

Engaging Entrepreneurs and Small Business Owners
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Have you noticed that it is harder and harder to get small business owners to networking events? All business marketing training programs tout the value of networking. But how many small and micro-business owners actually take advantage of the networking opportunities you provide?

As you know, this group of entrepreneurs can be quite elusive. They don't occupy the typical space in our communities that we have come to expect for generations. So, how do we find them, and how do we get them involved? How do we get them to value chamber membership, let alone chamber activities?

I believe the answer lies in 2 primary areas:

- a. Creating more meaning and caring in our connection with them.
- b. Providing more of the resources they need to be successful.

In the past, business owners have joined the chamber for one or more of the following reasons:

- a. They feel they should support the chamber
- b. They wish to take advantage of chamber services and assistance
- c. They believe that chamber membership will lead to increased business for them
- d. They want to participate in order to increase the visibility of their organization and its executives in the community

Today, however, many small and micro business owners do not feel any of these pulls. In fact, many don't feel the chamber has anything to offer them in terms of growing their business. Their business is often conducted more globally, through the internet, so local networking events don't provide the impetus to grow their business. They want their interaction with the chamber to have more purpose, something that definitely delivers to their bottom line. They want something that is less transactional and more transformational.

What does that look like? What about re-inventing what the chamber offers? Instead of offering, or in addition to offering, networking, we begin to offer more actual leadership training? What if we connect and create a powerful community of support for these business owners?

I know that many communities have a leadership program. I have been very involved with the delivery of these in the past. However, what I am speaking of here is more mentoring, more coaching and more resources. In the past, I know, coaching has been seen as perhaps a little "flaky". But, coaching and mentoring are on the rise in the corporate world and there is good reason for that.

According to Ted McGrath in an article entitled 'Business Coaching Industry on the Rise', "... even as coaches are becoming integral to corporate development, an equally fast-growing number of entrepreneurs and freelancers are employing coaches to boost their own credentials

and adopt coaching skills themselves to use in leading their own teams and advance their brands...

"when it comes to building a personal brand, a coach can be a powerful resource in helping clients learn to get out of their own way, increase engagement at work, take action, stand out and achieve goals".

In our re-invention of services, what if you had access to all of the resources these entrepreneurs needed, from foundational training on how to run a business, to marketing effectively and economically, to developing their leadership skills, to having a coach, and to actually master mind with other business owners?

What if you could then use these resources to draw these businesses into chamber membership in a mutually rewarding, cooperative relationship?

I am reminded of the adage, "If you always do what you've always done, you will always get what you've always got". So, let's do something UN-usual instead of usual. Let's create a new relationship with our members. One that is transformational. One that gets everyone UN-usual results.

Let's make a transformational change in the businesses, the chamber and the local economy. Let's go for a win-win-win!

Where do you begin?

1. First, you have to find out where these businesses exist so that you can begin a dialogue with them. That is going to require some out of the box thinking and most likely use of social media.
2. A series of Small Business Focus Groups , in non-competing businesses, can help establish what is working for them and what is not working for them. Additionally, it can be utilized to give them actionable information that can immediately begin transforming the direction of their company.
3. Mastermind groups of like-minded individuals. So, what is a mastermind group exactly? According to The Success Alliance, "Mastermind groups offer a combination of brainstorming, education, peer accountability and support in a group setting to sharpen your business and personal skills. A mastermind group helps you and your mastermind group members achieve success. Participants challenge each other to set powerful goals, and more importantly, to accomplish them."

"Through a mastermind group process, first you create a goal, then a plan to achieve it. The group helps you with creative ideas and wise decisions-making. Then, as you begin to implement your plan, you bring both success stories and problems to the group. Success stories are applauded (loudly!), and problems are solved through peer brainstorming and collective, creative thinking."

"The group requires commitment, confidentiality, willingness to both give and receive advice and ideas, and support each other with total honesty, respect and compassion.

Mastermind group members act as catalysts for growth, devil's advocates and supportive colleagues. This is the essence and value of mastermind groups."

4. Provide an opportunity for individual and/or group coaching.
5. Provide on-going basic foundational training delivered weekly to their inbox to help them learn what they don't know about running a successful business. These videos can train them in the critical fundamentals to build their business. (46% of businesses fail due to a lack of experience and knowledge in how to run a business).
6. Weekly e-class that delivers additional strategic guidance in the area of sales and marketing.
7. Weekly "Ask the Expert" call where they can get their business questions answered.

Micro-businesses represent 95% of the 28 million businesses tracked by the US census. They employ 31 million people, represent 17% of GDP, and generate \$2.4 trillion in receipts. However, their failure rate is over 50% within the first 4 years. Studies show that when they receive the kinds of support that we are discussing here, they have an 80% success rate. If these small businesses in your community that are failing at such a high rate could turn that failure into financial success, what would that do for your chamber and your community, particularly if they now see value in chamber membership?

If you are ready to create this Win-Win-Win situation in your community, I can show you how to roll out the above program for the chamber and how to increase not only your membership dues but improve retention rates as well.

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