

PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Execs pushed to pay attention to 'human bottom line'

By Tim Puko
PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE-REVIEW
Sunday, February 28, 2010

Wedding engagements help John Henne make his living. But it was his friends' divorces -- and some help from a local leadership program -- that made him change the way he does business.

After John Henne saw four of his friends go through painful divorces, Henne Jewelers in Shadyside began a program called "To Have and to Hold" in 2008. It provides a free coupon for counseling and questionnaires for couples to do together, encouraging them to think beyond the rings they're buying.

The idea was an outgrowth of Henne's time in Serving Leaders, a faith-based program designed to encourage business and nonprofit executives to better serve their communities.

Integrity -- and not short-term profits -- should be the top priority for any leader, said Serving Leaders President John Stahl-Wert.

"Frankly, from my experience, some of the problems people encounter could have been averted if they'd been more thoughtful about who they got engaged to," Henne, 42, of Fox Chapel said. "I wanted to encourage more people to take more classes and counseling before they got married, but that could lead someone right out of a sale. ... It's better to see more couples stay together, even if I lose a sale or two."

Henne was one of the first participants in The Leaders Collaborative, which Serving Leaders created as its core program in 2007. The six-month program brings together executives to learn from each other and work towards a "breakthrough goal," a project they each develop as their way of improving the lives of others.

Serving Leaders began in 1978 as the Pittsburgh Leadership Foundation, which has undergone a rebranding since 2009. The foundation now is the fundraising arm, helping nonprofit leaders and others who otherwise couldn't afford the program; Serving Leaders is the name for the organization's programming arm, Stahl-Wert said.

Stahl-Wert, 51, of North Point Breeze, the former pastor of the Pittsburgh Mennonite Church in Greenfield, wants to get the region's leaders thinking of a "triple bottom line": profit, community and environment. That way, their businesses and organizations benefit all of Pittsburgh, he said.

Serving Leaders pushes the idea of a breakthrough goal so executives can develop their own visions as motivation.

"We're able to talk about the deeper things business school doesn't talk about and consulting firms don't talk about: We talk about character," he added. "I ask bottom-line questions, but there a fiscal bottom line and a human bottom line, and we have to pay attention to both. ... The real treasure, the competitive advantage, is on the human bottom line."

Its Christian element is primarily what differentiates Serving Leaders from the region's other leadership programs, said Kate Dewey, principal of the nonprofit consultants Dewey and Kaye. Dewey has been a board member, and worked on the strategic plan of Leadership Pittsburgh, an organization founded to help identify corporate executives who can serve on nonprofit boards in the region.

The Pittsburgh area has many leadership programs, including several run by colleges. While they might seem like competitors, most have found their own niches, Dewey said. The industry is thriving now as companies realize one-day or weekend conferences aren't effective at developing leaders or creating systemic change, she added.

"I don't think they're nearly as popular because people (think they were) episodic infusions of information and didn't provide long-term development," Dewey said. "But when you get people together (repeatedly) over a period of time, there is a benefit to that. They've become the preferred methods for people to participate in and companies to invest in."

Tim Puko can be reached at tpuko@tribweb.com or 412-320-7991.

Images and text copyright © 2010 by The Tribune-Review Publishing Co.
Reproduction or reuse prohibited without written consent from Trib Total Media