

Chapter 12

Goddesses in Community: A Guide For Creating Your Own Venus Group

(Excerpt From “Becoming A Menopause Goddess” ebook from most ebook retailers. Available in softcover as The Big M on Menopause Goddess Blog site.)

If there is one overriding tidbit of wisdom we wish to pass on to our sister goddesses, it is this: Do Not Attempt The Menopause/ Midlife Journey Alone. While the Venuses’ travels thus far have been arduous, the support, sustenance, and guidance offered by women of shared experience have macheted through the dense thickets of the Change and greatly eased our passage. Although it was not on Meeting Four’s agenda, we burst into a spontaneous gratitude gab about the importance of the Venus group in our lives. Each goddess felt that we had come exponentially farther together than we could ever have hoped alone. Even the support of a few close girlfriends could not have challenged, helped and grown us in the ways we experienced through the synergy of Venus.

While we were marveling at our unfolding and becoming over the past three years, we also carefully examined what made our group

so successful. Scrutinizing what worked and why might help us offer a model for other women to create their own Venus group.

Maybe we were just lucky; maybe the right women came together at the right time through kismet; maybe our Venus group is so special that it can't be duplicated. But we don't think so. Time and again, we've bonded on the same menopause and midlife issues with women we barely know: on planes, in restrooms, and in grocery store checkout lines. The raw material of women in community is powerful magic indeed. The willingness to open up and share is a part of our essential female makeup. All we need is a structural framework, tight enough for focus and loose enough for the alchemy that results when women come together. With that in mind, we offer a matrix for creating your own Venus group. Remember that these are not rules, simply guidelines, that you may use as a starting point to naturally evolve your own goddess community.

1. Meet No More Than Once Each Year

Perhaps every six months would also work. We are not sure, since we began our group with annual meetings. However, it seems that it takes us a full year to realize and integrate changes from the insights proffered at each meeting. We didn't start out knowing this; we initially met once a year because the Venus's schedules are busy (read crazy). In hindsight, we see how valuable it was to have a full twelve months to embody what we learned at our previous gathering.

2. Meet No Less Than Once Each Year

We feel that we can indeed create and enjoy virtual community via the Internet. After all, we started the Menopause Goddess Blog, not only to expand our community but also to help nurture

and connect us when we aren't physically together. But we don't think there is any substitute for meeting face to face with open hearts and arms. Not to be too woo-woo about it, but the energy we create together fuels our transformation into the goddesses we want to become. And it just plain fill us up to bursting to be with one another. We honestly look forward to it all year.

3. Nobody Can Know Everybody

In retrospect, we realized that it was incredibly important that we didn't all know one another from the start. Every goddess knew some of the women at our initial gathering, yet no one of us knew everyone. Because we had not shared history or patterns as a group, it made it easier to focus on our intentions and what we hoped to accomplish. Too often a group who know one another well can slip and slide into bitch sessions that may be fun but make no forward progress. In addition, we had no preset roles that we enacted within group. For example, Patty-Venus is the strong peacemaker in her group of close friends at home, and to be vulnerable and open is just not her role. In the Venus group, she is able to allow and even celebrate sharing her deepest feelings and fears.

4. Begin Before The First Gathering

Again, looking back, we see how important it was to start working before we came together initially. We sent out the questionnaire in Chapter Two to all our potential attendees, as well as to some women who were interested in the questions for themselves once they heard about what we'd planned. (These women are satellitel Venuses and contributed their thoughts and feelings in the spirit of helping us all.)

We thought that the questionnaire might serve as a focusing tool and general icebreaker when we did come together. Little did we suspect that it would serve as much more. The process of looking at our attitudes and feelings, past and present, fostered a level of self-awareness that propelled out Meeting One forward. Our questions and answers also helped inform our group as a whole. Personal information gleaned was as new to each individual goddess as it was to our sisters. Yet universal themes emerged and we knew we were on the right track. Feel free to use all or part of our questionnaire. You can download a copy from our blogsite: www.menopausegoddessblog.org.

5. Set Ground Rules - What Each Woman Agrees To Bring And Keep

None of us is sure that we verbally articulated each of these rules as such. It seemed that they were just understood. Looking back, we think it would have been a good idea to clearly state the ground rules as we saw them. Our “rules” were essentially a set of values that we lived as members of the group

A. Respect

Mutual respect and unconditional positive regard were a must. This was pretty easy for us, and likely will not be difficult for any Venus group, but it needs to be understood.

B. Confidentiality

Personal info that is shared stays with the group only, but the knowledge gleaned can and should be shared generally, especially with other women and our spouses.

C. Safety

Trust is an absolute necessity for any Venus group. We agreed to take the outer layers off and bare our souls. No envy, no cliques, no hidden agendas would be tolerated. (and that included the book, which was secondary, even tertiary. In fact, I didn't even want to write a book, but my sisters prevailed upon my better nature after a couple of years.)

D. Focus

Establish an agenda and focus, but allow the organic movement of the group. Venus gatherings were not business meetings conducted with Robert's Rules of Order nor was any agenda carved in stone. Be focused but not rigid.

E. Work Ethic

Show up to share and to work, as well as play. As we said earlier, we've heard from so many women that they are members of "women's groups" that never seem to grow or get anywhere as a result of their propensity to degenerate into bitch sessions. While we'd be lying if we didn't cop to the fact that we occasionally enjoy a good 'whine and wine' get-together every now and then, in our Venus group we had some serious issues we wanted to tackle and we sure didn't want to waste time.

