

They've Got an IDEA for You

“**T**he devil’s in the details.” Entrepreneurs and business leaders are painfully familiar with this timeless adage. Many spend so much time focusing on everyday operations that they lose sight of opportunities to grow – whether that includes opening additional facilities or hiring more employees.

“As business owners, we tend to get wrapped up (in the particulars). You’re so busy trying to stay afloat that you don’t think about swimming,” asserts Skye Huff, national sales partner and coach at Sales Artists, a corporate training company headquartered in Anderson.

Mentoring and coaching offered through the IDEA Academy are helping Huff and other entrepreneurs address that challenge.

IDEA (Innovate, Demonstrate, Educate, Accelerate) is a collaboration among the Madison County Chamber of Commerce, Flagship Enterprise Center (FEC) and the Corporation for Economic Development.

At the helm is DeWayne Landwehr, former executive director at the FEC.

“A lot of entrepreneurs aren’t necessarily business people,” he contends. “They’re idea people and inventors, and they have a drive to do something, but not necessarily to run a business.

“Even when you get past the business formation side, (it’s), ‘How do I hold people accountable? How do I get people to feel they’re in the same boat I’m in and that we’re going in the same direction?’ ”

More than a dozen companies from a diverse group of industries took part in the inaugural class, which launched last September. Participants met twice a month: for training (blending traditional classroom learning with group interaction) and for informal networking at the FEC. The course spanned one year, covering topics such as accountability, business planning, marketing and innovation.

“This is for existing businesses, more than brand new businesses,” Landwehr notes. “Most of the businesses that participated have been in existence for more than three years – some for as long as 30 years.

“Training is so important. I see people struggling every day trying to keep their business afloat. I think knowledge in a few different areas would really help people make a better profit and make us as a region more economically viable and more prosperous.”

Helping hand

Sales Artists, created in 2007, has clients in a variety of industries, but works primarily with telecommunications companies.

Huff says that the IDEA Academy provides “a foundation for the company to be sustainable.” In addition, she says the emphasis on collaboration is what impressed her most.

“We go in, we learn something and then we have to apply it,” she declares. “We work together to solve a challenge. People who go to the Idea Academy are setting themselves up for success instead of failure because they’re taking time to work on their business.

“We wouldn’t have continued to stay in IDEA if it hadn’t provided results,” she adds. “We believe it’s made over a 10% rate of return to our revenue – not only in new business that came in, but also cost savings overall. It was worth every penny.”



The next IDEA Academy class, starting in September, will feature a shortened timeframe (six months compared to one year) and a second location (in Noblesville).

INFORMATION LINK

Resources: DeWayne Landwehr, IDEA Academy, at www.getlinkedmadison.com/idea

Skye Huff, Sales Artists, at www.salesartists.com