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OUR EDITORIAL FOCUS
Our country was founded by visionaries who believed in free enterprise through individual determination. We support that spirit and hold that the future of our area lies in the growth and development of small businesses and the efforts of entrepreneurs. We are dedicated to supporting and promoting that growth.

St. Louis Small Business Monthly is St. Louis' locally owned business publication, bringing business tips, strategies and analysis to the presidents, CEOs, owners and top executives of 16,000 businesses in the St. Louis Metropolitan region. SBM, founded in 1988, publishes every month and also provides information at www.SBMon.com and through a variety of business-related forums and events.

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Honoring 50 Fast Moving Businesses

These Businesses Have Beat the Odds To Become Successful

According to Bloomberg, eight out of 10 small-business owners who start a business fail within the first 18 months. A whopping 80% crash and burn. Needless to say, owning a business is not easy.

I don't think most people walking the streets today realize exactly how difficult it is to own and sustain a business, much less grow a business. Sometimes we read in the press the "once-in-a-lifetime" story of an entrepreneur that builds a business in a month or two. It's easy for some to believe that's how all businesses are built.

Business owners know better. Building a business is much like an Olympic athlete winning a Gold medal. The public sees the athletes competing at their best and winning medals. It actually looks pretty easy. But what we never see are the 5 a.m. wakeup calls to train each day. What we don't see are the 4 hours a day, 6 day a week training routines. What we don't see are the friends and family these athletes are giving up for months on end as they travel thousands of miles to train. These are the real reasons these athletes end up standing on the podium.

Business owners have a lot in common with these athletes.

This month we are honored to feature our latest class of the Future 50, 50 of the up-and-coming businesses in the St. Louis area. We are proud to introduce them to you, and we know you'll be hearing more from them in the future. As you read through their stories (pages 21-34), you might also get a sense that this honor and their success has come easily. Don't make that mistake. Just like Olympic athletes, these entrepreneurs had to do the hard, difficult things to earn success over the years.



They've risked a lot and worked hard to not only survive but to build growing businesses. We are honoring them this month not only for their success and for their future successes - we are honoring them for their discipline, focus and perseverance that it took to become a success.

These are the types of companies economic development agencies dream about. The strategy for economic development used to be stealing larger companies from other cities. That strategy didn't work. These agencies have now figured out the best way to create economic development is to nurture and build small companies, just like our Future 50 honorees.

This is a strategy that is already paying off for St. Louis. Companies like Enterprise, Build-A-Bear, Express Scripts, Edward Jones, World Wide Technology, Scotttrade, just to name a few, all began in St. Louis, and they all began as small businesses.

They have played a critical role in our local economy and community. The race is now on to find the next great businesses to follow in their footsteps. We think some of our Future 50 firms have that opportunity. Stay tuned. ■

Ron

SAGE ADVICE

SPEAK WORDS THAT MAKE YOU SOUND SMARTER

People are not buying what you think you are selling. They are buying the job that you do for them. They are hiring your product or your service for that job. To begin to illicit this kind of thinking in your organization, you can ask yourself: What job am I being hired to complete? When our customers buy our product or service, what outcomes are they seeking for themselves?

Jeremy Nulik, page 11

Using control is like any other harmful addiction; it's painful to withdraw from and difficult to imagine a life without. Until you decide a life without using control is more desirable than one with it, you will continue to use it. I offer you a challenge: Seek out people who influence others without the use of control. Notice how they make you feel, how they make others feel. Watch what they do and how they do it.

Judy Ryan, page 36

Get some good mentors who have climbed the mountains you're facing.

Phillip Cohen, page 39

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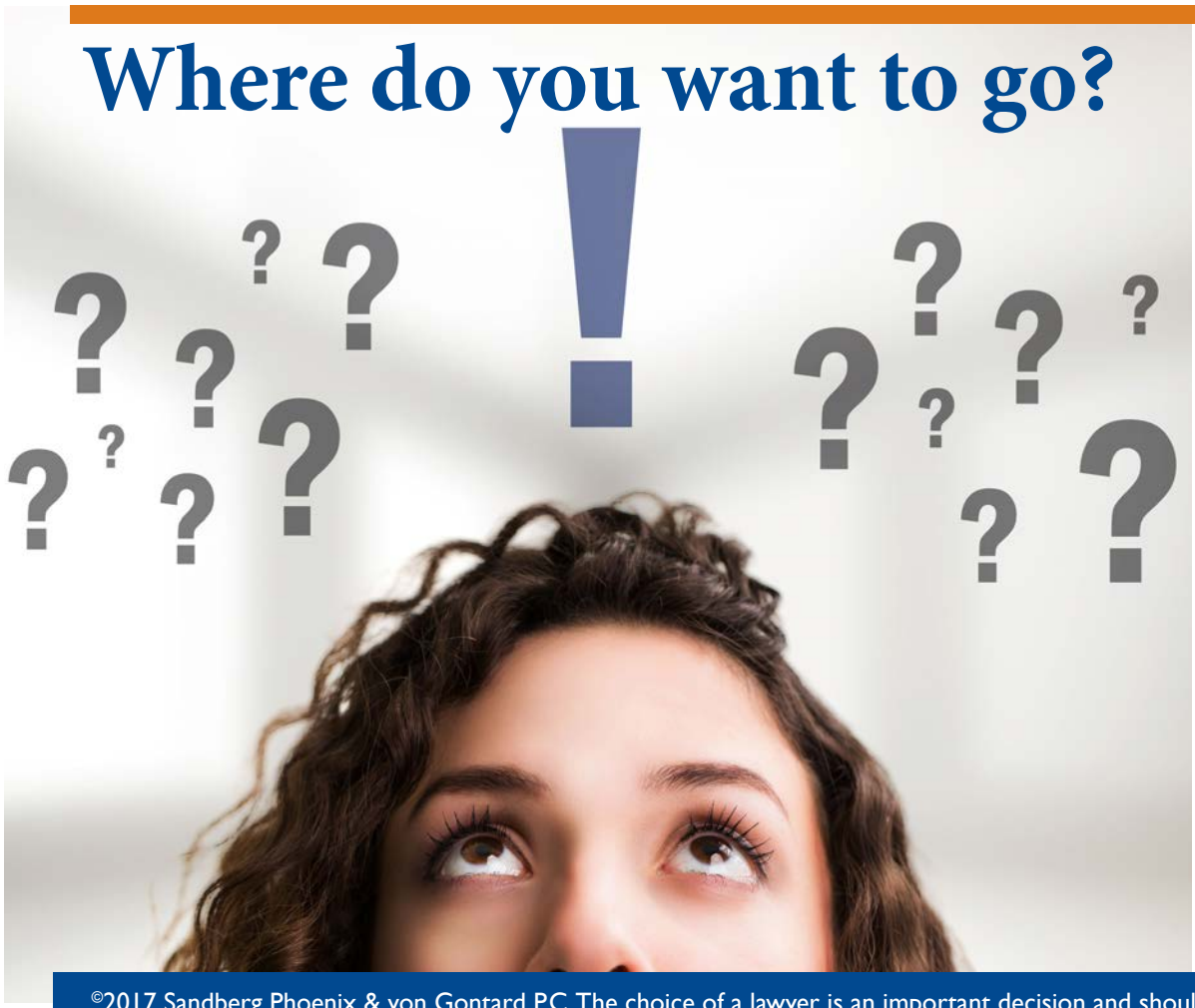
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Building A One-Of-A-Kind Business

Shelly Tisius Is Putting Employee Satisfaction First As She Builds MT & Associates

Having spent her entire career in leadership and human services, Shelly Tisius developed a strong understanding of the needs of businesses. With a passion for the Deaf community, Tisius has also been working and socializing in it since 1998, allowing her to gain an understanding of their needs as well. "Most interpreting agencies only have a background in sign language interpreting when they open a business," she says. "I have experience and formal education in business and sign language interpreting, which allows for a well-balanced and educated approach to the business and interpreting demands."

As an experienced interpreter, Tisius realized there was a void in the industry when it came to quality customer service that clients received. She felt like she could fill the gap.

The result is MT & Associates, a sign language interpreting service Tisius founded four years ago.

Today, with her unique training, understanding and passion, she doesn't view her role as management but more so as assisting clients, interpreters and staff with considering all the facts before a decision is made. "Our company name being MT & Associates represents the partnership position staff have over business practices so we can focus on community needs rather than what a traditional management model desires," she says. "This enables us to focus on processes to enhance the quality of services rather than leading with a bottom-line focus. Service to our community always comes before the business, and it's working because our business continues to grow, interpreters love working for us and our clients are always satisfied."

The keys to the company's early success come from seeking help and guidance, according to Tisius. Early on as an entrepreneur, she contacted SCORE and began working with a mentor, Tom Cornwell. SCORE provides free small business mentoring to entrepreneurs and small business owners. SCORE is a non-profit, volunteer organization, whose mission is to promote the success of small business in the St. Louis area.

"Having an outside the box perspective is really important when you are growing a business. The great thing was that Tom wasn't in our industry. Everyone giving me advice seemed to be tied to the industry in some way. It was refreshing to get an outside viewpoint on the ideas and issues I presented to Tom."

"I found SCORE through my work with the SBA when I first got into business," Tisius said. "I met with Tom and then we met again. He said some owners never come to a second meeting. I knew I needed to be persistent to get the most out of the mentoring SCORE was providing."

For Tisius, her SCORE mentor became a great sounding board. "It was nice to have someone I could bounce ideas off of and gain feedback on those ideas," she said. "Having an outside the box perspective is really important when you are growing a business. The great thing was that Tom wasn't in our industry. Everyone giving me advice seemed to be tied to the industry in some way. It was refreshing to get an outside viewpoint on the ideas and issues I presented to Tom."

Tisius said her SCORE mentor has helped her with a variety of issues, everything from how to grow the company, interacting with clients and customers, etc.

Another key to the company's success has been her commitment as boss and mentor to her staff.

Over the years, Tisius has learned a lot about people and the diversity of the individual by being a boss. "For example, if you provide me a challenge, I can likely see it from various perspectives," she says.

While she says this skill is a burden when she's trying to narrow down what to eat for dinner, it's an invaluable asset when working with internal and external clients. "It has also shaped MT&A's business model of only working with the highest-quality



interpreters and staff," she says. "We not only have a vast amount of in-house expertise but also a highly diverse staff to meet any hearing or deaf client's needs."

To build a positive culture as Tisius has at MT&A, she recommends that employee satisfaction always come before current business needs. "Only hire people for positions that are a good fit for them at that business," she says. "I find that experience in the basic skills for a job are crucial, but most important is the character, demeanor and work ethic of the individual. Work processes can be taught, but soft-personal skills are much harder to teach. After you've got the best people, then provide them guidance and let them spread their wings/take their own initiative. There are many ways to do the same process, so allow for creativity but stay connected for when they need you."

SALES MOVES BY JEFFREY GITOMER

All I Wanted to Do Was Give Them My Money



Help or hell? Customers call for one reason: They want help. Most of the time what they get is one letter short.

A few years ago I found myself in Muncie, Indiana. I was on the way to Indianapolis and in need of a hotel room there. And I wanted to eat dinner at St. Elmo Steak House. I ate there the year before and could still taste the (world's best) shrimp cocktail and a perfect steak. And I was going to request Bill –– one of the world's finest waiters.

My dilemma was: Do I stay at a downtown Indianapolis hotel, near St. Elmo's, or at an airport hotel because I have a 6:30 a.m. plane to catch? I decided to stay near the airport and take a cab back and forth. I called the Adam's Mark (the closest place to the airport), got an operator and said, "I'd like to make a reservation for tonight."

The operator said, "One moment please." And transferred me to what I thought was their reservations department. "Adam's Mark reservations. May I help you?" the next person started. I repeated, "I'd like to make a reservation for tonight." "For which city?" she said.

Crap, they'd transferred me to one of those central reservation places. I hate those places. Why couldn't they have taken my reservation at the hotel? Why did they have to send my call 1,000 miles away? I hung up.

Maybe the downtown hotel would be a better idea. I called the Omni Hotel. "Omni Hotel. How may I direct your call?" the operator chirps. "I'd like to make a reservation for tonight," I said. "Reservations is closed. Please call back after 9 a.m.," she stated firmly. "In other words, no one wants my money?" I questioned innocently. "Reservations is closed, sir." (For those of you who may not be familiar with American jargon and euphemisms, SIR is an acronym that actually means Stick It in your Rear.)

I ask for the front desk. Surely they will take my money if I talk real nice. "Front desk. May I help you?"

"I'd like to make a reservation for tonight."

"I can't help you. We don't take reservations."

"What do you do? Isn't the idea to sell rooms?"

"Sir, I don't make the rules; I just follow them."

Now I ask for the hotel manager. "This is Heidi. How can I help you?" she said in a matter-of-fact way. Professional –– but not friendly. "I'd like to make a reservation for tonight," I begged.

"Sir, I can make you a reservation, but we are almost fully booked and the only rate I can give you is $159." (In other words, we have cheaper rates but not for you, buddy) "I'll only be there for 10 hours," I pleaded. "Sir, we are almost sold out, and that's the best rate I can give you."

