

THE COLLABORATIVE SPIRIT

Collaboration among small businesses not only saves time and money, it also creates a bond of trust and deepens relationships that can be helpful in providing trusted referrals for and to each other.

For several months we have been in the process of forming a small business collaborative to serve and support its members as well as the TwinWest Chamber and the small business community. My husband and I have always been team players. We always experience more success and enjoyment from working with and for a group of people. The time of the Lone Ranger is long gone.

This might sound odd coming from two people who have been entrepreneurs for 15 years, yet within our own industry, we helped to develop a business model that provides a built-in mentoring program. It encourages team work and collaboration with our mentors and our team players, as well as others in our industry. We often share our training, marketing and events with others, not because of immediate financial reward, but because collaboration and generosity are sound business practices which always pay handsomely in future dividends.

Because of its benefits, we began to wonder what it would be like to create a collaboration that was not part of our industry. We wanted to include other small business people who shared the same core values, especially integrity. We thought, “Wouldn’t it be exciting to share small business expertise with others, pooling intellect and experience into one marketing, training, referral and event collaboration?” With our personal experience to go on, we spent hours researching the value of collaborative efforts in all kinds of businesses. We were gratified to find a huge movement in the small business community to share everything from software to education to networking events. Our survey showed that more than 54% of small business owners depend on their chamber or other business associates for their business referrals. This includes our own TwinWest Chamber.

What's the difference between a collaborative team and a non-collaborative team? First, collaborative teams usually seek each other out based on common values, needs, dreams and desires. Non-collaborative teams are usually goal-results oriented. Their member's contribution to the team is based solely on what individual talent they provide towards the completion of the task. Completion of the task is the common goal. Second, a collaborative team works at a specific task because they enjoy doing it as team – they are together not just to complete a task but because they want to do business with, and support, people of like minds, values, and goals.

The culture of collaboration honors the entrepreneurial spirit. When a dream is shared in collaboration, the dream becomes the group vision that inspires teamwork. “Creative collaborators become members of their own tribe... How much better to be with other worthy people, doing worthy things, than to labor alone.”¹

¹ Warren Bennis & Patricia Ward Biederman
The Secret of Creative Collaboration 1997
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