



## Ask SCORE for Business Advice

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Positive Networking by Tina Dettman-Bielefeldt

With the downturn in the economy, some business owners are finding it hard to get excited about going to work. It's common to hear an owner say that they're missing their usual drive and just don't feel like hitting the pavement in search of new business. If there was ever a time when networking should be prescribed, it's now.

Robert Jahnke, a SCORE volunteer and owner of Top Hat Marketing, says that networking can help entrepreneurs gain back a positive outlook. Instead of getting depressed, meeting with other business owners is great medicine.

“The meetings will help you stay fresh,” Jahnke noted. “You're always getting new ideas, and members want you to be successful. If you are having a certain issue or problem, there's probably someone in the group who has experienced the same thing and can give advice.”

Jahnke is one of the founding members of HBBA (Helping Businesses Build Assets). With a goal of becoming one of the most influential networking organizations in Wisconsin, there are numerous groups to choose from at [www.hbba-wi.org](http://www.hbba-wi.org). The price varies but is as low as \$20 a year. Groups meet weekly or bi-monthly, and in addition to providing referrals, members also provide support.

“As founder, I know a lot of people,” Jahnke said. “I try to help my group, but if there's someone I can't help, I'll refer them to someone else I know.”

Jahnke believes that most business owners are happy to share their expertise and will likely have ideas for a struggling business. Because the group meets on a regular basis, members become friends. Jahnke often gets together socially with group members for dinner, a round of golf, or other activities. The atmosphere at meetings is upbeat.

“We have fun. We laugh. It's a good environment,” stated Jahnke.

In addition to building a support network, members benefit from learning about other businesses and exchanging referrals. Jahnke is quick to point out the benefits. He says, “Referrals buy the most, negotiate the least, are more loyal, buy more often, refer more business to you, cost the least to acquire, and are more enjoyable to work with.”

Meetings include open networking, educational tips, members' business pitches, a few featured businesses, and referrals. In a typical meeting, about 15 to 20 referrals are generated and enthusiastically passed along. The format is "give and take," and members learn that they help themselves by helping others. They also pass along a good attitude and energy that will inspire even the most discouraged entrepreneur.

Jahnke concluded, "Overall, business owners are positive people, and they're happier and more fun to be with. I get something out of every meeting."

For more information on networking, contact the Green Bay Chapter of SCORE. Visit [www.greenbayscore.org](http://www.greenbayscore.org) or call Cindy Gokey at 920-496-8930 for information.

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