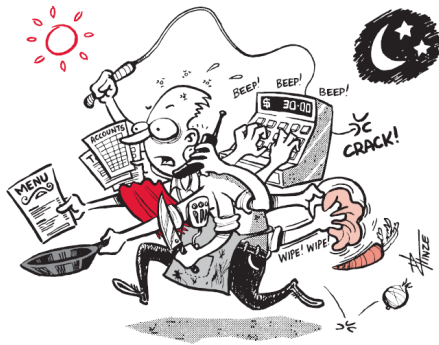


Professional development - the role of the facilitator!



What is the best way to help?

The business owner?

- How can a business owner be convinced that time out of the business on a professional development activity can mean the difference between survival and growth or bankruptcy!
- It relatively easy to convince the business owner that he or she needs to take some time out to acquire some technical advice on some current aspect of the business e.g. a new regulation that impacts on the industry, a new piece of equipment that will improve efficiency etc.
- It is more difficult to get the business owner to take time out, or have their staff take time out, to develop what we may term more 'esoteric' skills and knowledge. These could include, in terms of staff, the development of team skills, negotiating skills, opportunity identification skills and planning skills. For the business owner this could include some PD to enable him or her to acquire skills that will help them grow the business.
- Often business owners are focussed on the product or service, however he or she needs to see that it is important to understand how the whole business works in an integrated way.

Professional development

- There is often a collective groan when professional development is proposed to staff. And business owners often think that it is a distraction from the main game - making money!!
- It is critical that professional development be seen as useful by all staff, and in particular, by the business owner. There are a number of important aspects that must be addressed if 'PD' is to be a success. These include: all stakeholders are involved in the planning; the facilitators use engaging strategies; time is given to ensure that the participants are able to learn, practice and apply the new technology or practice; there is adequate 'follow-up' and practice in applying the new technique or concept; the PD is scheduled carefully; handouts are carefully developed to complement the PD activity; and there is a thorough evaluation and review of each PD activity to check its effectiveness.

Approaches to Professional Development

- Professional development can be formal and informal and may be a few hours long or over several days e.g. for example attending a conference.
- PD can lead to the gaining of qualifications or credentials that are required in the industry.
- PD can be obtained prior to working in an industry or business or whilst they are working, i.e. in-service.
- PD can be offered by the HR department in the business, bought into the business or held outside the business. It can also be in groups or may involve an individual undertaking a course or program.

- It may involve the acquisition of industry specific skills or generic skills such as team-work, negotiation skills, opportunity identification skills etc
- There is a range of approaches that are used in delivering PD. These include the use of case studies, business coaching, mentoring and technical assistance etc.

Facilitation vs advising

- Facilitating is a process whereby a person is assisted to learn. The person is assisted to ‘discover’ and ‘acquire’ knowledge and skills.
- Advising is more associated with imparting knowledge and is usually provided by experts in the field, for example, an accountant, a lawyer, a marketing expert etc. There is an assumption that an adviser is up-to-date with the information they are imparting.
- Members of the AIEF are experts at assisting people with business decisions in order to help them get to where they want to go. The essence of good facilitation (and indeed good teaching) is to have a 'minimum need for control'.
- Enabling a person to learn and develop is much more empowering and useful than 'filling up the heads' of clients with knowledge that, in these modern times, is very temporary.

Steps in facilitation

- Listening; Questioning; Brainstorming and idea generation; Business planning; Reflecting

Some difficult skills that need to be acquired if a business is to grow

- In enterprising communities there is usually an effective and often informal communication network that facilitates the exchange of ideas. Often this takes place in restaurants, coffee shops and bars. How can the business owner tap into this network? How can they start their own?
- Successful business enterprises are more often than not structured on network and alliance base-models not so much on hierarchical or vertical based business management models. This helps promote the development of enterprising ideas within organizations. How can a business manager implement such a model?
- The focus in more enterprising and growing regions, towns and cities is on new ideas, technologies and directions not on existing or competing ideas and products. Rather than a ‘me too’ attitude in terms of product development, the Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in entrepreneurial regions focus on developing a ‘locus of opportunities’ around new ideas and products. And these have lately been technologically based. Facilitating a brainstorming activity for a business owner that helps them identify new ideas or approaches can have great results.
- Successful SME leaders are more often than not visionary and ideal role models for others. They quickly pick up on ideas and convert them into marketable products. One of the tools of a business facilitator is the ability to enable a business owner to ‘think outside the square or box’.

These skills are important to acquire if a business is to grow and be successful. However it is one of the more difficult tasks to convince a business owner to give up their valuable time to ‘brainstorm’.

AIEF Members are trained and experienced in developing these more esoteric but essential skills. Once a business owner hires an MIEF he or she knows that they are maximising their opportunities to grow and develop their business through developing their own skills and knowledge.

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