I reject her "offer" and call back the Adam's Mark. This time I ask for the front desk. "I'd like to make a reservation for tonight." She starts to transfer me to Buffalo and reservations central again, but I'm wise to her tricks and I ask for the manager on duty. I get Crystal. Friendly, helpful Crystal. She takes my reservation on a piece of paper, calls it in to reservations central herself and calls me back three minutes later with a confirmation number. Couldn't any one of the other people have done the same thing?

I tell Crystal I may arrive late because I'm eating at St. Elmo first. She says, "Be sure to get the shrimp cocktail." I smile and reassure her it's on my mind.

NOTE: My Adam's Mark rate was $89 for the room. The rate at the Omni was almost twice that. Now I can eat and sleep for the same money I would have spent just to sleep and have money left for a cab ride and a big tip for someone nice (if there is such a person).

I hop in the cab and announce, "St. Elmo Steak House please." "Be sure to order the shrimp cocktail" the driver says as we start out.

My St. Elmo experience was superb. Service as great as the food. And, of course, a shrimp cocktail that everyone in creation seems to know — and rave — about.

Here are the lessons and pointed questions attached to the above story as it relates to YOUR business and YOUR customers:

- Who is empowered to take an order? How easy is it to do business with you?
- Suppose the customer wants it and you are unavailable. What happened to that order? Suppose your competition was available?
- Just because you're closed doesn't mean your customer has no needs. How many of your customers are open when you are closed or unavailable? What happens if a customer calls to place an order when you are closed?
- Start with friendly engagement –– not professional engagement. How do you want to be served — professional or friendly? Let me ask it a different way: Do you want to hang around someone professional or friendly? Easier answer.
- Max Gitomer's first rule of business he taught me: "Son, first take their order and their money." Is that what you do?
- Upper management (whom I define as "people with as little customer contact as they can possibly get away with and zero sense of reality") are the pinheads that make rules to drive customers to competitors. Are you making corporate accommodations or customer accommodations?
- When you have the best quality, people talk about it. When your quality exceeds everyone else's, you develop a reputation — and no one talks about the price. What are you known for?

I am most amazed at the companies that spend millions on advertising and marketing to attract the customer but yet their people won't take "yes" for an answer when a prospect arrives ready to buy.

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Jeffrey Gitomer is the author of "The Sales Bible," "Customer Satisfaction Is Worthless, Customer Loyalty Is Priceless," "The Little Red Book of Selling," "The Little Red Book of Sales Answers," "The Little Black Book of Connections," "The Little Gold Book of YES! Attitude," "The Little Green Book of Getting Your Way," and "Social BOOM!" For more information, visit www.gitomer.com or email salesman@gitomer.com.

ASK THE BANKER

Are home equity loans a good way to finance a startup company?

Starting a new company can be risky. According to the Small Business Administration, just two out of three new companies survive their first two years in business. Only one in three lives to celebrate its 10th anniversary, reports the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Banks understand these risks. That's why most are reluctant to approve loans to fund business startups. That's also why banks require detailed business plans that explain how loan funds will be used and repaid.

The hurdles to home equity loan approval, on the other hand, are much lower. For some small-business owners, these loans can be a good source of startup funding. You are essentially borrowing your own money – the equity you have built in your home. So you won't be required to submit a business plan to justify how the money will be used or repaid.

The home equity approach also gives you options. One is a traditional home equity loan, which functions like a typical mortgage. You'll get a one-time lump sum that you'll pay back, with interest, over a set period of time.

Another alternative is a home equity line of credit, which works more like a credit card. This option gives you the flexibility to withdraw funds as you need them, up to an approved amount. As you pay off the principal, your credit revolves and you can use it again.

Both home equity approaches to funding a business startup, however, include risks. These loans use a borrower's home as collateral. So if a business struggles and the loan isn't repaid, borrowers may lose their homes.

It's a good idea to talk with a banker before seeking business startup funding. ■



Debi Enders (debi.enders@commercebank.com) is vice president, small business banking at Commerce Bank.

CULTURECENTRIC LEADERSHIP
BY JONATHAN JONES

Take the CultureCentric Leadership Quiz

Respond to the following statements with a quick gut feeling of Strongly Agree (5 points), Agree (3 points), Disagree (0 points) or Strongly Disagree (-5 points).

• The environment encourages employees to perform at their best every day.
• All employees talk positively outside the office about their career and the company.
• Meetings are productive and engaging.
• All employees believe they have a clear mission when they come to work.
• All employees are excited about their career and coming in to work.
• All employees work in an atmosphere of trust.
• We only have the "Right People" and they are in the "Right" roles.
• All employees see management as a cohesive unit and want to follow them.
• Reports, accountability and dashboards are in place to ensure corporate performance-to-plan.
• We are consistently profitable and growing.
• There is a simple repeatable formula for sustainable success at my company.

Total your score.

What does your score mean?

30 or above: You are either Zappos-like or in denial.
1 to 30: Excellent – a positive score indicates a positive culture. Now is the best opportunity to maximize the value of the culture!
-9 to 0: Don't cry – this is typical. Many people like to be average.
-39 to -10: You know there are problems. Hopefully this quiz can help you determine the action you want to take.
- 40 or lower: Plan your exit strategy; get out while you can! Life could be better!

Note: This quiz was designed for awareness and has not been statistically validated. I hope it gives you areas to look at to strengthen your culture. ■



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HIGH VOLTAGE MARKETING
BY TOM RUWITCH



Why I Choose the Small, Local Camera Business Over the National Big Boys



It can be difficult for small, local businesses to succeed in a world full of corporate giants and online vendors. That's why I'm always happy to highlight local businesses that are doing what it takes to compete.

I'm an avid photographer who subscribes to several email lists for various camera vendors – some local, some out of town.

The out-of-town vendors are industry giants who fill my inbox with special offers, new releases and other product pitches.

The problem: I've already sunk a lot of money into cameras and lenses. Sure, I'll buy a new lens and upgrade the camera eventually. But most of the time I'm not in buying mode. After a while, I stop opening those pitchy emails because I know I'll see a bunch of products I don't want or need.

On the other hand, I open my emails from two local vendors: Schiller's and Creve Coeur Camera. Why? Because when I read their emails, I become a better photographer without having to purchase better (more expensive) gear.

A recent email from Schiller's included tips on how to protect camera gear from sweltering heat. Last winter, around the time that bald eagles gathered near the Mississippi, Schiller's shared tips on how to photograph birds of prey.

Emails from Creve Coeur Camera included lessons on how to protect your lens from scratches and how to create a sense of movement in your pictures.

Emails from these vendors also included product pitches, but I don't mind that as long as I find something that will interest me beyond the pitch.

When you pitch a product, only a small percentage of people are ready to say "yes" and buy at that moment. If you send enough pitches and catch enough of those yeses, your email may have positive return on investment (ROI).

But you will maximize your ROI only if you focus, also, on the "maybes" – those people like me who aren't saying yes right now but are prospects to buy later.

You should include content in your emails that will keep the maybes interested and educate them.

Photography tips keep me interested. So I continue to open emails from the local guys while I'm likely to ignore (or even opt out of) those pitchy emails from the big boys.

When I am ready to buy, whom will I choose? The local folks who have helped me with their interesting emails or the out-of-town big boys whose emails are not even opened? I think you know the answer.

That interesting, educational content serves a dual purpose. It moves the maybe to yes more quickly. That tip about preventing lens scratches recommended that you put a glass filter on all your lenses. Filters are inexpensive and easy to replace. Scratch the filter and protect the lens. Good tip. I bet the store sold a bunch of filters that week to people who otherwise weren't planning to spend a dime on camera accessories. Good tips often serve as good sales letters. ■

Tom Ruwitch is founder and president of MarketVolt, a St. Louis-based marketing technology firm. Visit MarketVolt.com/grow-your-list for an expanded set of list-building techniques.



Just Add Water

Know the Job You Do Can Create Instant Change

My clearest memory that involves instant coffee took place during the Reagan administration at a small town church. Rather than brewing a fresh pot, nice old ladies offered cups of the water dressed in brown. I can still remember the sounds of the plastic spoons brushing the Styrofoam as they prepared it, and the musty scent of almost-coffee that had arisen.

I had not given the stuff a thought since that day. That is, until last week, when listening to a podcast called The Pitch featuring Sudden Coffee, a company that claims "instant coffee like no other." The show format is a glimpse into a pitch from founders to investors. This episode, however, was compelling because it is likely one of the most apparent examples of an insight that is frequently missing in marketing: knowing the job – the real job – your product or service performs.



Spoiler alert: Sudden Coffee did not have sudden success on the program. The cofounders, one of whom is an award-winning barista and coffee nerd, claimed that home coffee brewers don't really know what they are doing when preparing coffee. And this next-level instant product would gather monthly subscribers because it took the guess work out of making a great cup of coffee. Just add water.

Here's the problem: Only a couple of the investors drank coffee so the "live demo" was a bit of a flop. The founders only discussed the attributes of the coffee itself. The investors quickly lit upon the hole in their presentation. They did not have any compelling reason to care about the coffee. Selling this product as instant coffee, only, like, better, was not going to force open the wallets of investors. And it was not going to inspire subscribers at the same cost they would pay for a tall cup at Starbucks.

A lot of founders with conviction are much like the Sudden Coffee guys. You become fixated on explaining the features and benefits of a product. The chances are that these founders are much like you. And a good place to start to separate out what is most compelling about your idea, product or service is by connecting it to what job it performs.

Clayton Christensen, Harvard Business School professor and author, most famously lit upon this concept of "jobs to be done" in *Competing Against Luck*. He believes that if companies could organize themselves based on the jobs that need to be done, then they could more effectively provide experiences that enhance the customer experience. This is the beginning of creating real differentiation, a chance for integration with other companies and a foundation for marketing and communications.

When it comes to instant coffee, the church ladies likely used it to have something simple to provide comfort to the people at a gathering. They hired the coffee to perform that job. Other things that do that would be donuts, juice, sandwiches, music. But they decided to hire instant coffee because it was simple to make, plentiful and kept people energized.

For Sudden Coffee, they are not yet clear on what the job they perform. But I suspect that it is deeper than a "better instant coffee." From what I heard toward the end of the program, it would be something like, "With Sudden Coffee, you can live in a collar community and still have a morning like a hipster." That is a platform on which you could create compelling messaging, and it allows for integration with other brands that do a similar job.

People are not buying what you think you are selling. They are buying the job that you do for them. They are hiring your product or your service for that job. To begin to illicit this kind of thinking in your organization, you can ask yourself: What job am I being hired to complete? When our customers buy our product or service, what outcomes are they seeking for themselves?

To get the real answers requires anthropology and research. But this is a beginning. And even the beginning will start to give you new ways to make instant changes to your communications platform. Just add water. ■

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Secure Your Small Business Against Social Engineering

Is your small business protected from the most prevalent form of social engineering—email phishing?

Although there are a number of different types of social engineering attacks, phishing was again the top variety, found in over 90 percent of both incidents and breaches, according to the 2017 Verizon Data Breach Investigations Report. The report also noted that 95 percent of phishing attacks that led to a breach were followed by some form of software installation. The act of manipulating people into disclosing sensitive data continues to be on the rise, and it's important for organizations of all sizes to lay the groundwork for prevention and detection.

Below are the areas of focus to prepare against potential phishing attacks:

Prevention:
- Educate users on the signs of phishing emails and where to report them.
- Isolate systems so the malware cannot spread.
- Consider including "[External]," "[E]" or "[Not from the CEO!]" in the subject line for incoming outside emails.
- Create an internal process that includes some form of communication other than email, particularly for large wire transfer requests.

Detection:
- Develop an incident response plan to identify, contain, notify about and resolve the incident.
- Expire credentials that may have been compromised.
- Understand where infected users have system access.
- Work with your financial institution to block and alert about irregular activity such as large transfers of funds.

To learn more about email phishing trends and to get other independent advice, contact Bill Gogel at bgogel@bswllc.com or 314-983-1363. ■



Karen Stern, CPA, (kstern@bswllc.com), partner in charge, Brown Smith Wallace Entrepreneurial Services Group, provides tax and accounting services for companies ranging from start-ups to $20 million in revenue.

HR BY THE NUMBERS
BY JESSICA SULLINS

Break Time



Breaks provide employees with the opportunity to refresh and step away from their desks. Exempt employees tend to take a break when needed. However, employers must consider how to handle breaks for nonexempt, hourly employees.

Workload, hours worked and department all impact when an employee can take a break. Employers should create a companywide policy and communicate it to all supervisors and employees to ensure consistency in the workplace.

The survey says:
According to AAIM Employers' Association's 2017-2018 Policies and Benefits Survey of 95 St. Louis and central Illinois businesses, 54.4% of employers provide two breaks of 10 to 15 minutes (excluding meals) and 90% of those employers pay employees during those breaks. Furthermore, 63.1% of employers provide 30 minutes as the average meal period length.

What to consider:
- **Tracking.** It is important to track breaks, both paid and unpaid, to keep an accurate record of the hours employees worked in case there is ever a question.
- **Pay.** Any compensation rules the employer implements for employees' breaks need to be in the handbook and communicated to employees.
- **Consistency.** Employers need to ensure they are consistently providing all employees with the same number of breaks and treating them fairly. ■

Jessica Sullins, PHR (solutions.team@aaimea.org) is on the Research and Solutions Team for AAIM Employers' Association, which helps Missouri and Illinois companies manage their people and processes.



