Producers, general agents and field managers have some of the most difficult jobs anywhere . . . and the most rewarding. But, it’s lonely out there with a serious shortage of peers for any of us to turn to for advice.

Do we just grin and bear it, stay late and talk turkey with the cleaning crew, or is there a viable alternative to what could be a big problem?

**Problems Producers Face**

Producers’ careers can be less rewarding if they have to contend with the ups and downs without a sounding board that understands the issues facing them. A busy producer has little time to take a step back to make adjustments – there is little opportunity to review their practices - because the job has to be done now. Sales won’t wait.

And how can they see the forest with all the “I-need-to-close a sale-today” trees there to distract them? People in highly-competitive, contest-living types of careers easily get caught up in the day-to-day battles and often find it nearly impossible to identify where problems exist and where change is needed.

Successful producers have a built-in bias for what they are currently doing. They have only one opinion (their own), and often there is no one to bounce new ideas off. Even if they identified the best, most sure-fire new approach, change is hard work, and all by yourself change is difficult to accomplish.

One approach to the problem is to identify a wider group of individuals whose experience set is broader than your own – a trusted group to lean on in handling new opportunities and problems. In brief, a producer can create or join a study group of others to add 5-10 more sets of experience. The result can be a geometric increase in your diagnosis and solution power. The net result is a boost in productivity for your practice.

**What is a Study Group?**

A producer study group is a collection of like-minded individuals who band together collectively help each other build their practices. Through periodic meetings and other contact the group helps solve real-life problems and considers real-time opportunities for members of the group.
Benefits to Members
The value of study groups includes the following key outcomes:

- Members benefit from what Harold Hook called the borrowed perception from others in the group. The brain power of 5 or 10 others is available to work on solutions to a problem or issue.

- Members give each other permission to be their harshest (and most constructive) critics. By discussing and taking advice from other members (and reporting back on progress) a producer has his feet held to the fire to accomplish a result. Just by having others care about the outcome, a positive outcome becomes much more likely.

- A study group becomes much like a producers’ Board of Directors. A producer can trust the advice given because, if handled correctly, it is an unbiased viewpoint with no hidden agendas and no axe to grind.

- A study group is a forum to bounce ideas off other members who gain as much from the consideration of others’ problems as they do from discussions of their own.

- A member gets the benefit of multiple viewpoints and alternative solutions – there is no one right answer. The process of discussing a producers’ situation (and that of others in the group) provides a perspective unavailable to most people.

- The net result is synergy – the whole becomes far greater than the sum of the parts.

In short, study group members benefit from an expanded experience set and a natural outgrowth of mentoring, coaching, networking, professional development and a lot of fun. A members’ reach is expanded 5 or 10-fold.

How to Start a Study Group
The best place to start a study group is with other producers in the general vicinity, although some groups have evolved to national memberships. Think about whom you know, whom you respect and who has experiences or skills that you would like to tap into. You don’t need to identify all 5-10 members of a study group. Just line up the initial core members – they will do the rest by suggesting additional members that you don’t know. It is not an overnight thing – as John Maxwell says, it is built daily – not in a day.

However, members should be selected carefully, focusing on those meeting several key considerations:

- A member should take membership seriously.

- Only those who will be committed for the long haul should be considered.

- A member should have unrestricted availability for meetings. A regular schedule of 3-6 meetings per year is best, and travel should not be an issue. Everyone attends and everyone participates fully.

- Members must abide by the strictest confidentiality – what goes on here stays here.

- Membership should be limited – somewhere between 6 and 12 members.

- Members should commit to a focus of handling real problems and issues at every meeting. A regular agenda must include what currently is of interest to the members. A study group meeting should not be a hypothetical exercise – this is the real world with real stuff going on.

Producers interested in building and improving their sales practices should seriously consider creating or joining a study group. By banding together with other, like-minded individuals, the potential for explosive growth is improved exponentially.