



Nicole Gebhardt (center) leads a workshop. Gebhardt focuses on marketing aspects of small and medium businesses.

# Coaching for Work, Coaching for Life

The old adage that it's best to keep one's professional life and work life separate is becoming outdated with the evolution of business/life coaching.

"The reason I call myself a business/life coach is because when you are a small or medium size business, your business is your life, and your life is your business," says Michael Kaplan, CEO, and owner of Strategic Solutions LLC, based in Lafayette.

"If your business is not doing well, then your life is probably affected by it. You can't divorce yourself from business when you own or run a small business," he says.

Business/life coaching can take many different forms, but the idea in Greater Lafayette is to help small and medium businesses improve their performance; in order to do that most successfully, individuals need a solid home life—which is where the life coaching becomes part of the business coaching.

"We will talk about any issue that comes up, whether it is personal or business," Kaplan says. He does business/life coaching for individuals and for groups, which he calls the Strategic Solutions Roundtable. During his group sessions, small and medium business owners usually talk about one of eight issues that are affecting

their businesses:

- 1) Time – business owners are working too hard, too many hours, and doing too many different tasks
- 2) Decision making – business owners need to find ways to approach it most efficiently
- 3) Control – business owners are feeling they are not in control of what is happening within their organization
- 4) Profit – business owners are looking for ways to increase profit and combat feelings of not making enough
- 5) Personnel issues and people problems
- 6) Growth – keeping the business growing steadily
- 7) Change – how to cope with a business environment that is always changing, such as technology and marketing
- 8) Feelings of isolation – as business owners, they often feel there is no one to talk to, or no one to confide in about important issues

One can almost say then that business/life coaching is a bit like therapy, with a dollars and sense edge. Kaplan, who has a master's degree in social work, says the groups go a long way toward helping business owners gain confidence and not feel so alone

in what they are doing or how they are handling problems. Kaplan has a lot of experience himself running a business. Shortly after earning his master's degree, he returned to his native Lafayette to take over his father's furniture business. In 1985 he opened his own furniture business, and then in 2003 he opened La-Z-Boy Furniture Galleries.

"The expression, 'It's lonely at the top,' is true," Kaplan says.

Another business/life coach in Greater Lafayette who advocates group sessions is Nicole Gebhardt, who is owner of Geb\*Art Strategic Communications.

Gebhardt worked in human resources and public and employee relations at Caterpillar for 12 years and was also a freelance marketing specialist and graphic designer. She opened her business in Greater Lafayette in August 2011. Her coaching program focuses on the marketing aspect of a small to medium business, and she uses the tagline, "Put an End to Random Acts of Marketing," for her coaching business. Similar to Kaplan, she is a strong believer in group workshops for business owners.

"We work through the information gathering and planning stages in a small group workshop," she explains.

I present material in a logical order and we discuss it so the group can contribute ideas and perspectives that may help everyone. I do, on occasion, take private clients, but it's the group learning process that is so effective. I encourage clients to consider it."

Even in this challenging economy, Gebhardt says she has been surprised at the demand from business owners for coaching and guidance, but with the caveat that the business owners want to remain as independent as possible with running their businesses.

"The business owners really want to do it themselves, including the marketing for their companies, but they just lack the confidence and the knowledge on only a few pieces," she explains. "So what I do is help them pull it all together."

Confidence is a key part of moving forward with business and with life, and any type of coaching can go a long way toward boosting confidence, but business/life coaching can also provide the emotional support that would seem necessary to build and maintain a strong business.

In addition to the planning and oral aspects of building a healthy business, Gebhardt helps her clients with written materials as well. Often, she explains, business owners will confuse the definition of marketing with advertising, but marketing really means everything to do with the business, including—but not limited to—all of the following items: the copy in the

marketing materials, the quality of the visuals (even, in fact, the business owner's appearance), the way the phone is answered, the invoice and billing process, and the list goes on.

"It's about the experience the customers have from the moment they hear about your services to long after the deal is closed. The objective is to create a strong degree of trust with the customer," Gebhardt says. "There are a lot of opportunities to reinforce trust beyond an ad."

In a small to medium business, developing the whole person, whoever is running the business, is another way to strengthen the customer's experience from start to finish, and developing the whole person is one of the primary missions of business/life coaching, explains Jason Ware, a facilitator of the Coaching Essentials Workshop given by Leadership Lafayette, a non-profit organization that nurtures leaders in the community, often people who own businesses or coordinate organizations, such as a member of a board of directors or a volunteer coordinator.

Once participants in the workshop agree on a definition of coaching, then they discuss the value of coaching, which may often seem secondary to everything else a business owner has to worry about on a day-to-day basis.

"In other words, why is it important, what do you get out of it, and also we talk about the fact that there is typically a higher level of self-awareness,

self-consciousness and emotional intelligence, that is perhaps heightened because of coaching," Ware says.

Often people will confuse the definition of a "corporate coach" and a "business/life coach," and one of the primary differences, notes Ware, is that generally, for a corporate coach, the corporation is the client. A corporate coach trains employees to be more productive with the corporation as the most important consideration, whereas, a business/life coach has the whole person in mind.

Ultimately though, the sought-after end result of both is similar: to produce robust businesses with employers and employees, who can be consistent and improve with time. ☘

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