SHARP & ON POINT
BY LAURIE GRIFFITH



Taking Full Advantage of Missouri Economic Incentives



Are you a business owner planning to invest in additional jobs or infrastructure? Have you considered the benefits of economic incentives offered by the state of Missouri? If not, the first thing you should do is reach out to your CPA. Many CPA firms work with specialists like Stephen Brunson, a principal at McGuire Sponsel who commits every day to helping clients make investment decisions while negotiating valuable economic incentives.

Economic incentives are put in place by state and federal government entities to encourage businesses to invest in jobs, infrastructure, etc. A great example in Missouri is Missouri Works, the state's flagship program and No. 1 incentive tool to encourage expansion and retention. Established in 2013, the program providing withholding benefits and tax credits to support businesses that are expanding their workforce and facilities.

There are distinct categories within Missouri Works, each with its own set of requirements. It's important to fully understand your project and how it can fit into one of these categories. According to Brunson, "with so many location options, businesses should not only understand cost, workforce and tax implications of their location decisions, but they should also understand how programs like Missouri Works can affect their analysis." Since these incentives are forward-looking, you can make strategic decisions in order to maximize potential value from your investment.

For example, one of the Missouri Works categories, Statewide Works, requires 10 new jobs in two years and wages at 90% of the county average. However, if you have a facility in an Enhanced Enterprise Zone (specified geographic areas designated by local governments and certified by the Department of Economic Development) and make a $100,000 capital investment, you can reduce the number of required new jobs from 10 to two.

If you meet the requirements and are approved for the program, you will receive automatic benefits including retention of state withholding taxes for qualified employees. There are also discretionary benefits that can be awarded in the form of additional tax credits that the Missouri Department of Economic Development can provide in order to secure competitive projects with a significant economic impact. When expanding businesses know their options and the advantages and disadvantages of different location alternatives, the Missouri Department of Economic Development will value the project, assess the competition and utilize discretionary benefits to help secure the investment and job creation.

Missouri Works is just one of many economic incentives offered by the state. Understanding and obtaining these incentives can be complex, so it's important to have a specialist like Brunson by your side. Join us at the next Sharp and On Point Speaker Series on Sept. 19, 2017, from 7:30 to 9 a.m. at the Lodge of Des Peres, where Brunson will discuss Missouri Works in more depth as well as other incentive programs. ■

Stephen Brunson, a principal at McGuire Sponsel, specializes in incentive identification, negotiation and compliance. He is experienced with tax incentives at all levels including local, state and federal.

Laurie Griffith is a principal at Lopata, Flegel & Co. Accountants and Management Consultants. The Sharp & On Point Business Advisory Speaker Series is a free event at the Lodge of Des Peres sponsored by Lopata. Learn business strategies you can immediately put in place to point your business in the right direction. To reserve your seat or for more information, visit www.sharpandonpoint.com or www.lopataflegal.com.



Prevent Work Comp Claim Fraud

These 4 Warning Signs Could Indicate Employee Claim Fraud

Most work comp claims involve legitimate accidents and injuries, but the few that are fraudulent can impact everyone. The most common type of work comp fraud is employee claim fraud, which occurs when an employee makes a claim for benefits that they know they are not entitled to. Depending on the extent of the crime, claim fraud can be a misdemeanor or a felony. Multiple offenses can be punishable by fines up to $10,000 or double the value of the fraud, whichever is greater.

In fraud cases, an employee may claim to have been injured at work when it actually happened elsewhere, file multiple claims for the same injury, exaggerate the seriousness of an injury, or even stage an accident that never happened. There are many ways a claim can be fraudulent, but these common red flags indicate that a claim is worth a closer look.



Warning signs of claim fraud

1. Suspicious timing

Did the injury occur on Monday morning or Friday afternoon? Did the employee file the claim late or after termination of employment? Is there a coincidence between the date of injury and a request for time off? Is the employee difficult to reach at home after the injury?

2. Suspicious circumstances

Did anyone see the accident happen? Does the employee's version of what caused the injury conflict with medical reports or the first report of injury?

3. Employee history

Is the employee new or disgruntled? Do they have a secondary job? Is there a history of disciplinary action or other litigated claims? Has the employee tried to borrow money from coworkers or requested pay advances?

4. Injury characteristics

Is the work injury similar to a pre-existing medical condition? Does the employee have hobbies that could cause a similar injury? Do they refuse medical treatment that may confirm the nature or extent of the injury?

The presence of any of these warning signs does not prove fraud, but should encourage policyholders to dig deeper by asking more questions. Because employer fraud is also a concern, employers must remain diligent about all work comp claims filed by employees. You may be at risk for employer fraud if you make a false statement about an employee's entitlement to benefits or support a questionable claim. Never discourage an employee from filing a legitimate claim, and always determine whether the reported injury happened prior to being insured.

If the details of an employee's claim just don't add up, contact your work comp provider's fraud hotline and let a trained investigator help protect you and your business.

Visit worksafecenter.com for more information on workplace safety and work comp insurance. ■

Caitlin Way (cway@mem-ins.com or 573.499.4236) is a Marketing Communication Specialist at Missouri Employers Mutual, Missouri's No. 1 provider of workers compensation insurance. MEM can help you eliminate injuries and reduce your work comp costs. Visit www.worksafecenter.com for your workplace safety needs.

Newsletters

For a business leader, communicating to employees is a full-time responsibility. Time for communication is built into schedules through one-on-ones, small-group meetings and large-group meetings. A leader will often have stand-ups for more urgent communications. Emails and internal memos are other significant methods for communicating. A tool Mosby has used for many years is a monthly newsletter.

We use the newsletter for three main purposes. The first reason is to show our humanity. The day-to-day operations of a business can sometimes mask that our organization is made up of people with interesting lives. We overcome this by sharing birthdays, anniversaries, client attaboys and other special announcements like personal achievements, engagements, weddings and new babies.

The second purpose of the newsletter is to highlight team efforts. When you have people and teams geographically spread out, it is difficult to see the extraordinary work being done by your fellow associates. We showcase their work through articles spotlighting specifics about projects and unique business initiatives.

The third purpose of the newsletter is to bring us closer together and align our team with the business direction. The opening of the newsletter is intended to draw the reader into what the company is focusing on and what is important at this moment in time. This greeting is typically written by me or the owner of the company.

How do we execute the newsletter? It is curated by our marketing team. Different employees from around the company fulfill unique monthly duties contributing content. Once the newsletter is packaged, a PDF of the final version is emailed to all employees on the first of the month. A paper version follows via snail mail to each employee's home. This last step helps bring the family in closer to the company.

Newsletters may seem laborious, but the ROI is high. ■



Mark McClanahan (mmcclanahan@callmosb.com or 314.909.1800) is the president at Mosby Building Arts.

What Your Employees Should Know About Security: Part 3

BY SCOTT M. LEWIS

Cell phone thefts are on the rise and will continue for the near future. In most cases, cell phone thieves are not after the data but after the actual phone. However, there has been a significant rise in identity theft due to stolen smartphones and the data contained on them. According to a Business Insider report, 44% of smartphone thefts were due to the owner leaving them in a public place, 14% were taken from a house or a car and 11% were due to pickpockets or street theft.

Some easy smartphone protections according to Ctia Everything Wireless.

- Be aware, know your surroundings and how you are using your smart phone. Do not carry it in your back pocket or loose fitting clothes.
- Lock it, set a strong password on your smart phone and change it often.
- Add apps that can track, lock, and erase personal information on your smartphone.
- Save it. Like your computer you should be backing up your smartphone and saving your pictures to a secondary media source.
- Insure it, just makes financially getting a replacement a little easier to swallow.

Using personal devices for business or what some people call BYOD, bring your own device, to the workplace. In some cases the development of a good BYOD policy can have some benefits such as improved moral in the form that employees like to select their own device type and manufacturer. There are also many challenges that come with BYOD such as ensuring that work data will not be mixed with personal data, verifying that non-employees or family members will not use the device and determining what happens if an employee is terminated or loses the device. These are all things that must be determined prior to initiating a BYOD policy, along with very tight written policies around confidentiality, intellectual right ownership and data destruction.

According to Computer Weekly, the ICO guidance recommends the following steps for BYOD companies:

- Determine which type of company data can be processed on personal devices
- How you are going to secure access and encryption of company data
- How the corporate data should be stored on personal devices
- How and when corporate data should be deleted from personal devices
- How the data should be transferred from the personal devices to the company servers.

System misconfigurations, poor patch management, use of default usernames and passwords. We all would like to think that hacking has simply evolved into a highly sophisticated process that is always keeping technologists on their toes. However, that is not the case and according to the Gartner Group, 99% of firewall breaches through 2020 are going to be due to human error and misconfiguration.

How could this be? Configuration of a firewall can be a very difficult and time consuming process, and the difference between being properly configured and misconfigured could be as simple as a missed period or misspelling simple mistakes that open things up to the outside world. In 2015 it was a misconfigured router that grounded 90 United Airlines flights for more than 2 hours. An AlgoSec State of Automation survey found that 20% of organizations had a security breach, 48% had an application outage and 42% had a network outage due to errors in a manual security related processes.

According to Info Security there are some steps you can take to minimize the human error factor during security change processes:

1) A request for a change is made. One of the biggest complaints is that it takes too long to make a requested change. This is one area where taking your time is well worth it. Make sure that you understand the change. Make sure that you understand the risks prior to implementation.

2) Planning for the change. Make sure that your team has a full understanding of your infrastructure. Making a change in one area may open up holes in another.

3) Understand the risks. Make sure that all potentially exposed areas are reviewed. What may seem like a simple change could affect applications, open up inward and outward traffic or expose other parts of the network.

4) Making the change. Make sure that someone who knows the firewall rules and configurations makes the changes, should it be added to the existing rule or should it be its own rule or abandon all together.

5) The change is validated. Make sure that you test your change and the rules in totality. Again, the difference between properly configured and misconfigured could be very small.

6) Documentation. Make sure that the change was clearly and completely documented.

Poor security policies written and automated. Having strong written policies are key to the overall success of any security initiative and awareness training. If you do not have policies, what are you going to train on and enforce? In addition, without strong policies, you open your company up to interpretation of existing policies. Worse yet, without a policy a legal argument could be made that if you do not say we cannot do it, then we can - but then legally where does the liability for misdeeds done lay? What are some of the things you should cover in your security awareness training policy?

- Acceptable use policy for electronic communications
- Confidential data policy
- Email policy
- Mobile device policy
- Incident response policy
- Network security policy
- Password policy



- Physical security policy
- Wireless network and guest access policy

The power of social engineering is staggering and the risk and exposure to your corporate systems is extremely high. In a study performed by Carnegie Mellon University, they found that people were willing to be convinced to download and install a program on their computers for as little as $1. The research showed that for the promise of payment of $1 that 67% of people were willing to download the program and 63% were willing to actually run the program. Security attacks are increasingly dependent on human interaction in order to achieve their goals, so accounting for the human factor within your security strategy and awareness is becoming even more critical in today's corporate environment. ■

Scott Lewis is the President and CEO of Winning Technologies Group of Companies. The Winning Technologies Group of companies is an international technology management company. Scott has more than 30 years of experience in the technology industry, is a nationally recognized speaker on technology subjects such as Collocation, Security, CIO level Management, Data and Voice Communications and Best Practices related to the management of technology resources. Learn more about Winning Technologies at www.winningtech.com or call 877-379-8279.

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Anders CPAs + Advisors	314.655.5500 anderscpa.com 800 Market St., #500 St. Louis, MO 63101
Black Dress Partners	314.223.0000 blackdresspartners.com 8820 Ladue Rd., #203 St. Louis, MO 63124
Blade Technologies, Inc.	314.752.7999 bladetechinc.com 10820 Sunset Office Dr., #101 St. Louis, MO 63127
Brown Smith Wallace, LLC	314.983.1200 bswllc.com 6 CityPlace Dr., #900 St. Louis, MO 63141
CTL Business Solutions	314.605.6625 cleartolaunch.com 414 Hanley Industrial Ct. Brentwood, MO 63144
Colarelli, Meyer & Associates (CMA)	314.721.1860 cmaconsult.com 7751 Carondelet, #200 St. Louis, MO 63105
Drive Social Media	314.450.8363 drivesocialnow.com 906 Olive St., #700 St. Louis, MO 63101
Experience On Demand	314.610.9551 experience-on-demand.com 16020 Swingley Ridge Rd., #240 Chesterfield, MO 63017
Gard Business Coaching	314.378.6644 gardbusinesscoaching.com 100 Chesterfield Business Pkwy., #200 Chesterfield, MO 63005
Gateway Safety Consulting, LLC	636.278.7233 gateway-safety.com 5 Fishers Hill Dr. St. Peters, MO 63376
Jackson Consultants, LLC	314.727.4474 jacksonconsultants.net 7612 Maryland Ave. Clayton, MO 63105
Leadership Alliance	314.993.8008 leadershipall.com 655 Craig Rd., #340 St. Louis, MO 63141
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Charles L. Crane Agency-West County	636.537.5000 craneagency.com	400 Chesterfield Center, #320 Chesterfield, MO 63017
Country Financial	314.279.5191 countryfinancial.com	762 Lemay Ferry Rd. St. Louis, MO 63125
Denny & Associates, Inc.	636.887.4700 dtdinsurance.com	1022 Peruque Crossing Ct., Ste. B O'Fallon, MO 63366
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Heartland Insurance, LLC	636.477.8700 heartlandinsurance.net	2451 Executive Dr., #200 St. Charles, MO 63303
Heffernan Insurance Brokers	636.536.2082 heffins.com	16100 Swingley Ridge Rd., #250 Chesterfield, MO 63017
Justin Neskas, Farmers Insurance	636.875.1975 agents.farmers.com	15366 Veterans Memorial Pkwy. Wentzville, MO 63385
Lang Insurance	636.229.7000 langinsurance.com	3920 S. Old Hwy. 94, #39 St. Charles, MO 63304
Mid Rivers Insurance	636.442.4040 midriversinsurance.com	2429 Hwy. K O'Fallon, MO 63368
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Since 1912, Lashly & Baer, P.C. has been contributing to the St. Louis community, not only sharing its knowledge as a law firm but by giving time to civic development. While celebrating its 105th anniversary this year, the firm continues as a leader in the business community.