Other than these five core values, we had not rules. However, we did set some intentions in order to get the best from our efforts.

6. Set Intentions

- A. **Compassionate Truth Telling**
We would ask hard questions of one another with compassion and commitment to reflecting back what we heard to the group. We also would provide a reality check when a Venus was too hard on herself.

- B. **Sharing and Examination of Dilemmas**
We would hold nothing back. We would indeed bare our souls. No question was too weird or trivial to get our full attention.

- C. **Sharing of Epiphanies Created By Our Synergy**
We were committed to sharing all that we realized or learned without censoring or wondering if it was relevant. Our entire raison d`etre was to share our bits of insight, cobbling together a whole of wisdom that might help all of us.

- D. **Sharing of Remedies and Advice**
It is our belief that the way in which women truly get their information about remedies and treatments is through the sharing of actual experiences with one another. We intended to share it all sifting through the gravel for the gold.

- E. **Compassionate Being With**
Perhaps our most important intention, we would honor each goddess's thoughts, feelings, ideas, and stories. We want most to be understood and heard, not simply 'fixed'. Especially since there seems to be no real FIX for menopause and midlife. We need all the support we can get.

Our Venus group is like therapy with someone who loves you. We are physician, homeopath, counselor, patient, sister, and best friend to one another. As is the case with therapy, we contract to do some work: exploring, accessing, shaping, and growing through our tears and laughter. But our sisterhood extends beyond therapeutic relationships. We've created a community that allows, no not allows, expects us to thrive. Thrive we have. Individually and collectively, the Venuses are healthier and happier than we were just three short years ago. We're still menopausal and we are still confronting challenges. But together we've come a long way and we owe much of our progress to the synergy of our goddess group.

The importance of this synergy cannot be underestimated. The energy that arises from our shared commitment and intension springboards us into tremendous leaps that we could never conceive, let alone manage, if we were on our own.

More than one Venus has marveled that she opened her mouth and some truth or important issue walked out, beheld for the first time not only by the group but by herself. There is more to each of us when we are together.

Our growth spurts are not limited to the short time frames that we actually spend in each others' company. We reflect all year long on the questions and changes that have arisen, aware of what our sister Venuses would think and say about our choices and circumstances. Whether we are right or wrong in our assumptions makes little difference. What is important is this heightened awareness, questioning, and aliveness. Our sisterhood

forms invisible threads that link us throughout the months between gatherings.

We don't think we are really that special. Nor do we think that it was magic or serendipity that made the Venus group work so well for each of us. We believe right down to our toes that any group of women can and will find the same synergy and succor that we did, simply by choosing to create it.

We wish you good luck in bringing together your own group of goddesses, though you won't really need it. All you need is desire and commitment. If we can help at all, please let us know. We can be found anytime at our blogsite: www.menopausegoddessblog.com.

The End of This Book, But Not The End of The Journey.
Stay tuned for further episodes.

And here's the questionnaire we sent out prior to the first meeting:

Hello dear friend,

Welcome to our weekend long slumber party - no men, no makeup, loose tongues, food and spirits, lots of fun. We're thinking spontaneity and open discourse, humor and heart, laughter and an honest look at our lives from this midlife vantage point. Theresa and Lynette hope to write about some of what we all come up with together. We have a working title of "Eunice of Willendorf, the REAL Women's Guide to the Goddess Within". Also under consideration is "Eunice of Willendorf, the Wisdom of Menopausal Goddesses". We'll explain all about Eunice when we see you.

This will be our contribution to the welfare of women for generations to come. Or not. It ought to be a great time regardless.

We'll stay in a great house with a spectacular view of Lake Tahoe. We'll eat meals in, so we don't have to be polite in public or dress up or anything. October can be cool, so bring warm clothes. We'll probably go on a hike, so bring comfortable shoes.

To help us all get started, we came up with a few questions. Please fill them out and send them back to us by September 15. You can email them to us - email to Lynette at Lynette@9points.com. Or if you prefer, you can snail mail them in the enclosed envelope. We really appreciate you taking a little time to do this – we are going to do it as well.

1. What books would be your “Desert Island “ books - the books you absolutely would not be able to get by without if stranded on a desert island?

2. Self -help books - which were your favorites or had the strongest impact?
(If so inclined, hi-lite special passages)

3. Movies or movie scenes
which were your favorites or had the strongest impact?

4. What were/are your Best life moments? Describe.

5. Worst life moments? Describe.

6. What were your pet peeves at age 20?

7. What are your pet peeves now?

8. What was your dream vacation at age 20?

9. What would be your dream vacation now?

10. What were your thoughts on friendship at age 20?

11. What are your thoughts on friendship now?

12. What do you wish you had known sooner re:
men

kids,

aging

career/work

friendship

anything

13. What are you glad you didn't know sooner about the same things?

men

kids,

aging

career/work

friendship

anything

14. Knowing what you know now what would you do differently?

15. What do you wish you had done more of?

16. Less of?

17. From your perspective now, what is life about?

18. How does this play out in your daily life or does it?

19. If a book were written about your life, why would anyone want to read it?

20. Any questions or thoughts you would like to contribute?

Bring your favorite CD's, pajamas (flannel is great unless hot flashes are a problem), stuffed animals or other totems - you know stuff for a slumber party. Mostly just bring your wild, wonderful ,witty selves. We can't wait!!!