The Edge: Consider sharing solutions as a small business mentor

Vicky Northrup
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The Women’s Business Center at Florida Tech has developed a unique mentoring program called IGNITE 360 that brings together a small business in need of support and up to five senior-level mentors employed outside of that business’ industry.

The purpose is for the mentors to identify areas of concern within the small business and offer alternative solutions that the mentee may not have thought of.

The time is limited, one hour a month for six months, which means everyone gets down to business immediately to understand the goals and help the small business find solutions fast. (Mentees have homework, of course (i.e. finishing business and marketing plans, researching point-of-sale systems, etc.)

Many small business owners work in a bit of a silo and feel that they can only get advice from co-workers, colleagues, friends and family. To have the opportunity to address your company challenges with outsiders who have no intimate knowledge of your business is actually quite helpful. It forces the participating mentee/owner to explain the business at a 30,000-foot level, ensuring they are able to succinctly explain the competitive advantages of that business in the marketplace.

Mentors also don’t have to be concerned necessarily with delivering information that may be hard for the business owner/executive to hear. The mentee understands that they may be
introduced to concepts that they are not used to employing to help their business grow — so those mentees have to be comfortable with change. Most savvy business owners know there is room for improvement and are eager to get this type of feedback. The beauty of this program is that business owners actually take the advice from these seasoned pros and put it to work immediately.

I participated in this program last year with five other mentors and I think we would all agree that at the conclusion of the program we walked away having learned a lot about ourselves, our mentee business, and how to employ our unique experiences to benefit others. As a matter of fact, I picked up ideas that I can now share with other small businesses at the chamber.

This is one of the few truly workable, affordable and successful programs in Brevard for small businesses and I would highly recommend any business owner or executive interested in growing their business to consider this fast-paced, confidential and productive mentoring program through the Women’s Business Center. In addition, any seasoned business professional looking to share their unique knowledge, resources and network with a small business should really consider becoming a mentor.