Founded by Jacob Lashly, a successful St. Louis trial attorney, the Firm engaged primarily in general civil trial work with a special focus on business litigation. "Our founder, Mr. Lashly, was one of Missouri's outstanding trial lawyers, as well as president of the American Bar Association," says Stuart J. Vogelsmeier, chair of the firm's Business Practice Group, who joined the Firm in 1988 and has spent his entire career at the Firm.

Over the years, Lashly & Baer has continually diversified, representing health care providers in business, regulatory, and litigation matters as well as lenders, financial institutions, and bond issuers and underwriters in its business practice group. "We represent governmental agencies such as municipalities, school districts, public libraries, mass transit agencies, and special tax districts," says Vogelsmeier. "We represent dozens of family-owned businesses, and are involved in business and succession planning. Our litigation group handles a diverse range of litigation matters including professional liability, premises liability, labor and employment, insurance defense, product liability, toxic tort, and transportation."

> "We want to continue to be known as the Firm of choice for our clients and our employees. We have a rock-solid foundation, which our past leaders have established. We want to be known as deal-makers, not deal-breakers."

Overall, what means most to members of the Firm like Vogelsmeier about being part of this long-standing success is how much they are able to directly contribute to the St. Louis community. "I'm also proud of the work we've done and will continue to do for our clients," says Vogelsmeier. "Our founders established high expectations, and we continue to set high expectations. Our 105th anniversary is in incredible sign of stability for our clients and the community."

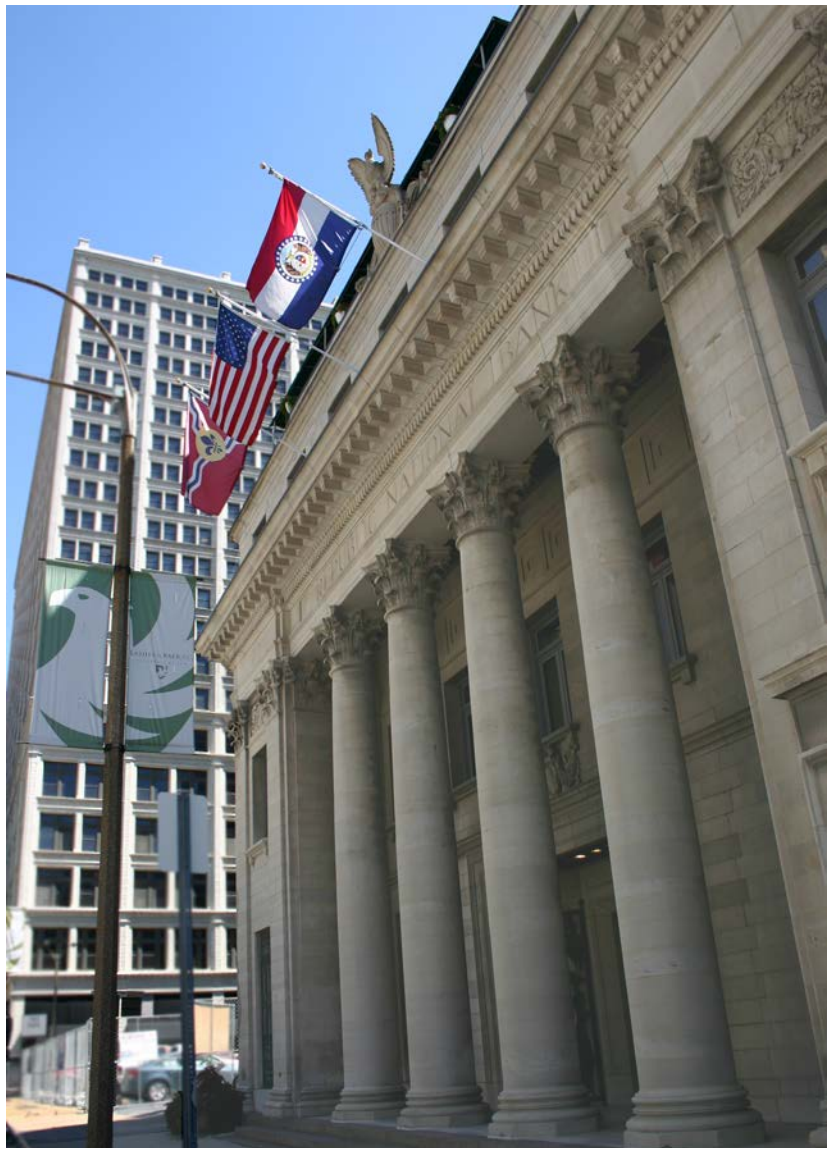
One of these high standards includes hiring the best lawyers possible, a key to the Firm's success over the past century. "I've been privileged to practice at Lashly for my entire career, and I've been surrounded by great lawyers who are leaders in their fields of law," says Vogelsmeier.

In addition to its team, its founders' legacy of public and professional service has supported the Firm's continued success. "The lawyers at Lashly have always been committed to serving the public good," says Vogelsmeier.

The Firm has been recognized by its clients as one of the top law firms in the region. The Firm was recently honored as one of the Top 5 "Best Law Firms" and one of the Top 5 "Best in Value" by SBM (Small Business Monthly) Magazine. The Firm also made the "Best in Customer Service" list. The Firm's clients submitted the nominations for all of the above awards.

Lastly, by always looking for creative solutions to client's problems, Lashly & Baer has been able to maintain long-term client relationships over the years, further contributing to its stability. "That's what clients want and expect," says Vogelsmeier.

In the future, Lashly & Baer will continue striving to represent the needs of its clients in positive and creative ways. "We want to continue to be known as the Firm of choice for our clients and our employees," says Vogelsmeier. "We have a rock-solid foundation, which our past leaders have established. We want to be known as deal-makers, not deal-breakers."



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While working in her therapy practice, Roberta noted the skills leading to successful personal relationships were the same skills needed to achieve workplace success. With this discovery, Roberta became certified in Reuven Bar-On's model of Emotional Intelligence and launched Moore EQi, helping companies succeed through improved emotional, social and cognitive intelligence behaviors and skills.

Moore EQi serves corporate teams, executives, entrepreneurs and other leaders who work for small businesses, middle market companies and non- profit organizations. Roberta is focused in the Professional Services Industry and works with financial service providers, wealth managers, insurance advisors, lawyers and accountants.

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FUTURE 50 AWARDS

The Hardest Working People in Small Business

Get inspired by the Area's Top Small Companies

WORDS BY
JULIA PAULUS OGILVIE



Tony Randazzo and Georgina Randazzo of Facilitec Corporate Furnishings

Winning Technologies Inc. Where Technology Meets the Boardroom
LibertyOne Software, LLC.
InNovare Law LC
PTACs Property Tax Assessment Consultants

9Round Fitness

April Porter



9Round Fitness offers 30-minute full-body workouts in a circuit format, combining boxing, kickboxing, weight training, resistance training, plyometrics and more. 9Round stands out from other facilities because it has no class times or appointments, so members walk in and work out at their convenience. A certified trainer is always available to teach and encourage the member through the ever-changing workout. Quickly gaining popularity, 9Round has grown from one location to four — in Creve Coeur; Kirkwood-Des Peres; O'Fallon, Missouri; and Wildwood — and from one to 20 employees in less than three years.

Accounting Career Consultants

Larry Weinberg



In business in St. Louis since 1985, Accounting Career Consultants is an accounting and financial recruiting and staffing firm focused in the St. Louis, Chicago and Milwaukee markets with 14 employees. The firm has survived three recessions and has also been through a succession plan to the second generation. Today it is one of the largest firms of its kind in St. Louis and is working toward doubling in size over the next five years by growing its presence in the Chicago and Milwaukee markets while opening new markets and starting to recruit in other disciplines in St. Louis.



ABSTRAKT MARKETING GROUP

BRIAN CONDON, SCOTT SCULLY AND JASON BAHNAK

In high school, Scott Scully, Brian Condon and Jason Bahnak were the guys who always had the odd jobs — selling gum out of lockers, painting houses and mowing lawns. "Self-starting is ingrained in who we are, so it was always our path to go into business together," says Scully, president and CEO of Abstrakt Marketing Group.

After following their own entrepreneurial paths, Scully, Condon and Bahnak decided to zero in on what they found they did best: growing business. Specifically, the partners wanted to build a company that offered clients the same process they had used to grow their own businesses. In 2009, they founded Abstrakt Marketing Group. "Abstrakt, by design, is focused across multiple industries," says Scully. "Everything Abstrakt does is designed to help companies simplify their messaging and grow their business."

Setting out with three employees in the basement of an old building, the partners applied their best practices in growth to Abstrakt, and they now occupy more than 35,000 square feet of office space and have nearly 250 employees. "While our space and staff have changed, the fundamentals our business was built on have not," says Scully. "We help businesses grow, and we're using those same processes and solutions to grow our own business."

Scully finds that partnering with the right people is a primary driver for accomplishment. "My partners, Brian Condon and Jason Bahnak, share my same entrepreneurial drive," he says. "The management team we have built at Abstrakt consists of real game-changers who are setting the standard in the means of achieving success — Michael Sepe, Randy Kunin, Chris Gooding, Jamie Schneider, Eric Watkins, Melanie Clark, John Schwepker; these individuals are helping Abstrakt achieve substantial goals at incredible rates."

In addition, focus and change are the firm's most important keys to success. "Focus on specific industries and offer narrow products and services," says Scully. "Don't try to be all things to all people. You also must be open to change. If something isn't working, pivot. If our company would have been married to our original ideas, we wouldn't be where we are today. Change can be difficult, but when it's managed properly, it can drastically improve your organization."

Abstrakt's revenue, which was $100,000 its first year, is on track to hit more than $20 million this year. Yet it's the opportunities of growth Scully and his partners provide to clients and their own team members that mean most to him. "Being a part of other people's journey to success is the most rewarding thing about my position," says Scully. "Watching my team members go to the next level within their careers and within life is very fulfilling."

While Bahnak, Condon and Scully feel the goals of $20 million in revenue and a team of 300 are achievable soon, their dream for the future is to be the No. 1 resource for small- to medium-sized businesses looking to grow nationwide. "To make that dream a reality, we have specific plans in place, working backwards from 100 million in," says Scully. "The more talented people we have, the more confident we become in achieving success."

American Roofing & Exteriors

Matt Woods

American Roofing & Exteriors has been in business for 21 years and has 30 employees. With a focus on home improvement and storm restoration, the company is developing a retail division and has grown to three additional locations. Even after overcoming the experience of going through three floods, one as recent as December 2015, American Roofing made 2016 a profitable year and looks to double staff and triple volume in the next five years.

AMM Communications

Ann Marie Mayuga/Ray Mayuga





AMM Communications is a strategic communications, public relations, and search and recruitment firm founded in 2008. Despite its small team size of two full-time employees, AMM has seen a 10 to 15 percent increase in year-over-year revenue and sales since its founding nine years ago. Ed and Ann Marie Mayuga have carved out a niche serving financial service and professional service firms, which has helped them accomplish this growth. The firm looks to grow its team to at least four employees in the next five years while remaining active in its industry, in the community and in support of entrepreneurship.



DECK & PATIO LIVING

DAWN FUTRELL AND AL FUTRELL

When Dawn and Al Futrell began to look for a new opportunity for their careers, they decided to combine their expertise and turn toward owning their own business in a construction-related field. Instead of starting something from scratch, the Futrells wanted to find an established business with a market share that they could build up. "We worked with a business broker, did research and found Deck & Patio Living," says Al.

With Al's background in construction and Dawn's experience in entrepreneurship, Deck & Patio Living seemed like the right fit. "After doing research we found that we wanted to get into the outdoor genre," says Al. "We viewed the business as a lead into the industry."

