

## Coaches sharpen skills of business owners

By Michelle Swafford / Staff Writer



Lizette Sundvick, an estate and business attorney, is shown in her office. Sundvick credits her business coach with helping her stay focused.

Photo by Steve Marcus

Las Vegas business professionals -- like athletes -- are turning to coaches to improve their game.

Clients' investments in coaches can be hefty but so are their returns after tweaking their plays.

For Lizette Sundvick, a Las Vegas estate and business lawyer, company revenue and the number of clients doubled after working with her current business coach for a year. She has worked with business coaches sporadically since 1998.

"After listening to my story and what it is I do, she affirmed the value I bring to my clients," Sundvick said of her Henderson-based business coach Honoree Corpron. "She affirmed the fact that I was not charging enough for my services and that I really needed to raise my fees to what I was providing."

She said her coach provides ongoing support outside of coaching sessions through spontaneous e-mails and phone calls to encourage her and see how she is meeting her goals.

"A little encouragement goes a long way," Sundvick said. "She's like a hound dog that sniffs out the least bit of negativity and turns it around."

"She identifies the walls you're running into and helps you to see them objectively and say, 'What are you going to do about that?' She helps you find a way around, over or through that wall. My business was always in a place (of), 'Where's the next client coming from' and 'How am I going to make that overhead?' Now I'm booked four to six weeks out."

Sundvick said she went from a one-woman office with an independent contractor to three full-time employees plus an independent contractor. She also doubled her office space and added a conference room in September.

"I finally feel like I have a business," she said.

"She keeps bringing you back to what you want to be working on," Sundvick said. "There are so many things in life that can distract us. Once you've been in business for 10 years like I had, it wasn't (that) I didn't know what to do -- it was what do I do first? How do I sit down and get this done first because there's 100 things I should be doing at once?"

Corpron, owner of Honoree Corpron International, has helped Sundvick knock out some of those 100 things.

Growing a business and increasing sales is one of the things Corpron says she has a lot of experience with. For five years, she was among the top 10 multilevel marketing saleswomen out of 60,000 for Shaklee Corp., a distributor of wellness and nutritional products. She also was a manager of 25 balance transfer account representatives at MBNA America before opening her coaching firm and writing books.

Corpron established her company in 2000 and charges a minimum of \$1,000 a month for two scheduled half-hour phone sessions with her clients, which come from referrals.

"I get paid to have their agenda," Corpron said. "I see them better than they see themselves. My specialty is making people more money in less time."

She said she helps her clients find more effective ways to get things done by doing it, delegating it, dumping it or delaying it.

Even Corpron relies on coaches and motivational speakers to help her attain higher levels in her own business.

Not all of Corpron's coaching clients were inclined to pay \$1,000 a month initially.

For example, Jason Mickey, a Las Vegas sales manager for New York Life Insurance Co., hired Corpron in June as his first business coach after trying to achieve his business goals on his own.

"I (couldn't) see people paying someone money to tell me to do the things I know how to do and that I know I need to get done," Mickey said.

He said Corpron challenged him to accomplish his goals in 30 days without a coach, but he couldn't.

"I found that I was not effective at holding myself accountable," Mickey said. "When you're in business you know what needs to be done. You have your goals in front of you and 99 percent of the time you know how to do it. Accountability is usually the missing piece. It's so easy to get caught up in the minutia of your day and the mundane things that have to be done. Holding yourself accountable for the things that need to be done is a challenge."

He said Corpron helped him to crystalize his goals and create a time line to accomplish them.

Those goals are coming to fruition with the hiring of four employees from top competitors.

"That alone has been worth every penny of the coaching cost," Mickey said. "My time-management skills are much more improved. When you start coaching you have a 90-day lag period between when you start working on your plan and when you see actual results."

He said his team's production has also increased after working with Corpron because he holds his agents accountable.

"The true measure is the results," Mickey said. "Results are often harsh, but they're never wrong. In your business life (or) personal life, take a look at the results -- do I have everything in that area of my life that I deserve? If you don't, you need to make a change. That's what coaching does. It allows you to recognize the changes you need to make."

Betty Mahalik, a local business coach since 1996, offers similar strategies, but a different method and price for her coaching sessions.

As owner of Dynamic Solutions, she focuses on small-business owners who want to be more successful by working fewer hours. The cost is \$400 for three 45-minute phone sessions per month, and most of her clients are referrals.

Both coaches have clients fill out goal-setting forms and other assessments that help the coach to know what areas need work. They both recommend a minimum of six months and some clients keep a coach for years.

"It's like working with a personal trainer; you can have all the goals you want but it takes time," Mahalik said. "Sometimes you have to undo a lot before you can start moving forward."

Business coaches such as Corpron and Mahalik say if they are not a good fit for the client they will refer them to another coach because the relationship is important.

The primary focus of business coaching is on improving the business, but other life areas can creep into coaching.

"Their business is their motivation to come to coaching, but a lot of times it relates back to things going on personally," Mahalik said. "People always think achieving goals is about moving forward and not letting anything distract you and that's true, but it's often those hidden things that are distracting and preventing them from achieving their goals."

One area clients often need help with is effective communication, Mahalik said.

For example, they may say they want to be in better shape, but they don't define measurable goals, Mahalik said.

That's where Mahalik says she excels because she was a broadcast journalist, public relations agent and worked in an advertising agency.

If coaches feel that clients need help in other areas they do not excel in such as organizing, they might suggest hiring a professional organizer.

"When people invest in coaching they're also willing to invest in other professional services that can help them to accelerate their progress," Mahalik said.

Business professionals who are apt to benefit from coaching are those who are goal-oriented and want to invest in themselves and are open to new paradigms.

Coaching clients also have to be able to afford a coach.

"I don't want people going into debt to pay for coaching," she said. "They have to be able to justify it."

Michelle Swafford covers health care and small business for In Business Las Vegas and its sister publication, the Las Vegas Sun. She can be reached by e-mail at [swafford@lasvegassun.com](mailto:swafford@lasvegassun.com) or at (702) 259-2326.