



Nonprofit Organization TAPs Into the Potential of Small Businesses

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Small business owners throughout Westchester don't have to spend a fortune to obtain strategic advice to maximize their outfits' potential.

The Acceleration Project (TAP), a Scarsdale-based nonprofit organization created in 2012, provides the type of services and professional expertise often thought to be reserved only for larger companies or well-heeled business owners.

"People who own their own businesses work incredibly hard and they really don't have the time or the resources to think about how they can position themselves in a changing economy, particularly with the pressure put on them by the Internet and big-box stores," said Jane Veron, TAP's co-founder and CEO.

Many of the businesses who utilize TAP's services are small, independently-owned Mom and Pop operations representing a wide variety of businesses that might be seen on Main Street in almost any downtown in Westchester, Veron said. Restaurants, hair salons, boutiques and clothing stores and dog grooming services have all signed up with TAP.

About three-quarters of the businesses that have used its services are owned by women while one of every three are minority owned, she said. They might seek help with branding, marketing, strategic planning, developing a business strategy or a financial structuring plan or a multitude of other services designed to help owners succeed.

TAP has helped businesses in 18 communities in Westchester and Rockland counties. It also works with municipalities whose officials are seeking to find the right mix of businesses for their town and recognize that a thriving downtown is essential to the health of a community, Veron said.



Members of The Acceleration Project's management team. The nonprofit group helps provide small businesses with consulting services that are often needed to compete in a highly competitive marketplace.

She added that so much attention is paid to glitzy startups and high-tech companies that explode suddenly onto the scene, but often it is the day-to-day businesses that become the lifeblood of a business district.

“We like to work with the businesses that are normally underserved, who don’t have access to the talent that we can bring to bear,” Veron said. “And we are keenly aware of the importance of investing in small businesses to keep our small towns vibrant, which is essential to the fabric of a community and essential to the economy.”

Among the programs offered to clients is a strategic advisory program where a team of the organization’s consultants advises a client on business growth needs during several consulting sessions; speed consulting, which is a workshop offered to a group of small businesses to review challenges, opportunities and strategies; a one-time consultation for a client with a long-term goal; and a large-scale project or study to address an important area of concern for a business. For the business owner who may be expert in their industry but doesn’t have the business acumen to make all the right decisions on his or her own, TAP consultants speak in an easy-to-understand manner, said Tracy Jaffe, TAP’s chief operating officer.

“We’re really good at taking basic content and speaking in plain English,” Jaffe said. “We’re so used to business speak.” Jaffe said TAP, which is funded through fundraising efforts, helps in other ways as well. Many of the

roughly 60 professionals and consultants who lend their services to TAP are women who have left the workplace part-time or entirely to raise a family. Therefore, it helps professional women ease their way back into the workplace, she said.

Clients of TAP pay a small fee, a fraction of what the services cost if a merchant were to seek them out privately, Veron said. Pricing is offered on a sliding scale and based on ability to pay. For more information about The Acceleration Project, visit www.theaccelerationproject.org.