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## Meaker helps business people visualize goals

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BRADENTON -- Melissa Clark has a doctorate, three master's degrees and a bachelor's degree. But when it comes to setting goals for her senior care business, Clark has historically taken an approach more like a high schooler than the degreed professional she is. "I just kept my goals in my head," says the owner of Suncoast Senior Care Consultants. "Or a lot of times, you just jot things down."

Clark is now learning the importance of setting specific goals, and actually writing them down with forethought, in a new course offered by local leadership development guru Sarah Meaker. "I've realized that if you don't take the time to plan your goals and write them down, you might still get there, but you could be a lot better off down the road."

Meaker's 10-week series is designed to guide small business owners on concepts that include not only goal-setting but time management, positive behavior change, overcoming "cold feet," communication, problem-solving and the importance of informal leadership. "My purpose is to give people the tools they need to profit, and to keep their greatest asset: their people," says Meaker, a former small business owner who four years ago earned a doctorate herself in leadership. "Because of the economy, there are a lot of people walking around in a state of shell shock."

Meaker, owner of Meaker & Associates, says she is amazed at the number of highly educated and intelligent business owners to whom goal-setting is an unfamiliar concept. She says even her own advanced degrees didn't teach her how to effectively set goals. That's just one of the voids she seeks to fill for small business owners through her course, which conditions its participants to consciously, actively pursue goals rather than hold them intangibly.

Another void Meaker seeks to fill is authentic positive thinking. Most of us are trained, she says, from birth through the most formative years through negative conditioning, setting in place a lifelong pattern of learning through "no" rather than "yes."

"Only about 23 percent of what we hear is positive when we're growing up," Meaker says. "The rest is all negative. My goal is to expand that overall box, to build in more positive messages. Because until you consciously go after those negative thoughts, they aren't going to change."

A third key void Meaker is seeking to fill for business owners is effective communication; a skill that she says also overlaps into goal-setting, communication and leadership. Clearly enunciating goals to not only yourself, but to those you are managing or leading, can mean the difference between success and failure, Meaker says.

In addition to running several small businesses herself, Meaker has worked as a contract leadership trainer with such diverse entities as the federal Transportation Safety Administration, the Navy, AAA Travel and about 100 local small businesses. Two of her most recent clients, the owners of Digital Safety Net, say Meaker helped them be more effective at both leadership development, and sales and marketing.

"She helped give us the direction and confidence to go out and be better at what we're doing, and to enjoy it," says Jeff Cordes, who studied under Meaker along with his wife Anita.

Meaker's next series starts July 7 and will be held weekly from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. For more information, contact her at (941) 773-5349 or [sarah@meakerandassociates.com](mailto:sarah@meakerandassociates.com).

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