Founded in 2002, the Futrells knew they could build Deck & Patio Living into the company they envisioned and purchased it in March 2015. "When we purchased the company, it did under deck ceilings and awnings," says Al. "We started expanding services by adding paver patios and outdoor kitchens. We purchased another small niche business in 2016 that did pavers and retaining walls and added those services then. Then we added a sunroom manufacturer to our offerings and then kitchens."

Quickly, Dawn and Al transformed Deck & Patio from a niche business with five employees to a one-stop shop for area customers looking to achieve their outdoor living dreams. Today the company has grown to a team of 35 and from roughly $680,000 in sales in 2015 to being on track to reach $3.8 million in sales in 2017.

Their success in two short years of owning the business all rests on the integrity of their work according to Al. "I have gotten to know people across the country in my industry and often field calls from others asking for advice," he says. "I always tell them to operate with integrity. You've got to have it and you can't fake it. If you do it, good things will happen."

In the construction industry, this means doing the right thing no matter what. "That is how we have been able to grow," says Al. "We take a different approach than a lot of contractors. From sales through the completion of a project, we ask our employees, 'Would you do that for your mother's house?' "

According to the Futrells, the push to operate with honesty and integrity is also a relief to their employees. Today, seeing their employees succeed has been one of the greatest surprise perks of ownership. "Seeing them change their lives for the better," says Al. "It's an area I didn't know I would feel so rewarded by, and not just helping them in terms of growth in monetary gain but as a person too."

In the future, Dawn and Al look to continue to grow Deck & Patio Living while bringing the best of outdoor living to St. Louis by finding new, innovative and cost-effective solutions for clients.

Anda Creative

Amanda Potts



Anda Creative is a full-service visual communications agency specializing in strategic branding, website design and development, print, and packaging design. Since opening in 2004, it has grown to five full-time employees and has continued to increase sales year-over-year. In five years, Anda Creative hopes to double its team size, and it has a goal of bringing in a full digital staff to accommodate multiple large-scale web projects simultaneously.

Aschinger Electric

Emily Martin



Aschinger Electric, an electrical and low-voltage construction company and service, has been in business since 1940 and is under its third generation of ownership and management. The company has remained nimble in advancing the markets it targets, its service offerings, and its use of technology and investment in pre-construction services. This responsiveness to the changes in the market have allowed it to thrive in changing times. Today Aschinger continues to grow and has 140 employees.



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ATIS Elevator Inspections, LLC

Colin Smith/Wayne Smith

ATIS Elevator Inspections LLC is a wholly owned division of American Testing & Inspection Services, an American-owned company established in January 2013. ATIS was founded upon American ideals and has a simple mission to be America's premier elevator inspection business. These ideals guide everyday interactions with employees, customers, vendors, partners and the general public. The company strives to provide a great work environment with unparalleled customer service and to treat everyone with respect and dignity.

Atredis Partners

Shawn Moyer

At Atredis Partners, an information security company, the team focuses on understanding each client's individual security needs, business goals and engagement drivers. Each and every work product is unique and tailored to the target environment and is powered by research and a passion to truly improve quality for clients and partners. The company assigns a founding partner or practice manager to every project team, ensuring constant and continuous client feedback, from scoping to proposal to execution.

BAM Marketing Agency

Bonni Burns



BAM Marketing is a full-service marketing management company located in the historic Frisco Building in downtown St. Louis. With a dynamic and experienced marketing team, BAM both pays attention to the details and knows how to get clients' messages to the right people. BAM has a high level of experience in strategic planning, creative development, media planning and execution, online management, social media management, public relations, and event planning.

BizLibrary

Dean Pichee



BizLibrary is a leading provider of online employee training and eLearning solutions. Founded in 1996 by Dean Pichee, an entrepreneur with more than 25 years of experience in the training industry, BizLibrary has grown to serve hundreds of thousands of employees in thousands of organizations throughout the United States. Year over year, BizLibrary has grown its revenue by $3 million to $5 million. It is also offering a new product suite and growing its employee base.

BluRoket Branding Company

Kavin Chambers



BluRoket is committed to supporting small businesses in achieving greatness. To see more small businesses thrive, BluRoket offers a multitude of services including website design and development, search engine optimization, social media management, inbound marketing, print and graphic design, small-business training, and mobile apps. The company strives to educate entrepreneurs on how to maximize their value and build the small-to-medium-business market in St. Louis. Expanding the scope of its products, the company is actively seeking to hire designers and product managers.

DEVEREUX & COMPANY

JAMES DEVEREUX JR.



After earning master's degrees in business and information technology, James Devereux Jr. found himself working with a few startup companies from 1999 to 2004, doing what he describes as "chasing the dream."

"I found myself working more as a business analyst, working directly with business owners, defining processes to make their business more efficient," he says. "I was integrating accounting systems with sales platforms and customer management systems."

Early in 2004, Devereux's father was working on his retirement plan and he asked whether his son wanted to come work for him and eventually take over his CPA practice. "I knew that the accounting industry was basically becoming a technology industry," says Devereux. "Every day new applications were popping up that would redefine how the industry was to take shape. I knew that a small accounting firm with a strong technology presence would be a good niche. I soon took the CPA exam, worked for my father for five years, then purchased the company from him in 2009."

Since its 1984 founding, Devereux and Co. has drastically changed, developing and growing along with technology and its industry. Converting to electronic documents, initiating remote support for clients and implementing tools to bring managers closer to their financial data to make business decisions are just a few of those changes, according to Devereux.

"The days of dropping off boxes to your accountant and getting financial statements two months later are over," he says. "I believe in real-time analysis of your financial data. Managers should be able to run their own financial reports and check on key statistics. Today we are an accounting firm that does more than compliance-related tasks. We specialize in business performance and efficiencies. We focus on business processes. How to add value to your product or service and eliminate waste."

Devereux has grown his business 250% over the past 10 years, developing his own keys to success along the way. He shares a three-part message with his company's team of 16 employees and his clients.

"First create a superior product," says Devereux. "Manage your expectations. Your clients should receive more value than what they expect. If you have a good product to sell, then your referral partners will have no problem recommending business to you. Network to demonstrate your product."

Second, Devereux suggests implementing a corporate structure that defines responsibilities. "The idea is to empower employees to do their tasks," he says. "The accountants and administrative staff need to take responsibility to get the jobs done, not the owner or managers. The accountants and administrative staff need to have the necessary resources available to get their jobs done. The accountants and administrative staff should be individually rewarded for job performance. This is the same across all industries. Otherwise business owners are chasing problems, not heading off problems before they occur."

Last, Devereux believes he's been able to grow his business because he's been able to do what he enjoys: working with clients to grow their business, eliminating inefficiencies and encouraging clients to be the entrepreneurs they set out to be. "You can't do the things you like to do if you're chasing problems," he says.

The Business Bank of St. Louis

Larry Kirby



The Business Bank of St. Louis serves privately held businesses and their families through commercial lending, SBA lending and home mortgages. With 76 employees and $595 million in total assets in the first quarter of the year, The Business Bank of St. Louis demonstrates financial stability and strong growth. Choosing not to merge or be acquired, The Business Bank of St. Louis celebrated its 15th anniversary this year and looks to continue to operate a tight, efficient and client-oriented business model.

Clarus Communications

Chris Torbit



Clarus Communications first opened its doors in 2001 with the principal goal of helping enterprise businesses with their telecommunications needs. Since then, the company has grown into a full-service technology services partner, assisting customers with telecommunications services, phone systems, cloud services and software licensing. Clarus specializes in providing over 45 telecommunications provider options to businesses that need dependable, scalable and innovative business technology. Clarus Communications has averaged 10-to-15%-per-year growth by continually expanding its partnerships with local and national carriers and agents. It recently expanded into Phoenix and Houston.



DRIVE SOCIAL MEDIA

JOSH SAMPLE

In 2011 in Josh Sample's Washington Avenue loft, Drive Social Media started as two friends looking to develop a clear approach to social media marketing. After its inception, the company teetered between success and closure, as many startups do. "At one difficult point, it looked as though I was going to have to consider moving back in with Mom or selling all of my possessions," says Sample.

Then along came Drew Foley, CEO of the Inc. 5000 company Express Chem. It was a turning point for Drive Social Media. "Drew was interested in investing in my vision, investing in me," says Sample. "Although apprehensive at first, I accepted the support because Drew's proven track record of scaling business meant that I could trust him to help me scale my dream while contributing so much to the Drive brand."

Today that has meant growing from two to 60 employees between St. Louis and Nashville with a predicted 20-plus additional employees to be hired in the next six months for the Chicago branch. "When we started in 2011 we monitored how many likes or comments we got a brand and clapped our hands," says Sample. "We would celebrate a 7 to 10% increase in engagement. Today we save our reveling for times when we can show our partners that the $5,000 they shelled out to DSM made them $20,000 in revenue. We can actually connect the dots between a Facebook ad and a Facebook user swiping their credit card at a brick-and-mortar."

This data-driven strategy, along with clear customer conversion paths, separates Drive from the pack and has allowed the company to make its mark in St. Louis and beyond. "Outside of that, we open our house to our clients, and we believe in 100% transparency," says Sample. "We don't just work for a business. We work with a business."

In addition to a focus on client relationships, Sample believes so much in the role employee and partner happiness plays in the success of his company that he has created a position dedicated to that concept: Drive's chief happiness officer. "Meetings with our CHO can vary from slurping pho to performances at Powell to checking out the view of downtown from a helicopter," he says.

Putting client and team relationships first has helped Sample increase Drive's revenue 14-fold from 2011 to 2016, and the company is projected to hit upwards of $10 million by the end of 2018. "St. Louis and Nashville are well-established, so we are gearing up to launch a third location in Chicago later this year and a Denver branch is on the horizon before the end of 2018," says Sample.

Cohen Architectural Woodworking

Phillip Cohen



Founded in 1982, Cohen Architectural Woodworking manufactures millwork and custom cabinets for commercial customers. It is a professionally managed, family-owned company that supplies firms in the health care, education, hotel, transportation and retail industries across the United States, including Alaska and Hawaii. The business has averaged a 46% sales increase each year for the past 13 years and continues to pride itself on a healthy and productive workplace. It has received several awards and accolades, including a place on the Inc. 5000 list of America's Fastest-Growing Companies.

CORE10 Architecture

Michael Byrd/Tyler Stephens

Celebrating its 10th anniversary in 2017, Core10 Architecture is an architectural firm based in the historic Central West End of St. Louis. Founded by Tyler Stephens and Michael Byrd, it has a team of architects and professionals who work on a variety of projects nationwide, ranging from institutional and mixed-use commercial to multifamily and single-family residential projects. The firm has experienced steady growth even during the residential and commercial building downturn of 2008-09. During the past three years, it has seen a significant revenue increase, and revenue is projected to be slightly under the $1 million mark in 2017.

Crawford-Butz Insurance

Stephen Butz



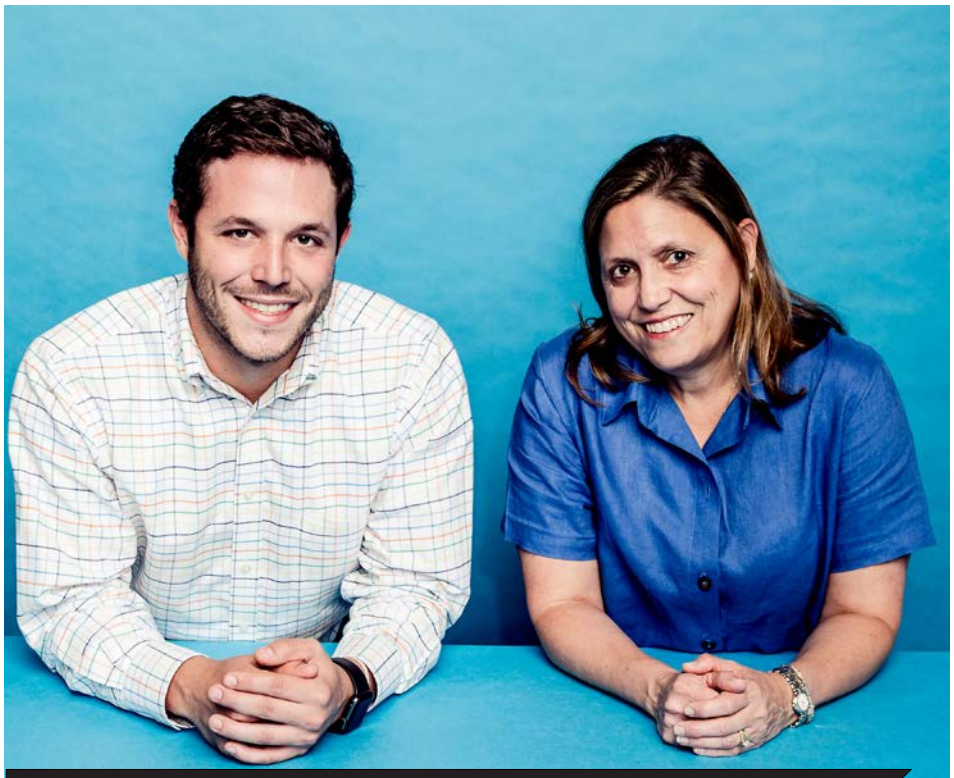
Founded in 1961 by Norbert Butz, Crawford-Butz Insurance is a full-service insurance agency that creates tailored personal and commercial solutions. It also sets itself apart by shopping for client policies with over 20 top companies to find the right price. The firm's knowledgeable agents and staff will shop all markets to be sure clients are getting the best coverage for the lowest premium available. Crawford-Butz customer service assists with all claims, billing and any other insurance-related questions for car, home or business.

