

Long Island Business NEWS

Where Business Gets Down to Business

Who's a king to call when he just wants to talk?

By Ross Daly

Friday, August 17, 2007

Most people have someone they turn to for advice at work, a colleague or supervisor. But what about the boss?

Discretion is clearly required.

On Long Island it comes in the form of the Long Island Software CEO Roundtable, now entering its fifth year of being the No. 1 corporate klatch for Island executives.

"It's a very personalized way to get advice without the conflicts you might have in your own office," said Robert Vormittag, president of Vormittag Associates Inc. and a roundtable member for most of its existence.

Brian Turchin founded the group in 2003 and facilitates its meetings. Turchin, a 30-year veteran of the software industry, is president of Cape Horn Strategies Inc., a Merrick firm he founded in 1998 to provide planning services to the software industry.

Turchin said roundtable topics range from compensation issues to corporate financing, marketing and emerging technologies. "At last month's meeting, we discussed how you need to pay a higher salary just to lure new college graduates to your business," he said.



Bob Vormittag, VAI and Brian Turchin, Cape Horn Strategies, Inc.

Difficulties in dealing with the Island's brain drain are often discussed: "One company has been looking for a director of software development for more than a year," Turchin said – as do LI's pricy housing market and high tax burden.

Dennis Labriola, president of Admit Computer Services in Farmingdale, has been a member for about two years, and said he got a variety of input from the group about expanding beyond direct sales.

"It's to share experience and to really try to advance each other, and share our knowledge," said Labriola, whose firm supplies software for public safety, homeland security and justice agencies. "It serves as a really good sounding board."

When he first joined the group, Vormittag also had questions about taking his business to the next level. He gained insight from other members and invited speakers, he said, especially in the areas of marketing and sales, software development and pricing.

Nicholas Croce, president of Inference Data in Lynbrook, is one of the roundtable's younger members. "Rather than having to learn the hard way, you can learn from people who have a lot more experience," he noted.

Roundtable members clearly gain from each others' strengths, Turchin said: "Everybody brings something to the party."

The party begins at 6 p.m. on the second Monday of each month and lasts for three hours. Members take turns hosting at their facilities, and serve everything from sandwiches to sushi. Speakers fill the first part of the program, which is open to both the CEOs and whatever team members they choose; later, the leaders retire to the closed part of their meetings.

Some of the private conversations "are about us," Turchin said, noting a mixed bag of personal and professional goals.

While other CEO roundtables may draw leaders from different industries, Turchin thought it was important that this group be limited to those in the software field. "Software is a different industry," he said. "It's about selling concepts, not something physical."

The founder set an upper limit of 14 members, keeping the group manageable and helping ensure that common times could be arranged for the busy execs. The group currently has 12 members, about half of whom have been with the group since its inception; a similar group Turchin formed in Manhattan has the same number.

While it invites leaders from Nassau and Suffolk and is open to both startups and established firms, the Island group does not include any direct competitors, Turchin said, because that would impede people from speaking freely about their businesses.

"It's brutally honest," he said.

The forthcoming fifth anniversary is proof that the idea has merit, and that a trust is building, Vormittag said.

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