of the previous week...

How could each one remember how they did... which days they missed their reading (or audio learning) or to do the step that they were working on or their prayer for themselves and the for the other members of their group? Well, our ladies didn't have to commit their successes and failures to memory. They simply tracked their successes at the end of each day.

Here is a photo of Jessica's tracking for one week. She used a simple iPhone app called "Way of Life". Here's the link to down load it – [Way of Life](#) – if

you're interested. Bianca simply used a calendar (photo also included below). Dani thus far has not consistently been able to get it together to track so she just retells how she did the previous week the best as she can from memory.



'Green' means completed for that day and 'Red' means not completed for that day.



(R = Reading S = the Step being currently focused on P = Prayer)

Bianca and Jessica both said that very often they pushed themselves to do the tasks that they were tracking even when they didn't feel like it or when they were really busy. Why? Well because they knew that they needed to record their day's achievements and they found a lot of motivation to record a tick (as opposed to leaving the space blank or making a cross).

SHARING

Sharing is simply the process of sharing with the others in the group how you did during the week with: your readings, the step you are presently working on and how praying for yourself and everyone else in the group is going. The members of the group would share if they hit all 3 goals every day (that's obviously the ideal) and also if they missed various goals on various days and even if they had let the whole week blow out without anything.

Sharing one's successes and failures in their Growth Group each week is obviously an incredibly important part of one's Growth Group sessions. On the one hand, knowing that one would have to share how they did was a HUGE motivation to do one's best during the week. It made everyone accountable. What's more, however, was that sharing put everything on the table so each person could be real with what was going well for them and what needed to be TWEAKED...

TWEAKING

So what's tweaking? Well, let me explain with an example from Jessica. So, on Monday and Tuesday of her weekly tracking (as can be seen in the photo above) Jessica didn't do her reading about the mitzvah of honouring her father and mother (indicated by the RED), nor did she do the step that she was working on which was calling one of her parents each day and asking them how they were doing and if they needed anything. Why did she miss these 2 days? Well, this was the question that Dani and Bianca asked her when she presented her successes and failures of the week at their Growth Group meeting and by the way it's their job to ask this question! The answer... She had gone away to London for 2 days for business and had left her book behind. Also, she didn't have a way to easily call her Mom or Dad from London as they didn't have apps like What's app or Viber on their phones.

After a brief discussion a solution was found for potential future trips. 1) If the book would be forgotten Jessica would ask her husband to take a picture of

the next few pages and send them to her. And regarding calling her parents, Jessica simply installed Viber on her parent's phones.

This is tweaking... learning from the past, seeing what could be modified to avoid similar lapses in the future and implementing them. By the way, the tweaks may not always be the perfect solution straight away. Some tweaks may be great, some may be a step in the right direction but there will need to be more tweaks before the problem they are addressing is fully sorted, some tweaks may be ineffective and some may be bad. It's a work in progress.

TWEAKING – THERE ARE NO FAILURES WHEN YOU LEARN FROM YOUR MISTAKES

I've been talking about successes and 'failures' above, however, it's very important to know that there are really no failures when one records 'failures', works out what the reasons are for what is going wrong and then TWEAKS. They say about Edison the great inventor that he failed over 1,000 times before he perfected the lightbulb. However, he didn't see any of those failures as 'failures' but rather as learning experiences. Each 'failure' taught him what didn't work and helped him take a step closer to the eventual formula that did. How can that be a failure?!

When Bianca didn't do her daily readings or exercises for 2 full weeks she brought that information to her Growth Group and they helped her analyse it. Why did she do nothing for 2 weeks? Well, after discussing it with the others Bianca realised that she had been feeling overwhelmed with having to stay consistent with her daily goals. She had set herself too much to do each day. She talked with Dani, Jessica and Chana Levin (their cherished group mentor) about different options she could try for moving forwards. The basic gist of the plan was to take on much less per day. As the ancient Aramaic dictum goes "If you try to grab too large an amount all at once, you'll end up with nothing. If you grab a small amount, you'll keep what you grabbed."

OVER TO YOU...

So you have read this far! Wow! You should get a medal!

If this topic of How To Grow With Your Friends interests you don't just let it be something interesting that you read... Use it! It can upgrade important parts of your life in the most wonderful of ways!

You CAN make a Growth Group with your friends or like minded people that you know! You know, believe it or not there are groups like this all over the world. I'm not just talking in the business world where this has been popular for decades, but also in the Jewish world with regards to friends growing together, helping each other achieve their personal, spiritual goals.

And you know we only live once. This idea might not be something that anyone that you know is doing, but SO WHAT!!! They probably weren't ever taught and encouraged to utilise this idea when they were growing up. And the bottom line is that regardless of what others do or don't do, if you would form a Growth Group with one or a few select people you could achieve and see AMAZING ACCOMPLISHMENTS within just 3 months!

So my final call... If you are even just contemplating about maybe forming a group with a few friends, GO ON! You really stand nothing to lose from trying and you stand to gain so, so much!!! You can send this blog post to a friend!... You can copy and paste the text that is below which contains a link to the 1st part of this 3 part series... Also there are buttons for emailing, what's apping or facebooking this at the bottom of the post. Feel free to send a link to part 1 of this blog series right now to a friend you'd like to discuss doing this with, or to anyone you think would appreciate reading it...

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