

Tips from the Top

Business insights from those at the top for those at the top.



THE ALTERNATIVE BOARD

*Change Perspective.
Improve Business.
Enjoy Life.*

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The Power of Peer Owners

I was talking with a person at a recent trade show. He asked me what I did and I told him I bring business owners in noncompeting businesses together in monthly meetings to help each other with their businesses. I was surprised at his enthusiastic response "That is just what I have been looking for" he said. "I am very interested!" He had tried to pull such a group together himself and said he had learned how difficult it was. He had three businesses, was growing rather fast and longed for the practical experience and wisdom of other business owners.

His enthusiasm reminds me of years of working with business owners, all who sooner or later say they wish they had a group of other businesses owners with whom they could regularly meet.

If you wish to see what this might be like for you, reserve 11:30 AM-1:00 PM **April 22** on your calendar and join us for lunch. Lake City Bank in Elkhart is hosting a business owner briefing on this process. You will be receiving an invitation early in April to register.

Gary Brunson, TABNCI, Michiana area

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Understanding Your Internal Processes

Do you know how all of your various departments function? I thought I did but when my board and facilitator pushed me to document all of our internal processes, I realized that I didn't know as much as I thought I did.

For instance, for one particular department, I realized that I really didn't understand how it works which, of course, is critical to the success of our business. So I invested some time learning that, in fact, it didn't operate as well as it should. There were all sorts of problems: employees didn't come forward with suggestions, people were doing personal activities on their computers during work hours, issues were buried so I wouldn't find them and so on.

Since discovering all of this I have started implementing improved technology that automates almost everything. I've put into place new processes and procedures and insist on reports that tell me everything that is going on. Employees can no longer hide anything, and I've already found "lost" business and been able to recapture it. This has been a painful, expensive process but our new technology will pay for itself quickly.

Perhaps you need to do the same. Take some time to know what is working and what isn't in your business. This is a good time to invest internally in our companies.

Kevin Adams, Direct Dental Plans of America, Denver, CO

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Is It Time to Review Your Web Site?

Recently someone pointed out that our Web site failed to provide a form to supply measurements for ordering one of our most common products. And they spotted an omission on one of our supplier's sites, it neglected to mention the company's address!

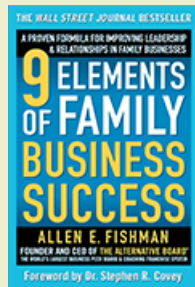
As a result, we decided to undertake a thorough review of our Web site and have found even more required changes. I recommend that you do the same ... and,

conversation to think through any aspect of your business without cost or obligation, [click here](#).

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Gary Brunson Debra Rider



John Kurtze Dick Wooden



Don Stohler

perhaps, ask your fellow TAB Board Members to assist you.

Rick Mand, Integrity Saw & Tool, Fond du Lac, WI

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Offer Free Advice

Twice a year I send a direct mail postcard to current customers and prospects as a reminder to bring their boat in for servicing. The Spring card reminds them to have their boat prepped before the summer launch while the Fall card focuses on winterizing.

Recently, I began adding a short boat maintenance tip to help my postcard stick-out and to differentiate myself as the local boating expert as well. Responses thus far suggest that my free advice is working. In time I hope customers will begin to anticipate the arrival of my next postcard and another free tip.

James Merten Jr., Merten Marine Ltd., Oshkosh, WI

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Don't Confuse Customer Service with Concessions

Managers often confuse issuing a credit or refunding a portion of the purchase price with providing good customer service. In reality, issuing a credit or giving a refund is NOT providing good customer service. It may temporarily alleviate an issue or conflict with a customer, but offers no long term benefit. In fact, it may be detrimental to the company by "training customers that a complaint equals a refund." Companies should focus on fixing the cause of the problem to prevent future occurrences. If a refund or credit is warranted they should always attempt to get something from the customer in return. For example, instead of issuing a credit for past services, give the customer a discount on future business.

Randy Weissman, Storage Banc, Saint Louis, MO

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CRM —Making a Difference in Your Business

I recently rolled out an online based Customer Relationship Management (CRM) tool. The initial purpose was to track inbound emails from customers, however, the more I work with the tool the more uses I see for it. Now I look at it as a potential for monitoring accountability, key performance indicators and tracking for turning around customer issues. If your organization doesn't have a CRM tool, I highly recommend that you investigate them. It has only been a few weeks since I implemented the tool and I am already seeing results from it.

Michael Herring, Best Skins Ever, Arvada, CO

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Quick Tips

Expectations

When hiring a new employee, besides preparing a job description signoff, hand them a list of "20 things we expect from you each and every day".

This ought to include items like "have a good, positive attitude" and "be on time." Then have the president and the new employee sign it. You'll be surprised by the impact it has on an employee's performance.

Craig Noto, SA Quality Fence, San Antonio, TX

Focus on the Positive

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Insanity = doing the same thing and expecting a different outcome. If you want improvement, BEGIN WITH YOU.

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Managers often use employee performance reviews to highlight areas needing improvement. But why do we focus on an employee's weakest points? There is greater value in defining his or her strengths and then developing a plan to build on them.

If you were coaching Shaquille O'Neal, would you tell him to work on his 3-point shot?

Edward Rishebarger, Burnside & Rishebarger, San Antonio, TX

Thanks for the Referrals

We always ask our existing customers for referrals. When they come through for us, we give them a gift certificate for their next purchase from us.

Not only does this help you develop new leads, but it allows you to market to your existing customers.

Rich Moriarty, George Tiemann & Co., Hauppauge, NY

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ABOUT THE ALTERNATIVE BOARD®

The Alternative Board® is comprised of members who are business owners, CEOs or presidents who run businesses in non-competing fields. During a TAB Board meeting, you receive the benefit of the collective experience of the board members, who offer practical solutions to your problems-not theories.

You can learn more about TAB, which has been helping business owners succeed since 1990, by visiting www.TABNCI.com.