Da-Com Corporation

John Tipton



Da-Com Corporation is a technology company that has been in business for over 50 years. As a family-owned company since its inception, the company and its employees are held to the highest standards. Da-Com has been consistent and true to the integrity that it shows to customers and employees. Now with between 150 and 200 employees, Da-Com is always improving in all areas and training its people to be the best they can be.



FACILITEC CORPORATE FURNISHINGS

TONY RANDAZZO AND GEORGINA RANDAZZO

In early 1990, Georgina Randazzo had the chance to be involved in furniture sales to the federal government along with the actual design and planning of federal spaces. "I enjoyed being responsible for all the steps of a furniture sale from beginning to end and learned a lot about the whole industry and process in doing so," she says.

With an education in interior design and small-business administration to add to this experience, Randazzo felt she could do it all. In 1993, with three partners, Randazzo founded Facilitec Corporate Furnishings. "In 1996, I took on full ownership — 100% of shares," she says. "My husband joined me at the helm of our company in 1996, and together we have grown it from two employees to anywhere from 12 to 16."

Today Facilitec has established itself in the St. Louis market and even nationally, now regularly competing for multimillion-dollar projects and accounts. "Our biggest priority along the way has been to maintain the same standard of customer service and care and respect for our clients that we had on day one when we were just getting started," says Randazzo. "I guess you can say that has always been the constant."

She credits most of Facilitec's success to this consistent level of service to customers. "We are fortunate to be partners of one of the largest furniture manufacturers that has a full breadth of furniture," says Randazzo. "We can take care of the front and back office and help our customers with balancing their budgets and still have beautiful functional environments for their employees."

While Randazzo says her firm still experiences the ups and downs along with everyone else, she has been able to achieve steady growth over the past nearly 25 years in business. "In 1993, when we founded Facilitec, our revenue was less than $1 million," she says. "Since then we have averaged eight-figure revenue for 24 years, so yes, our business revenue has grown very nicely."

Randazzo reminds other business owners to be persistent and true to themselves. "Do not promise what your business cannot deliver," she says. "If things are tough, keep on going, learn from your mistakes, but never give up."

Discount Drapieries

Norma O'Bryan



Discount Draperies is a custom window treatment company. It goes beyond the norm, creating handmade drapery panels, valances, cornices, bedding and pillows. Located in O'Fallon, Missouri, Discount Draperies specializes in creating a custom look while keeping the client's budget in mind. With a strong reputation as well as repeat and new clients, the company has grown annually for the past eight years.

Dovetail

Scott Leisler



Dovetail is a strategically led specialized brand communication agency dedicated to helping brands that are poised for expansion, facing disruption or being outspent by their competition. With a tight-knit team of 15 loyal brand strategists, digital marketers, art directors, content developers and communication experts, Dovetail relies on its individual expertise and business acumen. Recently it has been awarded several key pieces and work with the Gateway Arch, the Loop Trolley, the Saint Louis Zoo, SLUCare Physician Group and the American Optometric Association. The company is also in the process of launching a unique approach to inbound marketing and is now an official HubSpot partner.

SPOKE MARKETING
DAVID MEYER, DAN KLEIN AND STEVE SLAIS



With their marketing or agency backgrounds, Steve Slais, David Meyer and Dan Klein wanted to create an agency where they would want to work. "Long ago, we realized that we'd be spending more time with co-workers and clients than we do with friends and family, so we treat each other, and clients, like friends and family," says Meyer, a partner at Spoke Marketing. "We want everyone to feel welcome and excited to come to work. Good ideas come from everywhere, so we've tried to encourage everyone to learn and contribute to their highest potential."

The common thread that has continued to drive each of the three partners at Spoke Marketing since its inception in 2008 is that they get to learn about multiple industries, be creative and have the unique opportunity to help clients grow and deliver a positive return on their investment. While their drive remains the same, the partners have allowed their business to evolve beyond their initial vision. "Frankly, we never thought we'd have co-workers," says Meyer. "We prided ourselves on outsourcing business to seasoned professionals so we could deliver high-caliber work without a big overhead. Over time, we realized we were working with the same people repeatedly and that we could accomplish more by having the team under one roof — all pulling in the same direction. It has allowed for more cross-pollination of creative, expertise and created a family atmosphere."

Today the partners have grown their team from four to 19, and they have also grown sales year over year despite the company's untimely start in 2008. "We had the misfortune of starting Spoke about 15 minutes before the Great Recession in 2008. We've grown every year, but over the three last years, we've been able to make up for lost time and have grown 346%," says Meyer. "Our goal is to bill over $3 million this year."

Meyer attributes Spoke's success to a combination of their reputation for doing what they say they're going to do and their unique approach to marketing. "We spend a lot of time at the beginning of a client engagement to fully understand their business, the needs and processes of the sales team, and deliver a comprehensive marketing plan that's designed to produce the highest return on a client's investment," he says. "Marketing shouldn't cost money; it should make money."

In addition to helping his co-workers earn a good living doing what they love and helping Spoke's clients grow their businesses, the most fulfilling accomplishment to Meyer is the number of pro bono services he and his team have provided to nonprofits and prefunded startups. "We live in and love this community, and we've given back in a meaningful way that has made a positive impact," he says.

Spoke looks to continue to grow while still maintaining the intimate family atmosphere its partners created. "Based on our current growth and experience, we think billing $5 million per year in the next three years would put us where we'd like to be regarding size while still allowing our team to collaborate effectively and have fun at the same time," says Meyer.

Faith Group LLC
Wendy White/Faith Varwig



Faith Group LLC was established in 2004 as a full-service consulting and engineering firm specializing in the planning and design of security, safety, operational, M/E/P and information technology systems for aviation, transportation, health care, large campus environments and critical infrastructure clients.

The firm provides a full range of services that include security and IT master plans, system design documents, requests for proposals, system testing and construction-phase services. Since its inception, Faith Group has provided these services at more than 75 facilities across North America and internationally. Headquartered in St. Louis, Faith Group has expanded to include regional offices in Minneapolis, Philadelphia, Atlanta and Gaithersburg, Maryland, and is DBE-certified by 20 agencies and WBE-certified by 10 agencies.

Fischer Lumber Co.
David Fischer

Fischer Lumber Co. is a family-owned business that prides itself on offering the highest quality of lumber and building materials, kitchen and bath cabinetry, windows and doors, and custom roof trusses to the Metro East region. Located in East Alton, Fischer Lumber provides jobs for 44 full-time employees, many of whom have been working with the company for more than 30 years. Since its founding in 1942, the full-service lumberyard has more than tripled and expanded all over the St. Louis metro area. Having recently celebrated its 75th year in business, Fischer Lumber Co. plans to continue to grow and serve customers' custom lumber needs on both sides of the river while upholding the Fischer family name.

GL Group
Gary Jaffe



GL Group is a family-owned business that has been around since 1974. Today the business has four divisions, all with a focus on learning and imagination. Now in its second generation, the company continues to treat employees with the same guiding principles and core values that Sandy Jaffe established over 40 years ago, putting its people before profit. GL Group is well-known as one of the best places to work in St. Louis and currently employs 220 people companywide.

jBloom
Bret Bonacorsi/Jen Bonacorsi



jBloom is a personalized jewelry provider with 22 employees. Ten years ago, Bret and Jen Bonacorsi started U Design Jewelry, and they relaunched and rebranded U Design as jBloom three years ago. jBloom recently signed its 1,000th designer, and it had its biggest sales month ever in March 2017, exceeding its Christmas volume. jBloom's niche is personalized jewelry to fit all personalities, and it provides a business environment in the field of a tribe of women working together, lifting each other up in support and motivation to help all designers reach their full potential.

JED Transportation

Rick Hutson/Vince Schneider



Celebrating its 50th anniversary, JED Transportation/Country Club Limousine is a luxury transportation provider. Founded by Joseph E. Dellerman in 1967, it now employs just under 100 employees and operates a fleet of 80-plus vehicles including sedans, SUVs, shuttles, limousines, specialty limousines, Mercedes Sprinters and 56-passenger motor coaches. In 2016 the company saw revenue surpass $5 million for the first time. JED also acquired Presidential Limousines and Kelly's Limousine in late 2016 and moved to a state-of-the-art facility in Hazelwood, conveniently located near Lambert Airport.

Jefferson Bank & Trust

John Dulle



For 125 years, Jefferson Bank & Trust has been a St. Louis community bank. The bank boasts five offices and $575 million in assets as of 2016. While Jefferson Bank & Trust supports the local economy by lending local deposits to local businesses, it also does so as an employer of 84 individuals. Jefferson Bank's low turnover allows it to provide excellent service by the same team over decades. In five years, the bank looks to have $850 million in total assets.

STAT COURIER SERVICE

NATASHA BOEKHOLT

After Natasha Boekholt graduated from the University of Missouri-Columbia with a degree in English, she, like many recent graduates, didn't have any promising opportunities. With little to no upward movement in the roles she was in, Boekholt realized she was going to need to make her own opportunities.

"Through connections I had in the health care industry, I learned about this great need for high-quality delivery services to long-term-care facilities, nursing homes, etc.," says Boekholt. "I thought, 'Well, I can do that!' Really, just by listening and learning, I was able to build a company from the ground up."

Not considering failure as an option, Boekholt founded STAT Courier Service Inc. in 1999. "I started the business by doing everything myself, from sales to customer service calls to actual deliveries," she says. "I didn't take a class or study the industry; I just learned on the fly based on what clients wanted and, more important, what they didn't want. I figured everything out along the way. Even if I made silly mistakes, I turned those mistakes into learning opportunities to continue improving the service I was delivering."

Since 1999, STAT has grown to be a national company but has still stayed focused on quality and maintaining long-term clients based on healthy, positive relationships. "In a lot of ways, things have changed, but the foundation of our operations hasn't changed: Customer service is still key," says Boekholt.

Putting customer service first has helped STAT Courier grow steadily; today it has operations in 39 states and the District of Columbia. Since 2010, revenue has more than doubled, and Boekholt's team now includes 11 employees. Boekholt believes her status as a woman-owned business, a rarity in the transportation industry, helps set her company apart. "With this status, we are able to help our clients in St. Louis and beyond meet their minority business participation goals while influencing the industry from the perspective of a woman-owned business," she says. "Also, maintaining relationships and focusing on quality has helped us continue being successful locally. We never lose sight of our home base."

In the coming years, STAT Courier will be focusing on expanding to new territories and continuing to play a bigger role in health care by connecting people to the services they need to stay healthy, like prescription and medical-related deliveries, and advancing the solutions available to clients within the delivery industry. "We see ourselves as a leader in innovative delivery methods and want to continually evolve the traditional way of meeting consumer expectations," says Boekholt. "In recent years, consumers want items delivered directly to them as quickly as possible — and we want to be a part of direct-to-consumer delivery methods."



MB Technology Solutions

Ryan Mortland



Since 1999 MB Technology Solutions has been providing top-notch support and customer service to clients as a strategic IT managed services provider. The 30 employees at MB emphasize caring for other businesses and their technology as if it were their own. While every year MB Technology Solutions has been profitable, the company has doubled revenue twice in the last six years while maintaining a stable financial position.

Mosby Building Arts

Scott Mosby



Founded by Sam Mosby in 1947, Mosby Construction was built on its founder's passion for excellence. With the same passion, Scott Mosby returned to Mosby Construction after college with the goal of improving teamwork between construction management and remodeling design. Scott purchased the Mosby Construction business in 1983 and changed the name to Mosby Building Arts in 1993. Today Mosby Building Arts is a family-owned residential design, build and architecture remodeling firm celebrating its 70th year in business. It continues to evolve its work quality and customer service by combining professional design talent with experienced construction knowledge.



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Shelly Tisius



MT & Associates, a sign language interpreting practice, was established in 2013 to provide deaf and hearing customers with a superior sign language interpreting experience. Though known for their sign language interpreting services, MT&A's resources are dedicated to exceptional human/business services. MT&A consults with businesses to reduce their liability and legal risk and improve their reputation, and it provides seamless sign language interpreting services so that there is less or no disruption to business practices. In MT&A's first year in business, 2013-2014, it grew 220%. In subsequent years, it has grown steadily at over 80% each year, and it looks to meet the same goal in 2017.

Orlando's Catering & Event Design

Sam Orlando Jr.



Orlando's Catering & Event Design is a well-known third-generation, family-owned business that is now in its 50th year in business. The company employs between 150 and 200 people, depending on the time of year, for its event business. Well-diversified among off-site catering, event rental space, and bed-and-breakfast, Orlando's Catering & Event Design has experienced steady growth for the past seven years.

