

## Small Business

## Coaches teach clients to coach themselves

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When an unsolicited phone call last January assured Don McCreedy a business coach could improve his 124-year-old family firm, he didn't even know what a business coach was.

But McCreedy listened to the sales pitch and decided to go for it.

Ten months later, the 47-year-old Toronto businessman attributes the recent success of A. Guinness & Co. Inc., a supplier of disposable food containers and other products, to his coach, Sandy Kemp.

Since that call, McCreedy's business has seen a 2 per cent increase in profit margin and improved process efficiencies to create a 5 per cent cost savings and tracking of key performance indicators.

Three times a month, McCreedy and Kemp meet for about two hours to discuss goals and strategies for McCreedy's \$3-million-a-year business. Kemp charges him \$1,650 a month.

Kemp is a coach with Action International, a global franchise that specializes in providing coaching to small- and medium-sized enterprises. Unlike consultants who depart once the job is completed, Kemp says a coach does only part of the work but helps the owner develop business skills in-house.

Before Kemp began coaching



RICHARD LAUTENS/TORONTO STAR

In just 10 months, business coach Sandy Kemp, right, has helped Don McCreedy improve efficiency and increase profits at his 124-year-old Toronto restaurant supply firm, A. Guinness & Co. Inc.

McCreedy, his company counted high-end restaurants, such as North 44 and Bymark, and clubs such as the Granite Club, the Badminton and Racquet Club and the Four Seasons Hotel among its customers. The 10-person business was clearly already doing something right.

But since McCreedy, who has

an MBA, had only worked in the three-generation family business, he needed an outsider's perspective to move the business forward and improve efficiency.

That was the game plan McCreedy expected from his coach and that's what coach Kemp delivered, he says.

says McCreedy.

For example, instead of paying salespeople a percentage bonus for total sales brought in, the compensation model now gives greater weight to new client accounts and higher margin items. McCreedy also wanted to delegate more work, so the pair mapped out a flowchart of processes to identify tasks that could easily be delegated.

Kemp, a former director at AT&T Canada, says business owners usually sign on for coaching for three reasons: They want to "make more money, they make good money and want to work less or they want help with a headache," he says.

Cynthia Richards has been running Event Spectrum Inc. for nearly nine years and business has been brisk thanks to a client list that includes Bell Sympatico, Infiniti Canada, Warner Brothers and Sysco Corp. The event planning business reached \$6 million of sales this year, but Richards felt she needed help.

"I wanted to make sure operations were streamlined and efficient," explains Richards. Her goal is to eventually play a less day-to-day role in the company's affairs.

A supplier mentioned Action business coach Warren Coughlin might be able to help. Richards met Coughlin and signed a one-year contract for \$2,000

per month in April.

Year-to-date sales at Event Spectrum are up 22 per cent. Richards attributes more than half of the sales increase to the coaching.

Coughlin, a former lawyer, worked with Richards to establish a 90-day plan, which includes sales goals, and targets for improving the rate of converting sales leads to clients.

Coughlin meets with Richards individually twice per month, and with the 14-person staff once monthly.

Coaching has not just impacted overall business strategy, says Richards, but has influenced smaller aspects of the business.

For instance, awards the company has won are now denoted on company letterhead and sales staff answers the phone with the same greeting. Minor changes, Richards acknowledges, but they accumulate to form a "wow impact" when meeting clients.

Richards believes the coach has already helped her fine tune some of the skills she needs to take Event Spectrum where she envisions.

She is certain she will continue using her business coaching for at least another year. After that, Richards will see. Her coach will probably have given her the skills to go it alone by then. That's his job.