

SCORE's Team Mentoring Helps a Successful Entrepreneur with the Launch of a New Business Initiative

Team mentoring provides business owners with array of skills in each counseling session

Cincinnati area small business owners now receive a stimulus plan they create with expert help when they tap into no-charge, team-mentoring services offered by SCORE executive volunteers.

Greater Cincinnati SCORE, a volunteer arm of the Small Business Administration, is working with outsourcing employment service Lee Hecht Harrison and Stifel Nicolaus, an investment firm, to promote team mentoring services to their clients in Cincinnati. The sessions are held at both company offices in the Chase Towers of Kenwood, 8044 Montgomery Road. Since December, 2008, an average of 11 entrepreneurs a week engage in team mentoring sessions, said Bill Haman, SCORE mentor. Haman is a former Avon Products executive. He is also a former SCORE chapter chairman, and writes a weekly blog with tips for entrepreneurs at www.askanexpert.score.org.

"This unique concept in counseling small business owners is typical of the creative, out-of-box thinking that makes the Cincinnati SCORE chapter one of the most effective in our nation," said Ken Yancey, SCORE national chairman.

Yancey heads the nonprofit volunteer group manned by 10,500 retired executives and small business owners in 389 chapters across the United States.

Under the Cincinnati team mentoring concept, new and existing business owners are teamed with up to three SCORE mentors who are experts in the entrepreneur's most-needed areas.

Entrepreneurs just forming their enterprises usually need help with business planning, Haman said. Established business owners often need expertise in marketing, sales and finance.

The team-mentoring sessions last up to 1.5 hours and clients are given assignments to accomplish between monthly appointments.

"We've created a synergy between our experts and the entrepreneur that allows us to focus immediately on aspects of situations where one counselor may not be expert," said Haman. "Our Lee Hecht Harrison and Stifel Nicolas clients keep coming back for more, and they come back with strategic plans, progress reports and success stories."

One of the team mentoring's biggest business successes this year is Perry Leitner, president of Leitner Electric Co. in Norwood.

Leitner Electric has been a Cincinnati fixture since 1978, and has a division of renewable energy solutions called Blue Chip Solar and Wind. SCORE mentors helped Leitner open a new Leitner Electric division called DayLeit.

DayLeit manufactures, distributes and installs advanced energy lighting products in LED and plasma.

Leitner said his wife, Bobbie, recommended he speak to SCORE counselors to help with his new enterprise. Their son, Evan Leitner, chief executive officer, developed the new lighting products and is working on up to five product patents for the DayLeit division.

Haman, of Indian Hill, led Leitner's team counseling sessions, which lasted about four months. The team included SCORE counselors Dennis Murphy of Loveland; Mike Mulligan of Cincinnati; and Scott Stoelting of Sharonville.

"We were well underway creating and building prototypes and beginning pilots of different plans when I met with them," said Leitner. "SCORE really helped give me focus and direction. They forced me to do a business plan.

"The unique business plan we developed became a literal guideline for us to follow. They helped us define our markets, create a format for non-disclosure agreements, and protect our patents."

Leitner said he enjoyed the team mentoring concept. "They were fired up—the energy and enthusiasm of the group was overwhelming. They thought my products were needed in today's market and that we were headed in the right direction," he said.

Haman said team mentoring has energized SCORE counselors as well as the business owners they are helping. "Other individual counselors call and ask if they can bring in their clients for team mentoring," he added.

SCORE's team mentoring program was mentioned in the July 15 Cincinnati Enquirer.