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Boot camp drills entrepreneurs for success

Women business owners get tips in marketing, service

Jane Larson
The Arizona Republic
Jan. 24, 2008 12:00 AM

Business coach Stephanie Frank stood before 250 women business owners at the fourth annual Women Entrepreneurs' Small Business Boot Camp in Scottsdale and made a request.

If you finish your to-do list every day, stay standing.



Everyone at the event sat down.

Maybe by this time next year some of the boot-camp lessons will make a difference.

Organizers billed the event, held Saturday, as "no theory, philosophy or fluff," and women entrepreneurs took away tips on everything from marketing to customer service and time management.

Frank, owner of Stephanie Frank Inc., exhorted them to stop sabotaging their own success.

"Today is the day that you stop doing those things that have not

been working for you," she said. "Today is the day you start doing the things that are going to bring you the business, the life, the prosperity . . . that you want."

Key to that is the FAST formula, or as Frank explained:

- Focus. List everything on your plate, then decide whether to keep it, drop it or change it so it works for you.
- Action. Categorize everything you do into administration, production, sales and marketing, or household and personal. Delegate what you can and schedule time for the rest.
- Systems. Write down how your business does things, even easy tasks like making coffee, so you can share the load.

• Team. Get the right people on your team and match their personal styles: creative people with the results-oriented, supportive types with the analytical.

Other speakers had more advice.

Branding

Building a brand isn't just for famous names, said Yvette Craddock of Click Marketing Solutions in Tempe. Brands identify a business, ensure consistency and create emotional connections with customers, she said.

Craddock listed the five elements of a brand:

- Position, or why your company is different from the rest.
- Promise, or what you deliver to customers.
- Personality, or the traits people associate with your business.
- Story, or your background and history.
- Associations, or the meaning behind your logo, tagline and company colors.

Customer service

As customers become more demanding, and as small businesses have to compete with big-box stores, improving customer service is one way to win repeat business and referrals, said Vickie Bouffard of Quantum Performance Training in Phoenix.

Among her simple tips:

- Use your voice-mail message to let callers know when to expect a return call. It reduces their anxiety, and when you do call back, your credibility skyrockets.
- Listen actively. Make eye contact instead of multitasking with your BlackBerry or cellphone.
- Surprise your customers and exceed their expectations. Bouffard spreads the word about the car dealer who not only serviced her muddy vehicle but unexpectedly cleaned it, saving her a trip to the car wash.
- Show appreciation. Handwritten notes cost much less than gifts and go a long way when saying thank you for the business.

Web sites

Mary Krause of Designers Café, a custom-Web-site design firm in Scottsdale, has heard the horror stories of Web sites gone awry. Avoid that, Krause said, with a contract that includes:

- The scope of the work, such as whether the site is to be informational or transactional.
- The timetable, with benchmarks to meet and a payment schedule.
- A statement of ownership. Clients should own their domain names and get copies of the site and its artwork.

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