

He means business

Hills man settles SCORE for entrepreneurs

BY BILL COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

So you'd like to run your own business, be your own boss, set your own hours.

Although you may have a great product or you may have a job that has become expendable under the current downsizing craze of corporate America, don't be too hasty before going into business.

"Ninety percent of the people I see don't go into business for themselves," said Ed Cesarone, a counselor with the Service Corps of Retired Executives Association. "We don't discourage anybody. We try to prepare them."

For Cesarone, a 47-year Farmington Hills resident, knowing the product you are offering, the customer to whom you plan to sell and the location are questions he would consider before trying any business. After operating two gas stations and a liquor store, those were factors he thought of first.

But a lot of people don't consider those factors when they go into business.

"You've got to have a business plan, which is like a road map," he said. "You've got to have a target, a goal and you use your plan as a tool to present to a loan officer at a bank."

Enough for a year

Most business plans need the financial backing of a bank or other lending institution, but many do not have enough money behind them.

"You've got to have enough to operate at least for a year," he said. "Cash flow is the problem we see the most."

Cesarone, 75, said he enjoyed his business ventures in three locations, including a liquor store in West Bloomfield, but found that retirement did not offer him enough activity after he sold the business in 1988.

His doctor told him to stay active and suggested SCORE as a way of using his business skill.

With five children and nine grandchildren, Cesarone and his wife Agnes are dedicated walkers. But helping people with their business problems or their questions is satisfying.

Research is important

Cesarone says choosing a good location, having the right equipment and enough cash to carry the business for at least a year without making a profit are important. And doing a good job of researching a possible business is important before trying out an idea.

"I had talked to a woman down in Trenton who bought a small liquor store before she had talked with me," he said. "She really didn't know much about the business or the location."

That lack of research proved fatal to the business and the woman's attempt to go it alone, he said.

Often clients have good ideas, but they are looking at the wrong location.

"You don't want to start a child care business in a neighborhood with mostly retirees," he said. "But some people don't really consider that first."

Parking, traffic and the size of the building are other factors to consider, he said.

Cesarone usually talks to a prospective business owner or present business owner but then looks over the business before making any recommendations. And before you plunk down money for a building, try to get a lease with an option to buy, he said.

Must like people

And although a business should be profitable and provide a good living, money should not be the primary motivation.

"I think liking people is the most important thing," he said. One of Cesarone's admirers is

Darlene Krogol, owner of Another Look Books in Taylor. Cesarone told her to consider video in her store.

But if you are going to go into business, you will probably be at it up to seven days a week. If that's the case, then enjoying that work is important.

"I wasn't able to spend the time with my family that I would have liked to," he said. That along with poor management can lead to failure.

"The important thing is to do what you love and love what you do," he said.

Other than workshops, most of SCORE's programs, counseling and services are free. For more information, contact SCORE in Detroit at 1-313-226-7947.



SHARON LEMMEL/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

SCORE-ing big: Edward Cesarone works for SCORE, which gives free advice to small business owners like Darlene, who owns Another Look Books in Taylor. Cesarone told her to consider video in her store.

"It was something I've dreamed of doing for a long time," she said. And her special-niche used bookstore has expanded to video, audio cassette and book rental as well.

"The money will follow if you do the other things," she said. "But I enjoy people coming in and being able to find a special book they couldn't find somewhere else."

Cesarone said that treating the customer well is important. When he owned his store in West Bloomfield, Cesarone used to have a woman customer who would buy one pack of cigarettes, and he would give her matches.

One day the woman walked in with a man who was going to place a big beer and liquor order on her say so.

"You've got to treat people well," he said.

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