

Breakfast of business champs

Mar 10 2004

New networking group focuses on island-based small office professionals.

There's "networking," and then there's networking.

For some people, the word means little more than vaguely self-interested schmoozing. For others, it means luring an unsuspecting prospect into the next level of their latest MLM scheme.

But for Paul Travis and other members of the Bainbridge Island Professionals, it means building a level of trust that benefits the entire professional community.

"There are lots of different kinds of networking," Travis said. "People might wonder if they're going to be sold something, or otherwise put on the spot."

Instead, regulars at the bimonthly breakfasts spend their time getting to know each other better, developing the kinds of relationships that are critical for professionals who rely primarily on referrals to build business.

Affiliated with the Bainbridge Island Chamber of Commerce, the group focuses on "SOHO" (small office/home office) professionals such as attorneys, architects, accountants, engineers, technology specialists, marketing and financial consultants, real estate and insurance brokers, medical practitioners of all types.

The current core membership of 25 to 30 "pretty well hits all the targets we imagined," Travis said, "plus one or two we didn't think of."

For example, a niche that might formerly have been labeled "pastor" is now characterized as "ceremony officiant."

Whether the profession is traditional, or an emerging specialty such as software consulting, the purpose of group membership is the same: "To develop an educational, networking and positive peer community."

The educational support includes presentations "that speak to the independent professional," Travis said, "to the person who maybe previously practiced in Seattle but has chosen to make Bainbridge their community.

"These people don't have the same kind of water-cooler resources as their big city counterparts."

The first breakfast meeting last November featured a mini-marketing seminar geared for professionals. The January meeting focused on "Building a Loyal Clientele."

On March 11, a speaker from the Washington State Dept. of Revenue will address how B&O taxes are levied and filed when multiple counties are involved.

Cooperation

Travis, a business and marketing consultant with Vivify LLC, first conceived of Bainbridge Island Professionals after working with another pair of Bainbridge-based business owners on the board of the Madrona School.

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There he met David Hager, a mediator and business counselor, and Dorothy Foster, a lawyer specializing in estate planning and nonprofit organizations.

“Even though we all did different things, we developed a great respect for each other,” Travis said. “That got me thinking about the value of really getting to know fellow professionals in the community – finding out what’s unique about them, rather than just looking at listings in a phone book or the Chamber directory.

“And, rather than look at things from a competitive standpoint – there’s only so much business to go around – why not meet each other over breakfast?”

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The Bainbridge Island Professionals Breakfast meets 7-8:30 a.m. March 11 at Doc’s Marina Grill, 403 Madison Avenue. A no-host breakfast will be served. Membership in the Chamber of Commerce is encouraged but not required. Information: BI Chamber, 842-3700, or Paul Travis, paul@vivifyllc.com.

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