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Growth Tools

Does practice always make perfect?

How many times have you had one of your salespeople invest time and energy preparing for a major presentation? They practice their pitch, prepare talking points and rehearse in anticipation of their prospect's questions and objections.



SELL DIFFERENT

Joe Ippolito

But in spite of all the preparation and practice, their pitch isn't successful.

For many salespeople this type of memorized preparation becomes a roadblock to their success. Instead

of paying attention to the prospect's reactions, they are busy focused on themselves running through a mental check list of important points to cover. They are so intent on delivering their well rehearsed message, they fail to actually listen or understand the prospect's issues and concerns.

The meeting ends with the prospect promising to give the presentation some thought. In reality he has no real intent of proceeding. Your salesperson blames the prospect for not absorbing the information or somehow not understanding how your company's value proposition applies to him.

For all your presentations, you must practice and be prepared to the extent that you internalize your message and become subconsciously competent. Meetings rarely go as planned when questions arise. You must own the information so well that you can respond without ever having to think first. So practice and then let it go.

JOE IPPOLITO is principal of Sandler Training, an international sales training and management consulting firm located in Beverly. He can be reached at jippolito@sandler.com.

| ENTREPRENEUR |

Same difference

Reading with TLC; New England Burials at Sea LLC



STUART GARFIELD | BUSINESS JOURNAL

Sisters Penny Castagnozzi, left, and Nancy Telian provide reading aid programs that can help students of all ages.

Focus on million brings these small companies nearer to the next level

BY SEAN MCFADDEN
JOURNAL STAFF

One provides burials at sea, the other a program designed to help students improve their reading skills. The concepts are certainly dissimilar. But the two businesswomen — Reading with TLC and New England Burials at Sea — have one key thing in common: These innovative smaller enterprises share a laser-like focus on their particular service or product — and are poised to take their business to the next level. Indeed, both companies are forecasting significant revenue growth for this year. In this week's Growth Tools section, we present both their stories.

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| LESSONS LEARNED |

Can leadership skills be taught?



Kate Ferenczy
DiCiccio,
Gulman & Co.

Not all leaders are "good" leaders. They may share certain character traits, but good leaders seek opportunities to hone those skills. That's what makes a natural leader even better.



Matt Monahan
Mass. General
Hospital

Vince Lombardi's "leaders are made, they are not born" philosophy guides MGH's Fellowship Program and Leadership Academy to instill leadership skills in managers and administrators. By growing our own leaders, we can promote from within and retain our best employees.



Mel Robbins
Author,
columnist

Leadership isn't a fixed state you achieve, it is a mind-set you cultivate. The question each individual must ask themselves is not whether leadership skills can be taught, but whether you are still open to learning the lessons of leadership that are always around you. They are there, if you want to see them.

★ **Next week's Lesson Learned:** What positive changes have you made at your company in 2010 as a result of the economy? Send your answer in 25-30 words to cmahoney@bizjournals.com. Be sure to include a high-resolution headshot.

GROWTH: Small companies forecast significant sales growth for '11

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 28

Reading with TLC: A book of business

The one thing **Nancy Alemian Telian** and **Penny Alemian Castagnozzi** wish they had more of these days is time.

"Honestly, we love every single aspect of this business — given the time to get it all done," said Castagnozzi, 52, who co-owns Weymouth-based **Reading with TLC** with her sister, Telian.

Growth chart

Business: Reading with TLC

Based: Weymouth

Revenue: \$278,000 in 2010

Principals: Nancy Telian and Penny Castagnozzi, co-directors

Only three staff members strong (including Nancy's husband, **Alan Telian**, who serves as business manager),

their company has established a niche for itself in the market for reading-aid programs aimed at students in pre-kindergarten through Grade 2, as well as those of all ages who have reading disabilities or challenges.

Reading with TLC's core products are "Lively Letters" and "Sight Words You Can See," which are each packaged as a set of flash cards and an instructional manual. The products sell for \$85 and \$35, respectively. Their hook is that the principals have created research-based materials that tie in mouth cues, humorous stories, pictures, hand movements and music to help students better develop their phonemic (sound) awareness and phonics (connecting those sounds to letter shapes) skills. They sell to schools, as well as individuals, such as those in private practice, school educators and parents.

Telian, a speech and language pathologist, and Castagnozzi, a former elementary school educator, developed the program in 1990 and began selling the materials in 1994. They officially incorporated the business as **Telian-Cas**

Learning Concepts Inc., dba Reading with TLC, in 2001.

"We wanted kids to have fun," said Telian, 56. "But, not only that, our products are known to close achievement gaps in those skills that are known to be predictive of reading success or failure."

Virginia Lynch, executive director of teaching and learning for **Brockton Public Schools**, praised the products as "visually engaging to the student. ... It's very interactive."

Revenue for the company came in at around \$278,000 in 2010 — which was up 36 percent from the year before. This year, the principals are projecting \$450,000 to \$500,000.

