The Edge: Growing people have biggest payoff

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There is a Chinese proverb that says, “If you want one year of prosperity, grow grain; if you want 10 years of prosperity, grow trees; if you want 100 years of prosperity, grow people.”

People grow companies, and companies grow communities. And so it goes.

Mentoring is a people-centric development process that reveals new opportunities, shortens the learning curve, saves money, instills confidence and clarity, provides critical resources, imposes accountability and supports true personal and professional growth through applied experiential learning. Mentoring is not about talking. It’s about doing and achieving.

Over the past two years, I’ve seen nearly 30 businesses come through the Women’s Business Center at Florida Tech to participate in the IGNITE 360 mentoring program. These businesses have represented numerous industries, at all stages of growth — from startup to second-stage businesses to companies ready for succession planning. These business owners have been women and men in business from two years to three decades — yet all had a commonality… the desire to get even better.
There are many times when an entrepreneur needs a mentor. Often it’s to gain the insights required to effectively manage the effects of ever-changing environments, trends, demographics, competitors and influences from economic conditions or technological advances. Mentoring can also help an entrepreneur answer the singular question: “What’s next.”

That said, mentoring isn’t just for newbies.

There are some mentoring programs out there that provide specialized mentoring for serious business owners with a customized group of advisers. At the Women’s Business Center, we’ve had the opportunity to bring together a team of accomplished mentors who form an advisory board for each mentee company. The team discusses objectives, creates a strategy and develops an action plan tailored to the participating business owner. These are the types of programs to look for when you’re ready to tackle the next level of your business growth.

According to a 2013 MicroMentor.com survey, companies that participate in mentoring programs have reported an average 106 percent increase in revenues and created more than twice the new jobs of those who did not.

Playwright George Bernard Shaw would have made a great mentor. I think he understood the value of customized business mentoring when he said: “The only man I know who behaves sensibly is my tailor; he takes my measurements anew each time he sees me. The rest go on with their old measurements and expect me to fit them.”

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