

S.A.N.E. BUSINESS PANEL



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Local Small Business Owners Q & A

As a service to our readers Company Magazine has enlisted the help of S.A.N.E. (Strategic Alliance Network of Executives) to address some of the issues and concerns small business owners are faced with. S.A.N.E. is a group of local small business owners, organized by **Dave Salzwedel**, who meet every month to discuss the positive aspects and the concerns in their industry. Because S.A.N.E. is a mixture of all different types of small businesses there is a wide variety of perspective on each topic.

S.A.N.E. - Strategic Alliance Network for Executives

1. What has been 1 struggle that your company has had to work through in 2008?

Kevin Eismann - One issue Epiphany Law has struggled with was managing the firm's rapid growth in 2007 and 2008. Average annual revenue growth of 75% over the past 2 years is a good thing, but rapid growth also brings along a new set of challenges. Being able to discuss these issues and others with fellow executives in SANE has been priceless.

Dave Salzwedel - Although 2008 began very well, with record revenues, it has cooled significantly due to the economic impact on many of our clients. We have

had to scrutinize all of our expenditures very carefully to drop anything that does not directly support customer contact or service activities.

Lisa Bower Hansen - The most challenging aspect of 2008 has been finding affordable health insurance for our employees. Most of our employees have been with us for 10 or more years, and health insurance is critical for their families. In May, we were notified that our insurance premiums would increase an average of 23% for our group, and we spent a considerable amount of time finding affordable options. We added an HSA option and spent time trying to educate our employees on how to save money

as health care consumers, but this issue is a continual process of research and education.

Carol Levenhagen - By far the biggest struggle we have had to face in 2008 has been one of cash management due to crude oil costs escalating to record highs.

2. When hiring employees, what are the 3 most important criteria you look for in hiring candidates?

Lisa Powers - Whether I am filling openings for our Career Options' clients or hiring for internal positions, I believe a positive attitude, strong work ethic and stellar work references are ESSENTIAL for



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any candidate. It is very difficult to change an attitude or work ethic - I would rather work with a driven and positive employee (and train on additional skills), than have a very experienced candidate who refuses to be part of the team or does not have the motivation for success.

Kent Nelson - A positive attitude, willingness to learn and share new ideas, and desire to be a part of a team working towards a common goal.

Duane Weber - First, we look at the person. We want someone who can fit within our culture and work in an environment which requires independent thinking. Integrity is extremely important to us. We also promote teamwork and a spirit of cooperation. We want employees who are not afraid to pitch in and get a little dirty if necessary. Second, we review their skills; we look for a skill-set that matches the position. While we prefer that the candidate have the skills necessary for the position, we will take a candidate whose personality better fits the company over someone who has the better skills and education. Third, we evaluate the wages to make sure the candidate is within a salary range that fits our budget.

Dave Coggins - Evidence of their ability to work effectively with others, a high level

of personal integrity and character, and verifiable evidence of a solid, successful track record.

Barbara J. Skoglund - Honesty is important; I also look for an outgoing, pleasant personality (people person) and a willingness to learn & listen to instructions. Experience is another criterion that is essential for me.

3. What is 1 lesson that you have learned as a business owner?

Dave Coggins - You need to learn to trust your instincts regarding people and business decisions. If you have a gut level feeling about something or someone that you cannot necessarily explain, it is probably there for good reason. Ignoring those instincts can often come back to haunt you later.

Carol Levenhagen - I have realized that there is no better way to "advertise" than to serve customers honestly and fairly.

Lisa Bouwer Hansen - Perhaps the biggest mistake small business owners make is to try to be everything to the company including leader, salesperson, bookkeeper, general manager, marketing director, personnel manager and maybe even custodian. Today, successful companies

must have great core processes to just stay in the game, and no individual leader has the time, skills or resources to perform every non-core function at the level necessary to succeed in business. Throw in a family, other personal commitments, and today's web speed of business, and either the individual or the business is destined to burn out. Outsourcing or hiring for non-core tasks is the only way a company can use its time and money effectively, both to get better performance for non-core functions and free up time for the executive to perform vital functions.

Barbara J. Skoglund - The most important lesson that I have learned is to delegate.

Duane Weber - Financials are important. I am an engineer by degree and a salesperson by experience. When I started the business 11 years ago, I underestimated the importance of securing finances. I also learned about the importance of understanding the "business" side of the business on the job. I encourage college students to get at least a business minor to compliment their degree, because if you own your own business or advance to senior level management and assume profit and loss responsibility, it is better to already have the knowledge about financials than to gain it on the job.

4. What are 2 goals that you have for your organization in 2009?

Dave Salzwedel - First, we have not done a very good job of getting our name out in the business community over the past year. There are a number of plans to change that later this year and early on next year. Second, we are rolling out two new "flagship" services which should be very attractive to our clients, Lead with Innovation and VICreative.

Kevin Eismann - Two goals for Epiphany Law in 2009 are continuing our controlled growth and expanding the depth and breadth of our business law service offerings.

Kent Nelson - Rebrand the company by educating referral sources on our unique services. Increase the number of clients we help start, purchase or expand their business.

Lisa Powers - Career Options had a record breaking year in 2008! To continue with this path, our first goal for 2009 is to increase our Recruiting (headhunting) Division's successful placements by 25%. Our second goal is to expand our client base who will utilize Career Options "exclusively" for ALL of their hiring needs.

5. What do you enjoy most about being the Owner or President of your organization?

Carol Levenhagen - It is a great privilege to be able to be part of the solution to our customers' needs, whether they are industrial, commercial, governmental or residential customers.

Kent Nelson - The freedom and flexibility it gives me to succeed and grow at my own pace.

Dave Coggins - Seeing staff and/or customers grow in a meaningful way and knowing that in some way you had a hand in that growth.

Kevin Eismann - The greatest joy of being a business owner is watching the people you work with grow in their professional and personal lives. The feeling of being a part of that growth is very rewarding.

Lisa Powers - Anyone that knows me can hopefully see that I am passionate about the staffing and recruiting industry. I feel blessed when we can find "the right match" between candidate and client, knowing that we are changing the lives of applicants each and every day.

Dave Salzwedel - Because we are a small business, I get to be involved in all aspects of it and really learn what makes it tick. It is also fun to see my dream of owning a business become a reality.

Lisa Bouwer Hansen - The best part of my job is the daily challenges and rewards that go with the territory. Some people get stressed out by issues that arise in day-to-day business, but I

get energized by the process of resolving problems and improving process to control the outcome. I am an entrepreneur in spirit, so I love the continual re-invention that goes along with owning and managing a small business.

Duane Weber - I love the customer interaction. I really enjoy meeting prospects before they become our customers, and I especially look forward to talking to them after they become our customers. I have a servant type personality and get a lot of satisfaction out of helping people. I know how much our solutions have helped our clients so it is always fun to tell them with confidence how we can help them, and later on hear about their success.

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If your networking group would like to submit a question and answer panel similar to the S.A.N.E. Business Panel, please contact Company Magazine at 920-432-2624.



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