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Learning Dynamics helps businesses deal with stress

By: Samaia Hernandez , Record-Journal staff

WALLINGFORD -

The economy has at least one national company expanding its reach to even smaller local businesses.

Learning Dynamics is a 28-year-old executive coaching and training firm that specializes in leadership, sales, business skills and human resources serves clients located anywhere from Waterbury to San Francisco.



Dave Zajac /•Record-Journal

Calvin Morgan, right, vice president of Learning Dynamics in Wallingford, instructs colleagues on the Common Decency program which teaches fair and consistent treatment of employees with many scenarios that emphasize and reveal the nature of that challenge.

While some businesses are freezing and

tightening their budgets, the firm is creating new training material on timely subjects such as stress and time management, and simply doing more with less.

Such topics have become hot requests for the company. Just last month the group joined the local Quinnipiac Chamber of Commerce, and while it's serviced large organizations including General Electric, Yale University and Pitney Bowes, its leaders are hoping to build relationships with smaller area business as they undergo changes brought on by the times and the economy.

Vice President Barbara Phillips recently hosted a panel on Connecticut Public Radio's "Where We Live" segment on working in a multi-generational work force. The former human resources professional is also busy visiting clients on site for training sessions.

"It seems that in the past year or even six months there's a great need for things like dealing with stress and helping folks to realign in terms of what they're facing," Phillips said.

In workshops, Phillips teaches practical concepts that people can walk away with, she said. For instance, she'll introduce concepts such as "shifting into neutral," which emphasizes eliminating negativity and finding a more "neutral" state to better deal with things clearer.

"It's very interactive," she said. "It's not a lecture." Groups are provided with handouts and broken up into pairs to work on exercises where one person will pretend to be angry and the other will try to react in a neutral state.

In total, the organization has held more than 400 different training sessions on various subjects across the country.

But as companies cut budgets and lay off employees, finding the money to hire an outside firm to train employees may not be an option for some.

Robin Wilson, president and CEO of the Quinnipiac Chamber, said the chamber will often hire a similar firm to offer a class to members at a discounted rate, but it's typically on something like sexual harassment, which is required by law.

"For the small business that really make up the bulk of the state ... they're not going to hire a consulting firm, but they would come to something that the chamber would have on that topic," Wilson said. "When we put on a workshop, everybody's bearing the cost and it cost a bit less."

Wilson suggested that a good target for Learning Dynamics would be a mid-sized business, rather than a small or large corporation that may have an in-house training department.

But Jim DeMaio, the company's CEO, said he's willing to work with clients.

"There's one organization that's a nonprofit and we said to them, 'Look, we understand that you don't have the budgets that some of our larger corporate clients would have,' " DeMaio said. "We will give them some type of price reduction in understanding who they are."

One of the main areas companies are struggling with right now is doing more with less, DeMaio said. Because of downsizing and hiring freezes some employees are taking on more than one position.

"It's not like they're going to be able to say, 'I need three more people or two more people,' " he said. "Maybe it's a matter of working smarter not necessarily harder."

The group is currently developing new offerings and programs to address such concerns. "We know that here just in the Meriden/Wallingford area there are a lot of smaller companies that may benefit," he said.

Quinnipiac University has hired the firm to present programs to staff on human resources and to coach the public affairs department on management skills and team building.

"It was very interactive," said Public Affairs Vice President Lynn Bushnell. "They've been great."

Bushnell said the university's needs vary from department to department. Some may seek the services of an outside firm while others would attempt to fill their needs from within.

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