

Ask SCORE for Business Advice

Recession Proofing Your Business

By Tina Dettman-Bielefeldt

There's a great deal of gloom and doom talk these days. It's common to hear talk from businesses of "just trying to hang on." Yet, some businesses are not just hanging on, they're thriving! Over the next few weeks, we'll be talking to some of those businesses.

One of the successful is Joe Kiedinger of Proffit Marketing in Green Bay, and he thinks it's time for an attitude change. Kiedinger likes to shake up businesses and challenge them to excel.

"There is a better way to do business," Kiedinger said. "Find out who you are and create an authentic business. Small businesses can compete and win in recessions but they have to know who they are and tell their story in a way that is authentic and genuine."

In order to identify strengths, Kiedinger starts with what he calls "The Flag Page". This form lists 56 positive life motivations that are rated in order to determine "what's great about you." After completing the form, it is tabulated and determines how you succeed as a business owner. It becomes the force behind the decisions that define your business, and a marketing tool that allows you to let your customers know what's unique about you.

"Create an experience that customers remember," Kiedinger said. "You can't get trapped into doing the same thing that every other business is doing. See what's different, see what's unique and be constantly connecting with that customer on a level that's special, unique, and different."

As an example, Kiedinger mentioned PC Junction, a restaurant in Egg Harbor. Despite the fierce competition among restaurants, PC Junction is doing something different. They made dining an experience by installing a train that travels around the bar and delivers food. They have fun activities for children, and have these youngsters begging their parents to take them back to the restaurant.

Kiedinger noted, "PC Junction created an experience. It's this kind of thinking that causes businesses to excel. We believe that every business decision is marketing."

He says that small businesses should see themselves as a small marketing company that sells something. The product is how you make money. The same principles have been applied to Kiedinger's company, started in 2002 as J. Kiedinger Advertising and renamed Prophit Marketing in 2007. From his modest beginnings, Kiedinger now has eight full-time employees.

He values education and says you must be a student first then the teacher, that's what he calls Prophit thinking. He spends time reading books by marketing gurus. He studies businesses that do well in a recession so that he can emulate some of their techniques. He then practices what he learns in his organization and when its favorable he tells as many people as he can. He believes that businesses owners need to plan for a recession so that they are able to experience freedom in their lives. Good times and bad, they're prepared.

Kiedinger tells businesses to take time to adjust their business plan, sack away money when the economy is strong, take a close look at expenses, and change something. "What are you going to do differently?" he asks.

As an action plan, Kiedinger recommends taking a serious look at where your business stands and asking yourself questions as to where you're vulnerable and where you're secure. Go on-line and find out what similar businesses are doing and copy the best ideas. Keep a positive attitude and make adjustments.

"Hold strong to your convictions and ignore the Ney's, but hold on to the Yey's," Kiedinger concluded. To learn more about Kiedinger's philosophies you can sign up to his free on-line newsletter at www.wisdomonwednesday.com.

If you'd like further information or have business concerns, contact the Green Bay Chapter of SCORE "Counselors to America's Small Business" at 920-496-8930 or visit www.greenbayscore.org.

Tina Dettman-Bielefeldt is co-owner of DB Commercial Real Estate in Green Bay and Chapter Chairman for the Green Bay SCORE group.