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Focused LLC: Focused offers executive business coaching and leadership training to help business leaders and their organizations succeed by providing solutions and offerings that boost their success and help them navigate the opportunities and obstacles. Founded by Bonnie Sussman-Versace in 2006. Based in Wyomissing.

Education: Studied technology and interior design at the Art Institute of Pittsburgh; other courses and programs in various areas of interest.

Personal: Husband, Phil; two four-legged children, Shih Tzu's named Abby and Sammie.

Hobbies: Work is my hobby. I like to walk, hike, read. I'm an amateur photographer and I love to watch and photograph sunrises and sunsets.

Favorite book about business or leadership: "E-Myth Revisited" by Michael Gerber. Other favorites are "The World According to Mr. Rogers" by Fred Rogers and Billy Crystal's book called "700 Sundays."

Best piece of management advice: Ask questions, and don't micromanage. You hired them for a reason: because they had skills and personalities that fit your organization. Don't turn around and tell them what to do. Let them tell you how they're going to do it.

What is the No. 1 challenge you're dealing with at your business? Pacing myself is a big challenge. It is a challenge for me to take time off for myself.

The Conversation

Bonnie Sussman-Versace

Focused LLC



READING EAGLE: TIM LEEDY

For more than 30 years, Bonnie Sussman-Versace has played various roles in business. She began by helping her parents with their retail clothing business when she was 8 years old and started her first company at 23.

"When I was a teenager, there was a fire at my parents' business, and they pretty much lost everything," Sussman-Versace said. "I almost lost both of my parents in that fire. It was a horrible nightmare, but it was one of the most incredible experiences a kid could ever have, and walk away from."

Sussman-Versace said seeing how manufacturers rallied around her parents to support their business through that ordeal in 1966 had an impact on her.

"It was a huge imprint on my life, both personally and professionally," she said.

Experiences such as that have been instrumental in shaping Sussman-Versace's professional life. It was about 10 years ago that she founded Focused LLC to help businesses, on a national and international level, thrive and prosper.

"Focused is kind of an extended manifestation of some of the things that I did for my own company, and my clients with my previous business," she said. Sussman-Versace was referring to Commercial Design and Furnishings Inc., a business she founded and led for 22 years prior to starting Focused.

From sustainability planning to boot camp for business owners to specialized support for businesses, Focused offers a full range of services. Its sustainability planning helps businesses establish a solid infrastructure. Sussman-Versace said that when it comes time for a business owner or leader to eye up retirement, his or her ducks should already be in a row.

Business Weekly: Why is sustainability planning good for a business?

Bonnie Sussman-Versace: It becomes more of an issue for a couple of reasons. If I'm in a business, and something happens to me, who can jump in and take over if I am out for a week, month or year, or if I take a one- or two-month sabbatical? I did that and I knew I had the people that could do everything that needed to get done, and I only had to call in five or six times. When you do the sustainability plan, it allows you to create

a solid infrastructure within your organization so you don't have to be micromanaging wherever you are.

BW: When is a good time for a business to establish a long-term sustainability plan?

BSV: When people go into business, they don't always think about what is going to happen next or afterward. Sustainability planning is not related to the age of the business owner or leader, or the age of the business. It is really something that needs to be considered and

planned for, and acted upon as early as possible.

BW: How long does it take to create a sustainability plan with Focused?

BSV: If someone comes in and wants to look at doing a plan, it can take anywhere from a month to a year. It depends on what needs tweaking, because there are different elements that need to be in place. It depends on what the business has in place already. I don't like to reinvent the wheel. There are a lot of pieces that need to go into

sustainability planning: it is not a business plan. We examine those and evaluate it and see if those pieces are workable for whatever else we need to add into the mix.

BW: Are there any misconceptions about sustainability planning, particularly when it comes to naming a successor?

BSV: It's not just about "I selected this person and they are going to succeed me." They need training and leadership development. I think one of the biggest mistakes that business leaders and owners make is they promote (certain individuals) because they are great at doing their job, and they don't look at the whole person. You need to look at the whole person to evaluate what they need to sustain their role in an organization.

BW: What is another element that should be considered when it comes to a company's workforce?

BSV: Like succession planning, sustainability planning doesn't just relate to people at the top of the organization. It's about key positions, and any position in a company. When thinking about sustainability, that is one of the elements. People are not really replaceable when they come in to learn about your business and the different elements and aspects of it.

It is the No. 1 asset of any organization. It's about how you protect the organization to make sure you have the right people in place. There are a lot of things to consider, and that is why it takes time.

BW: What role do your international affiliates play when it comes to fulfilling clients' needs at Focused?

BSV: I collaborate with different colleagues (international affiliates) on special projects and programs as needed.

Interview By Courtney H. Diener-Stokes, Reading Eagle