

Focusing on Construction Business Needs

Date: Wednesday, March 16, 2011 – 10 – 11:30am

Venue: Keene Public Library, Kay Fox Room, Keene, NH



Goals: Start and continue discussions, Build relationships, Identify resources and common needs; Inspire new program development

1. How will you (or how do you) know that your business is successful?

When I get to work less than 60 hours/7 days a week, depends on year, time of year, I was a painter, it's still seasonal, when I feel comfortable and not so scared to hire people, and can take next step in my biz, and maintaining the biz. Need/want to be more efficient.

Helaine asks, what in particular does he mean by efficiency?

As renewables get more lucrative, the industry has levels of work to be done. I look at all the squares in a flow chart... Oh the inefficiency of wearing all the hats in a family-run business.

Don't feel bad, I have a list for when I leave the house. Becoming efficient isn't easy and it's a lifelong thing.

It's just my partner and I, we're 4 years old and the marketing and networking aspect is full time and actually getting the work done is a fulltime job and to be effective and not feel overwhelmed is a challenge to get it all done the way you want it to be done.

I'll know we're successful when we have the amount of backlog to sustain us for at least a year, right now it is still job to job.

Judging success, echo what another said, sufficient backlog, less scrambling, more marketing, it's so much every day, did I get my list done, or how much have I had to shift off to next day and I'm not sure it's so important to "finish the list."

Near term success is to generate continuity and enough work to have money coming in consistently because the jobs are consistent, so you're not having to push and pull. Construction is highly cyclical. It was going real good and then the economy tanked.

2. What needs do you have as a business owner?

Cash flow

Labor. Really difficult market to regulate, so there's a lot of unregulated construction work. It's very hard on the people to do it, so not a lot of interest in doing it. To find people who are actually interested in *doing* the job. Competent, (something about legal work).

Need new projects of course, but also when some builders take on "free" design work it takes away from us – some are good some are not – and it's hard to convince clients to hire us. The need is to better educate a builder about why it would be profitable for them to work with us.

That's difficult – by the time we get the job the design time is over and a price is on the table - we're given the plans but what's there's less than what I need to actually build it. Get an educated public to get more projects voted for. There is a need for building but people are uncertain in this economy.

I live in lakes region and I was surprised at how many projects were on town warrants. Last year, forget it, there was nothing. I think it's a bell weather "gee maybe worst is behind us" and I'm seeing a lot of that. I think most people have accepted that the recession is over. Regarding marketing, getting out there, this is an important time to do that.

3. What resources, programs and people have helped you strengthen your business? Why do you think these have worked for you?

SCORE

Before I opened I had a SCORE rep, went to SBDC, went to HGC; HG is a great resource to continue with.

Not a member but on list of home builders association and they have a lot of great resources, good way to network and learn things, for example building science.

Assoc. Contractors of NH, gets us involved with other contractors, sub contractors. Amer Inst of Arch of NH, to work with architects to team up with on projects.

High speed internet access, and improvements in project mgt software, I have the luxury of having a project and organizing it and having access to software on line. But again it's always a challenge of pushing an organization forward to use this stuff, big big effort to get people in org on board.

After initial set-up I don't do that much marketing or networking. I have a small base of customers.

Helaine: When you're looking for resources, do you go the internet, meetings at a distance,

I'm everywhere all the time

Face to face is important

Just showing up and being in the room is so important (meetings in concord) love hate relationship

4. What keeps your business from supporting you and your family?

Time, you're always hustling if you're a small biz owner. And it takes you a week before you realize you're actually on a vacation, or else you just don't bother to take a vacation, or you're on vacation but you're still working.

We just moved everything into our store so we don't have to go home. Yeh, time management is the hardest.

I'll take a half hour just to plan my day, to make blocks of time

I'd have to unplug my phone and lock the door in order to do that.

When you have a broad based business it's harder

Cash flow

The economy

I don't have as much of a perspective because I'm not a biz owner, it's not on my back whether it sinks or swims. Time is really the only thing that keeps me away from home. I do a lot of work from home, so it's a give and take.

I'm better now about making boundaries with clients.

5. What long-term goals do you have for your business and how will you finance these projects?

Where are the bankers in this meeting? I think it makes sense for me to own my own building and consider that an important investment. How will I finance it? I don't know? It's 2011 and now I'm afraid to get into debt. I didn't used to be but I am now. So, I could sell my soul...

I'd like a Main Street office, a presence in town instead of out of my partner's home. How to finance? Get more projects.

One of our long term goals, is to get ourselves more efficient and embrace newer technology, seeing our clients in the south using newer tech, so getting everyone on the that page is our big goal. How to finance it...

It's pretty cheap, \$30 for Netview, stay in your office and have the meeting on line, so you don't have to leave early for a soccer game. Also, issue no more checks, instead online wire transfers. And they're not costly.

I don't care as long as I get paid. Just kidding. My goal is to be self-financed. Subcontracting so we basically fund the project and then get paid. So I have lines of credit but ideally I'd like to get beyond that so I can fund myself. Have my own money in the bank.

6. Other than the things that are out of your control (weather, economy,) what is you greatest challenge to being profitable?

Motivating people to work

Fear. Fear in hiring, no one so far has given me the sense that they could rise to what I need. I need more than a person with a job description but someone who can do 3-6 different things at once.

Not being able to be at 3 places at once.

It doesn't get better 20 years from now. (people laugh and groan a bit)

Coordination, coordinating people efficiently.

Labor, motivating people, efficient execution of labor.

\$ from my gross goes to marketing and I haven't figured out the best way to do marketing.

The magic 8 ball.

End Discussion:

Helaine: Invite you – is there anything else to say

Need to have a positive attitude.

I have a question: what keeps you from taking advantage of training? Not enough time? Not aware of opportunities, what is it?

I go to trainings all the time, and people ask me where can they get training and I have to send them to Greenfield, etc.

Are you saying what you need isn't here in this region?

(Essentially he says yes.)

What keeps people from training, people laid off & can't afford training, people left wearing too many hats, not enough \$ but we do offer programs.

Time is big killer. Like even coming to this meeting.

Which is better for you? If something like a training was available 24/7 or to show up physically at a place.

Personally, being at a physical place is better for me

I love webinars and use them all the time. But something else NH doesn't have a lot of are certifications. Once you have it, you try to maintain it so the incentive is there to keep it up and get training. Not that I'm advocating more in NH.

It's like with Architects and builders doing design work when the economy is bad certification loses its glow. Contractor will say we'll do without, we can do that ourselves, we don't need to bring in a specialty xyz. But in a good economy more likely to spring for it.

A lot of contractors were willing to take low number jobs and said we'll just have to figure it out along the way.

Political influence is on the rise... that really sours me...

Do you mean unions?

No, I'm talking about biz owners, at award times, kill a bid, or expose someone anything to knock out competition. We've tried with legislation to deal with that. That's one of my biggest let-downs, corruption, with just a phone call someone gets or loses a job.

Finding out about the training is really difficult.