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Mentoring Key to Your Future Success

Whether you're opening a new business, trying to make some changes to your existing operation or have been established for decades – business mentoring is useful for your company's future growth and success.

Small business owners who have attended an Iowa Farm Bureau *Renew Rural Iowa* seminar are eligible for free mentoring through the Entrepreneurial Development Center (EDC) with Curt Nelson, President of the EDC and consultant with *Renew Rural Iowa*. Nelson said that mentoring is essentially the same as coaching– and in this instance is consulting for free, since the tab is paid by Iowa Farm Bureau for *Renew Rural Iowa* attendees.

"It's picking up someone who's been there before and can help you omit mistakes," he said. "It's like a free clinic...you sit down and ask questions to help figure out how to remove obstacles for growth."

Sandy Ehrig, Outreach Coordinator with Iowa Farm Bureau's *Renew Rural Iowa* program, said mentoring is a full, diagnostic assessment of a business.

"This is our way of taking (business owners) past the classroom to action – this is the connector to action," she said.

About two years ago when Hadar Manufacturing President Mary Miner first attended a *Renew Rural Iowa* seminar, she knew she needed to make some changes to her business but had no idea where to begin.

"We had some really core issues that hadn't been resolved," Miner said of her family business that she runs with her husband and two siblings in Humboldt.

Miner and her co-owners decided to dig in and follow the steps outlined at a *Renew Rural Iowa* seminar to improve their business for years to come. They agreed to seek the one-on-one mentoring recommended.

"It was a reality check for all of us to say 'we really have to do this.'" she said. "You have to look at the big picture instead of just your day-to-day activities – it really pushes you out of your comfort zone."

At first, Miner said they had to figure out how to structure their business succession plan and basic practices of business. Now, after countless mentoring sessions, she said they still meet with Nelson for mentoring at least four times a year. At that point, she said he always offers something they can go back and improve.

"The (mentoring) they provide by seeing things from a different point of view is helpful," Miner said. "One of the lessons is there's no done - it's an ongoing process of constant adaptation."

Miner said that mentoring is without a doubt helpful to all business owners and entrepreneurs.

"I think that when you're already creative, intelligent and enthusiastic – it's really easy not to see all your blind spots," she said.

All businesses have areas where they can improve, she said, and seeking the help of a professional mentor can help them to find those areas.

"In a very professional manner - they point out all the weaknesses in your armor." she said. "You just have to have that outside perspective – even if you don't want it."

Mentoring, *Renew Rural Iowa's* Ehrig said can help business owners improve all aspects of their businesses, including:

- Completing a business plan
- Calculating realistic start-up costs
- Defining real market opportunity
- Honestly assessing the state of business
- Developing a plan of action to move forward
- Understanding the strategic fit of the solution

Dave Sengpiel, General Manager with Iowa Farm Bureau's Rural Vitality Fund , LLC said he spends more than two-thirds of his time educating business owners about how best to capitalize on their business.

"Getting adequate funding for a company is a complicated maze that a business owner faces," he said. "The sooner that he or she gets some help in working through the process the less painful it will be. Finding the right balance between giving up some portion of their ownership, putting up personal guarantees or pledging all of the assets of the business for funding is a formidable task that can be terrifying if left alone without some guidance."

Business owners who meet with EDC often need a plan of action that Nelson can help them to develop. Or, he said, he can refer them onto specialists in the business arena who can further help with their company's success.

"We do whatever it takes to make (businesses) successful," he said. "Sometimes it is advice and sometimes we roll up our sleeves and do the work for them."

The key is not to wait too long to seek guidance. Helping your business early on, before it develops problems makes salvaging it easier for mentoring consultants.

It's also critical that business owners understand that it's not a one-time, hour long appointment. Rather, it often takes many return visits to fully deal with a problem and continue to improve a business.

Nelson said only 20 to 30 percent of clients that seek mentoring will follow the advice they get and come back for more meetings.

"It's a process of taking and figuring out what works for you and coming back again and again," he said.

Mark VerMeer and his wife Sheri, co-owners of EquiSpa in Ankeny, regularly seek the help of Nelson and the EDC.

"(One-on-one mentoring) is the best thing that ever happened to our business," said Sherie VerMeer.

Mark says that they wouldn't have been able to seek the help of EDC without a financial backing from *Renew Rural Iowa* and the Iowa Farm Bureau.

"We are now to the point where we would never hesitate to call (EDC) before we made our next move," he said. "Farm Bureau and *Renew Rural Iowa*...are providing a tremendous service to Iowans."

To attend a *Renew Rural Iowa* seminar visit www.renewruraliowa.com. If you have attended a seminar and wish to take advantage of your free mentoring services, call (800) 254-9670.

Nominations being accepted for Iowa Women of Innovation

The 2008 Iowa Women of Innovation will recognize women in the workforce who are innovators, role models and leaders in technology, science and engineering. A special event will be held to recognize these women from 5-8 p.m. on November 11 at the Des Moines Marriott.

Nominations are open to women in the technology, science and engineering communities, in business or academia and employed in Iowa. Each nominee must meet the basic definition of the award category for which she is nominated. Individuals can self-nominate and submit multiple nominations for the eight categories. Deadline for nominations is September 26.

To nominate or to register to attend the event, visit <http://www.technologyiowa.org/women/2008/>.

Economic Gardening – How does your community grow?

Economic gardening is designed to “grow your own” jobs through entrepreneurial activity within the community. The concept of economic gardening originated with Chris Gibbons in Littleton, CO who 20 years ago decided that it made more sense to work with existing, fledgling and new businesses in the town rather than trying to compete with the 35,000 other economic development organizations in the country to recruit businesses.

Economic development plans typically include four key tactics: business recruitment, retention, expansion and entrepreneurial development.

For complete article by Jack Schultz, The Agurban/Boomtown Institute, visit:

<http://www.boomtowninstitute.com/Newsletters/20080729.html>

New business creation across the U.S.

Each year, the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation releases the Kauffman Index of Entrepreneurial Activity, which is a leading indicator of new business creation in the United States.

The index captures new business owners in their first month of significant business activity – thus the measure provides the earliest documentation of new business development across the country.

In 2007, .30 percent of the adult population or 300 out of 100,000 adults created a new business each month – representing about 495,000 new businesses per month. This total rate of business creation increased slightly from .20 percent in 2006.

For complete report, visit the 2007 Kauffman Index of Entrepreneurial Activity.

http://www.kauffman.org/pdf/KIEA_041408.pdf