



## *Forming a Business Advisory Board*

The concept is to tap into and leverage the brain power and personal contacts of business leaders within a business' marketing area to help the business grow faster. My tips are:

- Select 8-12 business owners. This is the second to hardest part. The selection requires thought and investigation. The Board should have a cross section of the local business community: large, small, no two members from the same type of business; be from businesses that are potential or actual users of the company's services; and be respected and active in community affairs. All members need not be a customer but you need to be mindful of privacy rules regarding customer discussion. Customers need to agree in advance it is ok to note they are customers of the business.
- Approach each candidate and suggest they have been specially selected due to their community involvement and respected stature in the community. You would like for them to consider becoming a member of your business' advisory board. Your business is trying to get closer to the actual needs of your community. You believe their participation could help.
- Duties of Board Member are:
  - Attend one monthly meeting,
  - Give candid reactions to various community discussion subjects presented; and
  - Respect the confidentiality of other Board member's meeting comments.
- Hold your Board meetings either at the beginning or end of the day. If the business has a suitable conference room, hold them there; if not, a local hotel meeting room will do. Make it quiet, private and comfortable.
- Meetings should not last more than 60 minutes, shorter if the discussion ends.
- The hardest part of having a successful Business Advisory Board is how the meetings are conducted. There must be a good, capable facilitator. This person prepares in advance a list of specific subjects to be presented and discussed. This person leads the meeting discussion and must make sure no one person dominates the discussion. Every person in attendance must comment on each subject.
- Remember that the purpose of the Board is to give ideas, direction to the business on becoming a better servant of the community's needs. This doesn't mean being the fund source of local charities. It means offering suggestions of how it can be better at helping those in the community who need its services, better than other businesses.
- After each meeting, a brief note should be sent to all attending, thanking them and listing the key actions the business will pursue AND not pursue. For those ideas not pursued, a brief reason why would be helpful. Not too much detail here, in the event it gets into the 'wrong' hands. But members need to know their ideas and contributions are taken seriously.
- The Board should replace 1-3 members every few months. Try to get staggered "terms" after the first year.
- Do your best to never SELL any Board member on switching or doing business with the company. If they initiate it, that's OK.