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Guest commentary: Business success isn't due to fate or fortune

SHEILA GREENSPAN, Special to the Daily News

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I saw a movie recently about two middle-aged people. In "Something's Gotta Give," they were both financially successful in their own rights, having achieved their self-made successes by using their talents, intelligence, hard work and contacts.

I thought about all the people I've met who have done the same thing and all the people I've met who have been trying for years and not meeting their goals.

I think about the difference between the two. Is it the people? Is it the goal? Is it the approach? Is it the personality? Is it the contacts?

Is it the guidance? Is it luck?

What is it, really? What makes one person successful and another person not? How do you "get there"?

Let me share vignettes from my volunteer work with an organization that helps small business people "get there." Both are from true stories. The first took place in California, the second in Collier County.

- When Eileen decided to sell the home-based business she had run singlehandedly for 10 years, she collected her company's financial information from her accountant to present to a prospective buyer. Her prospective buyer asked for other information which Eileen didn't have. Where to start? She needed help.

She had heard about SCORE, so she called her local office and set up an appointment to meet with a counselor. The person with whom Eileen met had been a small-business owner and was knowledgeable in the areas of her requests. The counselor reviewed the financial information and made comments and suggestions which Eileen then incorporated into her paperwork.

As she had never written a formal business plan, the counselor provided her with an outline for an executive summary, business plan and marketing program. Eileen was very excited about working with the counselor because he exhibited a high level of expertise and had, himself, gone through the same paperwork for his own company. He was very pleasant and encouraging. When the "assignment" was complete, the counselor reviewed the work, commented and made suggestions. He was able to recognize other values Eileen had not realized and guided her into incorporating the additional revenue streams. Eileen followed the suggestions, completed her paperwork and submitted it to the prospective buyer. As a result of the assistance of the SCORE counselor, the business was sold for considerably more than originally anticipated.

- Jordan had been involved in improving his quality of life through physical fitness in his native Germany, and was eager to bring the concept and program to America. The task was overwhelming and he found himself going in several directions at the same time. One evening, at a local social function, quite by chance, he sat next to a gentleman who turned out to be the chairman of our local chapter of SCORE. They talked about his program and our chairman invited him to call SCORE for an appointment with a counselor.

The counselor found Jordan's qualifications to promote, market, manage and develop the project to be

exemplary, but he needed assistance in setting up his program "the American way." In numerous sessions with several counselors of various expertise, Jordan was helped with a step-by-step procedure to define and implement a winning strategy. They also assisted him with legal and governmental compliance, the business and marketing plans and financial projections.

Finally, Jordan opened his business and had interest from his first customer. Jordan needed help negotiating a potential contract. SCORE counselors instructed him in the "art of deal-making, American-style" before signing.

Jordan said he couldn't have achieved his goal without the help of the many counselors who worked with him. He said he will continue to use the SCORE's resources.

We are fortunate to be a part of the national organization of SCORE (Counselors to America's Small Business) and to have a local branch in Naples to serve all of Collier County. We have 52 counselors who have a wide variety of backgrounds and know-how in business-related professions.

In the first nine months of fiscal year 2006, our local chapter had 1,251 counseling sessions — both in person and via e-mail — with people who were starting new businesses and who needed guidance in getting their businesses to the next level.

Our chapter volunteers spent more than 3,600 hours in that same time period with clients and the community. Some clients require many counseling sessions; some require only one or two. We are happy to accommodate our clients as needed. There is never any fee for our counseling services.

We are located at Fifth Third Bank at 900 Goodlette-Frank Road N., Naples; phone, 430-0081. Our Web site is www.scorenaples.org

Please visit us for a wealth of information and a schedule of workshops and other events available to the public.

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