Peoria Contract Services

Kyle Pogue

PCS is an efficiency solutions provider that helps companies improve efficiencies in energy, processes, production, supply chain and more. A company of 15 part-time and full-time employees, PCS has seen rapid growth since the beginning of 2016. In 2016, its revenue grew by more than six times that of 2015 and the current pace for 2017 revenue is set to grow another three times into seven figure revenues. Soon adding electrical services to its capabilities, PCS expects to be at $5 million in revenue in five years with contracting abilities in multiple states.

Purk & Associates, PC

Jennah Purk-Hall



Purk & Associates is an accounting, tax, audit and business consulting firm that employs 25 full-time team members and has grown since it opened in June 2009. The company's 2016 revenue was $4.7 million, and it is on pace to exceed $5 million this year. It was selected for the Inc. Magazine 500 or 5000 Fastest-Growing Companies list from 2013 to 2016. Within the next five years, Purk & Associates will continue to add talent and expand opportunities for senior team members to become shareholders of the firm.

THE MILLER GROUP

BRANDON MILLER/RHONDA MILLER/JOE SVOBODA

Certain that the future was in personal computers and development, not mainframe computing, Mike Miller began to develop a vision for a company with this focus. With strength, intelligence and motivation, Miller brought home a PC from a local plumbing company one night to do some custom work. "It was from that seed that The Miller Group grew," says Rhonda Miller, owner & CFO of The Miller Group. "Corporate training followed, first with the Center for Business, Industry and Labor and then a large contract with AT&T. By 1990, we had full-time employees and an office/training facility."

In the beginning, The Miller Group was focused on corporate technology training and software development. That was its primary business until the late 1990s when Microsoft Office products overtook the software market, at which point The Miller Group became a hardware and service provider. "In 2011 Mike passed away and our CEO Joe Svoboda took the helm, and we are now a full-time managed service provider," says Rhonda.

Even while overcoming challenges and changes, The Miller Group makes sure to be a trustworthy guide and exceed the expectations of its clients. "Technology is at times difficult to understand," says Rhonda. "Therefore, we strive to have our clients trust that we have their best interests in mind. Communicating effectively with our clients has also been imperative to our success. We strive to provide value because we recognize the client's technology expenditures to be an investment."



In addition, Rhonda sees the tenure of employees and a positive work environment as some two of the company's greatest accomplishments. "This enables me to contribute to the success of our clients, employees and my own family," she says. "Being a family-owned and -operated business provides the opportunity to participate in both the personal and financial success of everyone involved, which provides me with great personal satisfaction."

Also as a result of the capabilities, loyalty and performance of The Miller Group's staff of 17, the company has been able to earn revenue today that is 25 times what it was in 1992. "As the CFO, my hope is to facilitate future growth of The Miller Group through the development of new markets and clientele as well as growing alongside our existing clients," says Rhonda. "Continuing on our path as a complete managed service provider under the leadership of CEO Joe Svoboda and assistance to him by my son, COO Brandon Miller, I am confident we can continue to serve St. Louis-area businesses well into the future. Of course, none of this would be possible without the continued dedication and performance of our valued team of employees."

TRAUBE TENT CO. INC.
DERYCK DIETZ



In 1938, John H. Traube founded Traube Blind as a manufacturer of Vancian blinds. It has gone through several changes, including adding awnings and introducing tents, and today it operates as Traube Tent Co. Inc.

"By the mid-90s Traube Awning and Traube Tent split and began operating as two separate entities," says Deryck Dietz, general manager of Traube Tent Co. Inc. "At this period of time the company had seen three successful generations of Traube management. In 2010 I had the honor and responsibility to become the first nonfamily member to manage the Traube."

Primarily serving the party and events market, Dietz and the team at Traube saw that the company had to expand the markets it served. "Every marketplace has a need for our structures," says Traube. "One of the key business goals upon my hiring was to grow our commercial/industrial applications utilizing our temporary, semipermanent and permanent structures. Through effective online marketing, radio spots and 'feet on the street' we worked to educate the marketplaces of our product and service offering."

Dietz's efforts paid off. In 2010, Traube installed seven structures; by 2016 it was installing 130 to 150 structures annually. "Our market penetration into the commercial/industrial, construction, petrochems, agribusiness, disaster relief and first responders, and defense contractors has been successful, and we look to continue to build on these successes," says Dietz.

In the last six years, reaching these new markets has led to tremendous growth for Traube. From 2010 to 2016 it saw a 224% increase in revenue. Dietz attributes much of this success to being able to identify key employees. "Support and empower them to do their jobs productively," he says. "Too many small-business owners try to control every aspect of the business. Certainly manage and verify that projects are completed correctly and on time, procedure is followed, and key activities are completed, but let the people you hired do their jobs independently unless your assistance is required. And if your assistance is required, never turn your back. Always support them. Trust in your employees."

In addition to trusting in employees, Dietz believes in planning ahead and not fearing failure. "At a minimum, have a five-year plan and a long-term goal/plan," he says. "These plans should be personal and professional. The two go hand in hand. You are going to fail from time to time. If you are trying and working hard, it is inevitable that you will fail at something. Your successes are the outcomes of your hard work; how you respond to your failures defines who you become and what your company is. Your success does not define you."

Seafoam Media
Nikki Bisel



Seafoam Media is a full-service marketing consulting firm. The team of nine at Seafoam works to expand on the traditional best practices of marketing while delving into the deep end of SEO, web development, content creation and social media in order to form a cohesive marketing strategy, helping clients get discovered online and build lasting relationships with their customers. Seafoam currently employs nine teammates. It has doubled in client and financial growth year-over-year since being founded in 2010.

Sweetology LLC
Kara Newmark



Sweetology is the first company in the country to offer experiential retail related to DIY cake, cookie and cupcake decorating. Similar to Build-A-Bear Workshop combined with "Cake Boss" and "Willy Wonka," the company now has four full-time employees and 10 part-time employees. Sweetology opened its flagship store in 2014 and was essentially break-even from the beginning. Its model has now been refined, and the company has opened its second store in Town & Country. Sweetology is poised to begin to roll out the concept across the country with the vision of one store in every city.

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TechGuard Security

Andrea Johnson/Suzanne Magee





TechGuard Security LLC was founded in February 2000 to address national cyberdefense initiatives and critical infrastructure security. Since then, TechGuard has served both the commercial and government sectors, delivering a "security first" approach of both offensive and defensive cybersolutions to clients throughout the United States. TechGuard offers award-winning cybersecurity solutions through consulting services, training, and innovative research and development and has grown to 86 employees.

Therapy Relief, Inc.

Sue Conklin



Therapy Relief Inc. provides skilled therapy services to children and adults. Intervention is designed to maximize independence for each stage of life. By including the family in the skilled therapy, the experts at Therapy Relief hope to become the first-choice provider through service, excellence and integrity. Early intervention services help children develop target skills that will assist in optimizing success in school. Rehabilitation focuses on helping clients regain independence and function.

Think.Eat.Live. Foods, LLC

Caryn Staebler/Dan Tegel

Think.Eat.Live. Foods is the developer of a new superflour called SunFlour (sunflower seed flour) that has four times the protein and fiber and 10 times the vitamins and minerals of traditional flours. It is intended to aid in making healthy, gluten-free meal and snack replacements like pancakes, power bar mixes, brownie mix and muffin mixes that provide one-third of daily protein requirements. The founders' overall goal is to make traditional high-carbohydrate products good for clients and health-supporting. Think.Eat.Live is now in 150 locations. The company has grown 50% a year for the past two years and is in the process of raising capital to grow nationally. Expected growth is at least $5 million to $10 million in sales over next three to five years.

Turnkey Technologies, Inc.

Chris Gherardini

Turnkey Technologies, Inc. is a Gold Microsoft Dynamics Partner focused on serving local, regional, national and international customers since being founded by Chris Gherardini in 1994. With 48 employees and offices in St. Louis and Chicago, the company has a strong presence throughout the Midwest and consultants in Missouri, Illinois and Georgia. Turnkey has established itself as a client-focused business solutions provider, focusing exclusively on the Microsoft Dynamics technology platform and related software products. Since its inception, Turnkey Technologies has experienced positive growth in annual revenue. Revenue grew 134% from 2012 through 2016 and is projected to grow by 14.7% in 2017.

WORTH CLARK REALTY

BRYAN BOWLES



Bryan Bowles has always had the determination to accomplish the things he has set out to do and the desire to do something big. So, making the decision to start his own business was not incredibly difficult, but also not without risk he had to weigh. "At that time in my life, I had a family of five and was the sole provider," says Bowles, who prior to starting Worth Clark, Inc., worked for Scottrade. "The decision to leave a well-paying career path and risk the savings for my family on starting this business very much had to do with teaching life lessons to my children. I hope what they learn from this experience is to never waiver or compromise when it comes to making your goals and dreams a reality." After earning his real estate license in 2007, Bowles quickly determined he had a knack for it. He began selling property and saving the commissions earned with the goal of funding the business with those earnings. "Scaling the business from there has proven to be where the real challenge in this industry lies," says Bowles.

Despite scaling challenges, since forming his corporation in 2009 and making Worth Clark a business in 2012 when he left his position with Scottrade to run it full-time, Bowles has been able to grow his business by leaps and bounds. Worth Clark has achieved 5890% revenue growth since its first year of business. With revenue of $143,227 in 2012, Bowles reached $8,437,490 in 2016 and is on track to exceed $13,000,000 this year. This has also meant growing from a one-man shop to 32 full-time employees and 261 1099 salespeople.

Keys to this growth have included hard work, discipline and putting people first. "A great team will help you get to where you want to be," says Bowles.

Additionally, Bowles believes maintaining his original vision for his business has led to successes. "The only significant difference today is that we are developing our own proprietary technology to operate more efficiently and provide more value-driven services to our customers," says Bowles.

While Bowles hasn't reached his goals yet, envisioning his company as nationwide in the future, he's proud to have created a work environment his employees vote as a best place to work for the last two years. "Having a successful business is one thing, but knowing the people who spend nearly half of their waking hours helping to make that happen are happy is the most satisfying thing for me personally," he says.

For Bowles, it all comes back to the people; it's his employees and others in the business community in St. Louis that Bowles believes have made his company successful in the area. "I've been able to find some great employees and mentors here in St. Louis, and I probably wouldn't be where I am today without those people," he says.





Web Design and Company

David Kley



Web Design and Co. specializes in making businesses successful through its St. Louis marketing services, including web design, web development, SEM, PPC and social media. Currently with a team of six, the company has seen massive improvements in growth year over year. Web Design and Co. grew over 400% from 2015 to 2016. The company looks to continue to grow by branching out into multiple subcompanies designed to specialize in specific areas of design, SEO and marketing individually.

Woodard Cleaning & Restoration

Justin Woodard



With over 200 employees, Woodard Cleaning & Restoration is the largest independent cleaning, restoration and disaster recovery company in the Midwest. Founded in 1946, the company is now in its third generation of ownership and operates a fleet of over 100 vehicles handling water, fire and smoke restoration projects throughout the Midwest, East Coast and Gulf Coast regions. In addition, Woodard is the largest carpet-, rug- and furniture-cleaning company in St. Louis.

Worry Free Marketing

Matt D'Rion/Chad Lane



Worry Free Marketing is a digital marketing and website design firm with nine employees. The company differentiates itself from others in its industry through its desire to empower small businesses with the same tools and abilities online that are typically reserved for huge companies. Now in its seventh year of business, the company has seen top-line and profit growth every year. In 2016, Worry Free Marketing achieved 52% growth, and its year-to-date pace is 30% above last year.



Handling Conflict

Let's face it: Conflict is not only inevitable but also a regular part of our personal and business life. In any group there will often be different opinions and experiences that will impact a conversation or task. In the workplace, individuals from one department will see the needs of the company differently from those in other departments and possibly even from the boss based on their jobs and how their work affects the company.

Conflict can actually be healthy, beneficial and productive.

Since conflict is a natural part of living life, our goal should not be to stifle or eliminate it but rather to embrace it. If handled in a timely and constructive manner, it can prove to be beneficial and insightful. Relationships and companies can be enriched by exploring differences, new approaches to tasks and new creative ideas. When conflict is addressed at the onset and is dealt with openly with respect, generally all involved are stimulated to be more forthcoming with creative ideas and alternative processes. This raises the quality of participation and productivity and can establish a strong unified "We" culture.

Ways to Handle Personal and Business Conflicts

There are many ways of handling personal and business conflicts. Here are a few. There is no one approach or solution to deal with conflict that will work in all situations or with all personality types. Having an understanding of these approaches will prove helpful when you are deciding how to address and handle a conflict.

Avoid it. Individuals attempt to turn a blind eye to the conflict or simply dismiss it as though it isn't happening. Unfortunately, the conflict doesn't go away and often intensifies, which can result in it being unmanageable. If the conflict isn't critical to the functioning of the company, denial or avoidance may be the productive way to handle conflict. Giving attention to noncritical conflicts can consume time and elevate a minor issue to a bigger issue.

Sugarcoat it. "We are like family here. We don't fight." "Come on — we are a happy, functional team." This approach minimizes differences or doesn't acknowledge the positive aspects of addressing the conflict. The source of the conflict rarely goes away or resolves itself. This approach may be used when the value or importance of the relationship is more important than dealing with a rather insignificant issue.

