

CHAPTER SEVEN

Create Your Winning Team

When I was still in the middle of my own divorce, I discovered why creating and relying on a Winning Team of friends, family, professionals, and resources is so important to Positive Separation. Just a few days after I created my vision for a happier future at that canal-side café (a story I shared with you in the Introduction), I met an acquaintance on the street. Her children went to school with my own kids, and we had chatted on a few occasions. Having heard about my divorce through the social grapevine, she asked how I was doing.

That was a low day. I'd had a vision of my happier future, yes, and taken some steps toward creating my positive commitments to myself, but I was still feeling frustrated, stuck, and very vulnerable. I hadn't yet disentangled myself from the whirlwind of emotions I was feeling. Plus, I was lonely. So when my acquaintance invited me to lunch at a nearby brasserie, I said yes.

As the rain poured down outside, I talked to my sort-of-friend about what was happening in my life and my divorce. I cried a bit (okay, a lot), and, in

my need to vent my bottled-up emotions, ended up sharing some of the most intimate details of my private life.

Afterward, once I was drained and had no more words, I stared at my plate in horror. “What have I done?” I asked myself.

The issue wasn’t that I was vulnerable, or even that I had gotten emotional. There’s nothing wrong with crying on someone’s shoulder. But what I had ignored in my need to unburden myself was how I felt about this woman, my casual acquaintance.

You see, this woman was not the kind of person I would want (on any other day) to have access to my personal information. From my mouth to her ears, and from her mouth to the ears of anyone who would listen, I knew that the deep, vulnerable secrets I had shared would soon be spreading like wildfire through our whole social network. I was terrified.

Usually, I have a nose for indiscretion, and I avoid sharing things I don’t want spread around. But after suppressing my emotions for so long, they had just bubbled up and taken over. As a result, I felt like I had broken one of my most sacred promises to myself.

Thankfully, nothing terrible resulted from my emotional outpouring that day (although it caused me stress for weeks afterward as I blew the incident up like a balloon in my mind). There wasn’t any backlash from my friends or acquaintances. Maybe they all let the woman’s stories go in one ear and out the other, or maybe my fears of her gossiping were never actually warranted.

The positive outcome of this incident was that it planted a seed in my mind—and that seed grew into my Winning Team and the teachings I will share with you in this chapter.

I realized that there was an important lesson here for me: I needed to find steady, positive, discreet, nurturing people I could rely on when I was having a tough day. I needed to talk to people who cared about me on a regular basis so that I could prevent the kind of emotional eruption that had led me to share intimate details about my former marriage with a near-stranger whom I knew I couldn’t trust. More, I needed to find professionals who could help me manage the challenging feelings that sometimes clouded my judgment and prompted me to make unhealthy or unhelpful decisions.

That night, after the kids were in bed, I lit some candles and reflected on what I needed to do in order to create the support system I needed and prevent another emotional blowout like this one from setting me back or diverting me from my focus on my happy future. Immediately, I flashed back to my student days. I was in my final months of study to obtain my Master's degree in law, and had just broken up with my boyfriend of two years. I'd been kind of a wreck then, too—but even at such a young age, I was also aware enough to know that I needed support from different people to get through this tough time. I remembered, vividly, how my family, friends, fellow students, teachers, and counselors each contributed to my healing and success in their own ways. A few months later, after graduation, I threw a celebratory dinner to thank them all.

Now, at forty, I realized that I needed to create another support net for myself—a Winning Team of friends, family, and professionals—if I wanted to heal and move forward.

I drew a circle with myself in the middle. Then, around that picture of myself, I wrote the names of everyone I thought would support me, my growth, and the best interests of my children. I wanted different things from each of these people: constructive advice, good laughs, shoulders to cry on. I wanted to find people to exercise and be active with, and people who would give me the kick in the pants I needed when I started to get down on myself. Most of all, I wanted to partner with people who were also aiming to create a happy future for themselves and everyone around them.

I realized that I also needed a professional family therapist who would understand the feelings and needs of my children during this process, and a different psychologist who could help me manage my own emotions; I was lucky enough to find Annelies and Willem, who became my staunch allies. Emma, my lawyer, and Edwin and Ruud, my accountants, were also part of my Winning Team, and helped me sort out all the details that had once felt so overwhelming.

With so many people to turn to, I never felt alone again. And because I had different people to fill different needs in my life, I never needed to rely on any one person too heavily. Soon, it became easy and natural to ask for help when I needed it. There were still hard days, but I never had to face them by myself, and I never again suffered the consequences of keeping everything bottled up inside of me.

Choosing Your Team Players

Once I formed my Winning Team, I no longer had to face my separation alone—and neither do you. You can and should seek help, knowledge, support, and love from others, but before you can do so in an empowered way, you need to *organize* that help.

The heat of an emotional moment (or worse, an actual crisis), is *not* the time to worry about who to call or who will give you the best advice. During those times, your judgment is not as sound as it usually is. You're not looking at the big picture. The last thing you want is to let your need for help create more negativity and drama.

Sometimes, in the thick of a separation, you can feel like you're drowning. Like I did that day in the brasserie, you will then reach out to whomever is closest, and hang onto them as tight as you can, hoping they will keep you afloat. As I discovered, this is not always the best idea, because the closest available person is often not the person who is best prepared to give you the support you really need.

Worse, when you reach out blindly, you may run into resistance from the very people you are asking for support. Some jealous or spiteful people will treat your separation as “payback time.” Others may simply be too close to the situation to offer the help you need.

Even when it comes to the people who genuinely want to help, it's important to maintain balance. Try not to ask too much of any one person in your life. When others feel overloaded by your needs, they will step back—and there's nothing worse than feeling rebuffed by someone you care about when you're already lonely and vulnerable!

The solution to all of these issues? Your Winning Team.

Your Winning Team believes in you! Its members support you 100 percent, and are willing to go the extra mile for you. They have a positive attitude toward their own lives, as well as yours, and always deliver on their promises. From them, you can receive structure, comfort, energy, motivation, and wisdom.

A Winning Team is not just a loose collection of well-meaning friends, colleagues, family members, and others who love and support you. It's a network of people whom you hand-select to create a protective group structure around