

Small Business Solutions

Partnering success for Logan Businesses

Two enterprising Logan businesses found they needed some fine-tuning to help build their business and look to the future,
writes Wendy Johnson.

Over the past few months a range of small business workshops have been helping to change outcomes for businesses in Logan. The workshops are the result of partnerships between Small Business Solutions, a Queensland Government initiative and a local coaching and mentoring business Performance Keys and Logan City Council's BizConnect Centre.

The Planning for Success workshops are based on giving small businesses owners and managers an insight into what makes a good businesses great and helps struggling businesses to make a turn around. Philip Fung, Manager of Small Business Solutions states, "We are delighted to continue working with BizConnect and Performance Keys to bring these workshops to Logan."

Now it is time to see just how successful the workshops have been for two local businesses.

Small Business Solutions Planning for Success Workshops

When: BizConnect starting 18th October and Performance Keys starting 20th September 2011

Where: Springwood and Beenleigh

Cost: \$320 for one-on-one business health check, 15 hours of workshops, plus on-going mentoring and support, and networking opportunities

Registration: Please contact Small Business Solutions customer service centre on 1300 40 60 80

Website: www.smallbusinesssolutions.qld.gov.au

Small Business Solutions is an outcome of the State Government's Queensland Skills Plan, and has been developed by the Department of Education and Training in conjunction with TAFE Queensland and Skilling Solutions Queensland.

BizConnect Centre helps Automotive Allstars find a new direction



Performance Keys taking FirePro to the next level



So many small business operators find that when the excitement and initial enthusiasm of owning their business is starting to wear off, they stop moving forward. This is exactly what happened to Don Manson, owner of Automotive Allstars a mobile mechanical service now operating for four years. As Don says, "I had done everything I could for my business but it was stagnating. I saw the BizConnect article in the South City Bulletin magazine and gave Wayne a call."

As part of the Planning for Success Workshops, BizConnect Centre's Wayne Rabnott ran a health check on Don's business and advised him that the workshops would give him a fresh impetus to kick start his business. Wayne was able to help Don pinpoint where he could make some small improvements that would have significant outcomes. As Don says, "I needed help with marketing because my efforts weren't really getting me very far. Wayne helped me to target specific audiences and how to word advertisements to attract new clients."

Wayne points out that Don needed to look at his billable hours through better management processes and being more efficient. "Our initial focus was to just get one more billable hour per day, as simple as that," Wayne says.

Measuring results

Don found financial projections difficult due to lack of experience and cites that as his key weakness. Wayne agrees and says that people don't necessarily like doing the measurements but they are critical to understanding your business. Now Don updates his spread sheets every week and regularly looks at his projections so that he knows exactly where he is going. "I'm now doing more billable hours per day. I wanted to see how far I could push myself without burning out. Things that Wayne suggested opened my eyes and helped kick off the business again and renew my enthusiasm. We measure our results now and say yes that did work."

So what did Don get out of the workshops that has helped turn his business around? He is very clear in his response:

- A definite direction, we know where we're going, what we're going to achieve, and when.
- Now we know exactly how to run our business and we're controlling it.
- Our billable hours have increased by 25%.
- Profitability from last year is up 1000%, in fact I had to reassure my accountant that it was all correct.

"All of our improvements are direct outcomes from doing the workshops and the mentoring. I'm not burnt out working harder, I'm working smarter," Don says.

Don and Wayne plan to continue the mentoring on a three monthly basis. As Don says, "Each time we get together we get a bit more direction. We look at any potential blockages around moving forward."

Networking

Wayne agrees. He identified that one of Don's challenges was to lift his business confidence. At the workshops the other participants gave him excellent feedback from a potential customer's point of view. As Don says, "It's hard for me to think of these things as I have been a mechanic since I left school and I use technical terms, but my customers don't know what that means so learning to clarify my terms and explaining exactly what the job will entail has helped with my customers. I assumed that people would know what I meant but they didn't, and now I know that."

Wayne believes participants receive numerous benefits through the workshops, including:

- Completing a business plan with the support of qualified mentors
- Conducting a Small Business Solutions online 'Business Health Check'TM
- Accessing one-on-one business mentoring sessions
- Networking opportunities

Since 1995, FirePro (Qld) has specialised in providing mechanical fire protection installations, as well as maintenance and service of automatic sprinkler systems, pump configuration, hydrants, hose reels and extinguishers. They employ plumbers and electricians and install sprinkler systems in anything from high rises to mines.

That's quite a list of services offered by this successful Queensland company. General Manager Janine Horrocks is the driving force for her business but she had come to realise that her business cannot revolve around her forever.

Janine has known Steve Clark from Performance Keys for a few years now and was keen to ask him about succession planning and moving her business into a new phase. As Janine says, "I felt my business has plateaued and I didn't know how to encourage the growth of my team."

Steve adds, "Janine didn't need help with the success of her business but she did want to lift the bar. I wanted to challenge her thinking. I'm mainly a coach as opposed to a consultant, I don't have to know all the answers but I do have to know the right questions and someone as smart as Janine can go find the answers."

A new structure

Understanding that the workshops would be a perfect way to complement theoretical learning, Janine also signed up her maintenance coordinator Nikki Hepburn for the workshops. Recently completing a Bachelor of Business, Nikki was ready to gain an understanding of the practical side of FirePro's business. "Nikki is a pivotal part of the business and I realised that I needed to include senior management and get us all on the same page. Now Nikki and I meet every week and I have initiated key performance indicators (KPIs), job descriptions and accountability."

Janine adds that she has always had a business plan but had kept it to herself and her partner. "I have never shared it with senior management. I didn't want to worry them with the technicalities but now understand that I have to include them and work as a team, we're too big now for just me to run the show," Janine says.

The workshops offer many opportunities for networking and exchanging information and tips. As Steve says, "The reason Janine has been successful is because she has found the things she needs to do to be successful. To change the mindset of some small business owners can be a challenge."

Janine's success has gained her a number of awards. Last year she was the National Association of Women in Construction, small business woman of the year. And for two years in a row FirePro has won Construction Skills Queensland employer category. This year Janine has won the Queensland Regional Training Awards and has been shortlisted for the state title.

Building success

According to Steve success in any business comes from getting the basics right, knowing what to do in challenging times, understanding what he calls your business "attitude and knowing that it all comes down to strategy, thinking and execution."

So what did Janine and Nikki get out of the workshops that has made a difference to the business? Janine's list of benefits includes:

- Nikki previously copied a quote spread sheet now she uses her initiative because she knows that the business has overheads to consider.
- In the maintenance division there is a minimum of 20% increase in work coming in because Nikki has the bigger picture, so instead of doing a normal quote she can include extra overheads and things she has identified in the course as part of the business and take some responsibility.
- Janine can now rely more on Nikki.

Steve adds, "People come to the workshops for different reasons. Some might have a marketing or sales challenge or some might have an organisational challenge some might have all those challenges. So one of the things we are doing is a three hour follow up after the workshops. If they set KPIs during the workshop we can see how they are monitoring them. I also offer a bi-monthly follow up."