

BUSINESS

Nichols: Personal Touch, Key to Corporate Survival

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In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, most of us have been effectively relearning the business of living--with the spectre of the pandemic adjusting and affecting where we go, what we do, and our interactions with others.

Also during this time, many have been relearning the business of making a living. According to the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO), the overall unemployment rate for Florida shot up 1.5 percentage points in March 2020 to 4.3% and Hernando County ranks among the top 10 counties for unemployment rates in the state (see article on page 5).

For those that are still working, many must readjust their schedules and their work styles; telecommuting and working from home as they also juggle their responsibilities with parenthood, elder care, and other family commitments.

As the dramatic changes in the way we live and work impact us all, how do we cope? Where are the answers? Teri Nichols, a 30-year veteran of Tampa Bay's staffing and recruiting scene, has some suggestions. And she's willing to share them with the Hernando community.



"This is a difficult time for everyone professionally and personally," said Nichols, License Owner of Spherion Staffing in Brooksville. "We just have to remember that we're all in this together. We have to sew the seeds of hope together."

Nichols, who has worked with the Florida Small Business Development Center, a subsidiary of the Small Business Administration, is the Brooksville owner and operator of Spherion, a leader in the recruiting and staffing industry with more than 70 years of experience connecting job seekers to employers that prove a mutually successful match. Currently, the brand services the workforce needs of more than 4,000 businesses nationwide and operates more than 200 offices across the country.

At this point, said Nichols, she has yet to see a great upsurge in either applicants requesting work through Spherion, or in employers posting jobs through the service.

"Applications are steady, as people are getting their stimulus checks, but will probably go up higher in the coming weeks," she predicts. "And we've been able to keep our full staff, for which we are grateful and very blessed."

In regards to specific jobs available, Nichols does note new openings in the manufacturing industry; an essential business in constant need of workers.

"You might see a boutique salesperson retraining as a manufacturing worker," she said, adding, "The temporary assignments that our clients have been able to migrate to a safer at home work situation are all clerical in nature and there have only been a handful."

Nichols sees virtual tools as being the key to working and hiring during a time when physical contact is limited.

"Employers can interview job prospects via video, and hire them electronically for home-based work," she said. "So many electronic tools, designed for efficiency, are now essential."

Nichols sees online video and audio conference calls as being another essential electronic work tool.

"Conference calls give us a sense of normalcy, and allow us to engage with others," she said. "Even if there's no water cooler, we still can have water cooler talk. You can start off by asking how their families are, make everyone feel a little less isolated."

Indeed, Nichols sees the personal touch as a key to corporate survival during these trying times.

"I've been reaching out to small business owners in the area, asking, 'How are you feeling?'" she said. "How can I help you?"

Aside from moral encouragement, Nichols supports local business people by helping them hone and update skills to help them succeed in the business world--and by introducing them to computer programs and software that will help them develop these skills still further.

"There are resources and tutorials that will help you fine tune your interview skills, computer skills, etc.," she said. "So when businesspeople get back out there, they are ready to go."

And when they do get back out there, what will the world of work look like?

"With all of the technological tools available, businesses will be doing more with less," she said. "Employees will be looking for ways to make themselves more valuable to companies."

Nichols also maintains contact with Hernando business owners.

"I think it's important to reach out to local business owners and talk, to run ideas by them," she said. "To help them navigate the waters, and to answer the question, 'What's next?'"

In the future, Nichols encouraged businesspeople to keep in contact, offering support, advice and opportunities whenever possible. And she encourages anyone with questions and concerns to contact her at 352-796-6000 or e-mail terinichols@spherion.com.

"It's important that we protect ourselves now and make smart decisions for the future," she said.

"We need to stick together."