A key factor in the company's growth, the principals said, is that over the last couple of years they've ramped up the number of events they've presented at or held across the country to promote the materials. Last year, they did about 33 such events — a combination of speaking engagements at conventions, free seminars, on-site seminars contracted by school systems and off-site seminars put on by the company itself. They already have 31 such events booked or scheduled so far this year, whereas last year at this time, there were only 10 seminars on the books. This strategy has allowed the company to grow its presence nationally, as well as north of the border — in markets such as Nevada, Florida and Calgary, Alberta.

To help address the demand, the principals have contracted with several trainers nationally and would eventually like to have trainers in every state.

Additionally, the principals have given out "scholarships," whereby they have waived the seminar fee to qualified attendees — such as those in leadership positions or those traveling to a New England seminar from outside the area.

"Our biggest problem (previously) was having people find out what our program is," said Castagnozzi. "Once people have seen one of our programs at one of our trainings, they love it."

New England Burials at Sea: High water mark

People often ask **Brad White** how, exactly, he got into this line of work.

"Someone just said to me (recently), 'You can do that?'" says the founder and president of Marshfield-based **New England Burials at Sea LLC**.

The short answer is, yes, he can — thanks to an abundance of U.S. Coast Guard training and licensing to take people out for hire. Not to mention marketing savvy gleaned from more than 30 years in the consumer products business.

Growth chart

Business: New England Burials at Sea LLC

Based: Marshfield

Revenue: \$200,000 in 2010

Principal: Brad White (pictured), founder and president



"You (learn to) identify the trend, you maximize it, and then you grow it," White said.

These days, he's ventured into very different waters with a company that

helps families memorialize their love ones by scattering their ashes or providing full-body burials — at sea.

"What we promote is that when you scatter somebody's ashes at sea, you look at the water and you'll always see (that person)," said White, who has been a U.S. Coast Guard master-licensed sea captain since 2005.

The concept has gained traction since White launched the business in 2006. Last year, the company performed 67 burial "events" — which he said is more than three times the number in 2009. Gross revenue for the company was around \$200,000 for 2010, but White expects that number to increase to between \$500,000 and \$800,000 this year. Services have been provided from

Maine to Miami and from San Diego to Seattle.

The company has two full-time staffers, but White said it has access to 12 contract on-call associates, including other sea captains and funeral directors. The bulk of its business comes from customers based in New England, though White said about 10 percent in recent months has come from inquiries from those outside this region.

He points to a number of key factors for the company's growth, such as affordability. Cost, for example, ranges from an "unattended" (no family members) event for \$395 to \$2,750 (which White called the "sweet spot" of his business) for events with up to 35 people in attendance.

The business represents a professional sea change of sorts for White, who worked for more than 13 years for **The Sharper Image**, eventually moving to San Francisco to serve as director of business development. Upon returning to the Boston area in 1998, White launched his own company, **Midnight Pass Inc.**, a pet-products manufacturing outfit that White said has sold about \$7 million of product from 2001 through 2010.

While simultaneously operating **Midnight Pass**, White, an experienced mariner, launched a charter boat service in 2005. One day, someone asked him to spread their uncle's ashes at sea. A new passion was born. "I decided I really wanted to focus on a service business with no inventory," White said.

He had to make sure that he was equipped with the appropriate certifications — from licensing to insurance. He also had to learn how to best market a business built around a highly sensitive subject. As a result, he's dramatically increased his advertising budget.

"I want to be the brand of choice in the burial-at-sea business," White said. "And to do that, you have to have very high quality and you have to be on the cusp of consumer demand."

SEAN MCFADDEN can be reached at scmfadden@bizjournals.com.

Obama's new regulatory review order pleases business

BY KENT HOOVER
WASHINGTON BUREAU CHIEF

President **Barack Obama** addressed the business community's concerns over excessive regulation by ordering a review of federal rules already on the books and directing agencies to make sure the benefits of new regulations justify their costs.

Consistent with the law, agencies should choose regulatory options that pose the least burden on businesses and consumers, according to the president.

Obama also strengthened enforcement of a law that requires federal agencies to give special attention to the burdens their regulations impose on small businesses. Agencies now will be required to provide

written justification when they don't consider giving additional flexibility to small businesses, such as exemptions from rules, extended compliance dates or streamlined reporting requirements.

The president's actions pleased **Tom Sullivan**, who runs the **Small Business Coalition for Regulatory Relief**.

"Through Republican and Democratic administrations, the Office of Advocacy has repeatedly criticized EPA, OSHA and other agencies when they issued rules that unnecessarily harm small businesses," Sullivan said. "President Obama is finally telling agencies to follow the Office of Advocacy's advice."

House Majority Leader **Eric Cantor**, R-Va., also had

good things to say about Obama's executive order. It "shows that he heard the same message I did in the last election — that Americans are sick and tired of Washington's excessive overreach and overspending," Cantor said.

In an op-ed column in the *Wall Street Journal*, Obama wrote that the goal of looking back at existing rules is "to remove outdated regulations that stifle job creation and make our economy less competitive." The review also "will help bring order to regulations that have become a patchwork of overlapping rules."

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