Use clout. Clout is often used to settle differences or conflicts. The source of clout may be from one's position or an assertive/aggressive personality. It can also come from a majority voice or a pushy persuasive minority. This approach, however, results in a winners/losers outcome, with losers detaching themselves and not supporting the final decision or plan. The aftermath may carry over to all future meetings, minimizing full participation of everyone because they anticipate the same use of clout. This may be the approach needed when other approaches are either ineffective or inappropriate. For example, voting is used in national and local governmental elections with the majority rules, or the boss may need to have last word.

"We" approach. With this approach, all parties recognize and acknowledge the skills and expertise of everyone involved. Everyone comes prepared to share their point of view, addressing the issue at hand rather than trying to convince everyone they are correct. All involved fully expect open dialogue and the need to modify views and opinions as the group works together, resulting in the best solutions emerging. The "We" approach will result in the full support and engagement of all.

Understanding these different approaches to dealing with conflict both at work and in our personal lives can prove to be very beneficial. If you are knowledgeable and comfortable with these approaches and acknowledge the pros and cons of each, you will be more effective in handling conflicts. ■

Richard Avdoian is founder & CEO of Midwest Business Institute, Inc., a business consulting and training firm. For information about training and seminars, contact Richard at 618-972-8588 or Richard@RichardAvdoian.com.



THE EXTRAORDINARY WORKPLACE
BY JUDY RYAN



I Can't Be a Good Boss and a Friend Too (and Other Myths)

"To power up the whole system involves learning to bring the heart and mind into a creative joint venture. Heart intelligence supplies balanced strength and allows more of one's individual spirit – the passionate actualization of one's core values – to come 'on-line.'"
-"From Chaos to Coherence," Doc Childre and Bruce Cryer

We have all heard variations of this theme. Parents say: "I'm not here to be your friend. I'm here to be your parent" as if the two are antithetical. This theme is completely true when you are using control methods.

Why control methods are still so popular

Control is mostly what we see modeled on TV and at the movies and what we hear about and read about in the news, and what we see playing out in front of us pretty much most of the time. Control is quite seductive because it's familiar and powerful. And people believe the alternative is passive and permissive. Besides, if you can get people to do what you want quickly by using a little force, coercion, guilt, judgment, a few carrots or pampering, what's the harm?! That's the million-dollar question I ask you to consider.

The small matter of massive inferiority feelings

Psychologist Alfred Adler coined the phrase "inferiority complex." He believed that conditions and conversations we offer in any given moment support either *inferiority* or *worthiness* in people but not both. He said that when they regularly support *inferiority*, people fall into a state of continuous struggle within themselves (we are the most medicated, addicted, obese and indebted people *ever*) and interpersonally (have you watched the news lately?), all symptomatic of missing crucial conditions and conversations needed for joyful and caring lives.

The pesky absence of purpose and values

Added to our general ideas that we are supposed to control *others*, we fail to seek and discover our personal power and aim it at a worthy and genuine purpose. Then we fail to help others do the same. My daughter recently said to me, "I'll never have your work ethic," to which I replied: "You already do. You play video games all night long." She replied, "Yeah, but that's fun," to which I said, "So is a life in which your work aligns with a meaningful purpose." When we use control, we don't bother defining purpose.

The toxicity of poor trust and teamwork

Relationships that work well are based on trust and authentic teamwork. Trust requires that we are secure and consistent in being transparent and straight with each other, telling the truth, committed to hearing each other, and respecting and acknowledging the gifts in each other. These are nearly impossible to do when force and coercion are present. When we don't feel safe enough to build strong trust within ourselves and with others, we have less generosity with which to provide supportive teamwork.

Consider dismantling control and fostering responsibility instead

Using control is like any other harmful addiction; it's painful to withdraw from and difficult to imagine a life without. Until you decide a life without using control is more desirable than one with it, you will continue to use it. I offer you a challenge: Seek out people who influence others without the use of control. Notice how they make you feel, how they make others feel. Watch what they do and how they do it. Get addicted to what they model for you. You will find them to be some of the most amazing and productive people imaginable. Let them seduce you into the authentic power of being responsible and helping others to do the same. Our world needs you to do this, and the sooner, the better. ■

Judy Ryan (judy@LifeworkSystems.com), human systems specialist, is owner of LifeWork Systems. Join her in her mission to create a world in which all people love their lives. She can also be reached at 314-239-4727.

VALUE PROPOSITION
BY DAVE DRISCOLL



Know Your Business Value to Grow Your Business Value

Growing business value should be the ultimate goal of every business owner. Actively engaging in ongoing, focused efforts to grow value is the only true way to ensure the well-being of the company, the customers, the employees and the owner's Life Beyond Business.

So, how do you know whether your plan to grow business value is going to be effective?

First, you need to know the actual current market value of your business. You have to know where you *are* to know where you are *going*. To be brutally honest, every business owner I've ever talked with believes that his/her business is worth quite a bit more than it really is. The owner is personally and emotionally invested in every aspect of the business's history, culture and relationships. Believing in that value is natural and motivating. But the market judges business value much more on solid facts and figures ... cash flow, seller's discretionary earnings (SDE), management team strength, customer diversification, etc.

To truly know the current value of your business, you need an unbiased, comprehensive valuation. Be aware that not all valuations are created equal. Applying a simple multiple to your cash flow or EBITDA does not calculate a reliable value.

A thorough market valuation should be based on three to five years of tax returns, profit-and-loss statements, balance sheets, and normalized SDE — *plus* an assessment of your value drivers, leadership team, policies/procedures, customer base and market position. This process is not quick or cheap. However, it is affordable and worth the investment. An experienced professional should process your financials, interview the owner(s) and analyze market data to generate a realistic, comprehensive picture of your company's value within a month. Aside from collecting the needed documentation, your time commitment in the process will be minimal — after all, you have a business to run!

Often owners wait until they are considering selling their business to find out the market value. Unfortunately, increasing business value significantly at that point is nearly impossible — the cake is already baked. Use the insight you learn from your business valuation now to make educated decisions long before you plan to sell your business.

Second, create a written plan to build business value. Business owners spend so much time putting out fires that the time for strategic planning is limited. Too often, improvements are random, unconnected efforts or the result of the latest crisis. This is not the place for a shotgun approach; you need a logical, well-founded strategy for long-term incremental changes. If you are honest with yourself, you probably *do* know what needs to be done to increase business value.

Candidly tap into your instincts and expertise in your field:

1. Critique and refresh any process/policy that is defended "because we've always done it that way!"
2. Are employees empowered to improve their performance, do they spend too much time seeking approval, or are they too afraid or apathetic to make suggestions?
3. What tasks and roles can you delegate to others?
4. Are your policies and procedures accurately documented to reflect what really happens every day?
5. What will your customers need in the future that is different from today?
6. What do your competitors do better than your company?

Gather input from your management team and top employees as well; do not discount the value of their insight for all the things the boss does not see.

I know how hard it is to prioritize planning when you are faced with never-ending demands for your time. However, knowing your business value and implementing a focused plan will pay you back many times over through increased business value. ■

Dave Driscoll is president of Metro Business Advisors, a business brokerage, valuation and exit planning firm helping owners of companies with revenue up to $20 million sell their most valuable asset. Reach Dave at DDriscoll@MetroBusinessAdvisors.com or 314-303-5600. For more information, visit www.MetroBusinessAdvisors.com.

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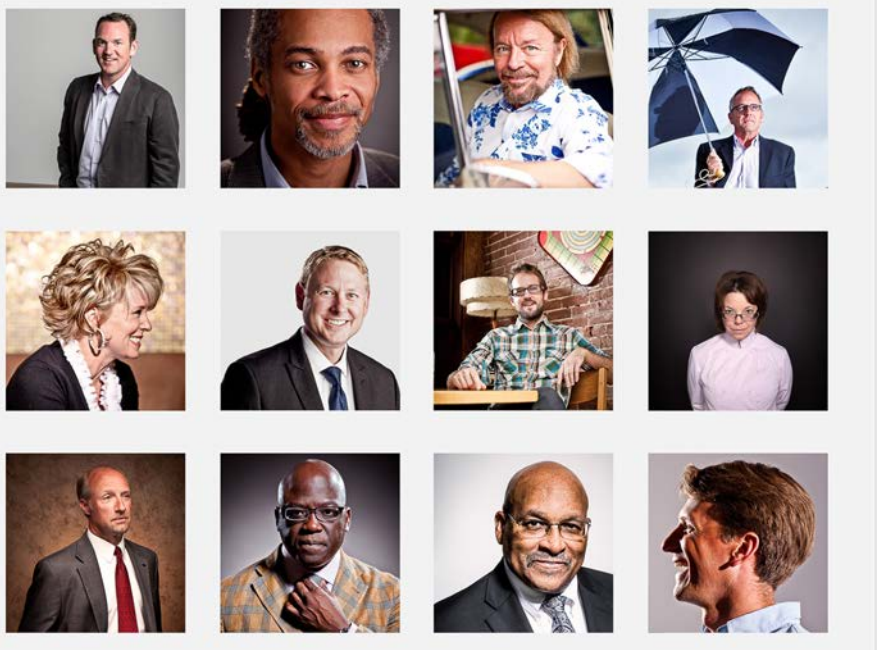
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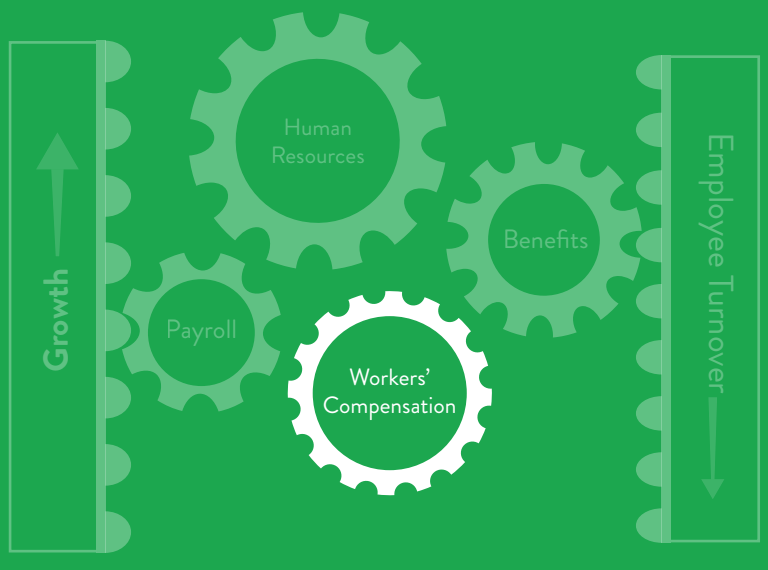
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TIME WITH THE BOSS



Phillip Cohen

COHEN ARCHITECTURAL WOODWORKING

Website: cohenwoodworking.com
Industry: architectural cabinetry for health care, offices, airports and other businesses

Education: mostly self-educated through books, audiobooks and mentors

Family: Married to Gina 41 years. Five sons and four daughters, ages 26 to 39. Eleven grandchildren, expecting two more.

What is your mission?
To help people find deep healing and healthy growth in every aspect of their lives. Woodworking provides a great environment for some of that.

What was your first job?
When I was around 9 years old, I had a paper route in Chicago.

What was your worst job?
My hardest job was off-loading green oak railroad crossties at a sawmill. I lasted a day. I went home feeling 2 inches shorter.

What led you to your industry?
I came from a violent home. I also had been homeless and strung out on drugs. Woodworking was therapy for me. I started building porch swings, birdhouses and toy wooden trucks with roller skate wheels. In 1982, I was building a house for our UPS driver. He let me build his cabinets from my basement. I broke down and cried that night. I knew that's what I wanted to do with my life.

What was the smartest thing your company did in the past year?
We signed up for a program that provided weeklong workshops of Harvard Case Studies.

Who is your industry role model?
Right now, Marc Sanderson, owner of Wilkie Sanderson in Minnesota. He's a brilliant strategist.

How do you try to differentiate your business from others in your industry?
Instead of building custom cabinets for our clients, we partner with them to create a custom team that provides the best results.

What's the hottest trend in your industry, and are you going to jump on board?
Technology. Automation. Standardization. Continuous improvement. Yes, we are already on board and feel like we're among the industry leaders.

What's the hardest part of your job?
Making sure I stay emotionally and physically healthy and charged.

What's the best part?
I get to do what I love with people I love. We create beauty in both our culture and our products.

What best advice would you share with new entrepreneurs?
Get some good mentors who have climbed the mountains you're facing.

What's your favorite place in St. Louis?
Drury Plaza, Chesterfield. Gina and I go there for solitude, study and renewal.

What book is on your nightstand?
My iPad, which is full of books about how to grow myself and my business. I read when I can't sleep. I'm currently reading "The Fortune Cookie Principle," by Bernadette Jiwa.

What has made you successful in your industry and in St. Louis?
I learned from my grandfather to be a friend first, then do business. We maintain consistency in treating people right, fine craftsmanship and delivering on time.

What do you like to do in your free time?
I've been journaling since 1969 about life, relationships, business and God. I have around 10,000 pages of journals. ■

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