

Q&A with Sam Black

Talking with the owner of Sam Black Consulting and Design-Your-Gift.

Written by
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History of our company: I started Sam Black Consulting 21 years ago. Was downsized at Citicorp Mortgage in St. Louis and decided to “hang my shingle” and go out on my own. Design-Your-Gift is 6 years old. I had so much fun doing it out of my home in St. Louis that when we moved here two years ago, it exploded into a

business. (Actually, my husband said if I moved 10,000 beads into our condo here he would divorce me!)



What it does: My consulting includes using state-of-the-art online assessment tools through Profiles International to help clients hire new or coach their existing sales, customer service and first-line supervisor employees. The jewelry business is so much fun. Although I design lots of pieces customers can purchase, the best part is hosting “play-in-the-bead-box” events. Ladies on a night out or kids come to make gifts for themselves or the women in their lives.

Sam Black, owner of Sam Black Consulting and Design-Your-Gift. / Lindsay Downey/Coastal Life at Design-Your-Gift so I can be open more hours even if I’m off doing training.

Number of employees: None now but may get part-time help

Business philosophy/company culture: Customer service is key in both businesses. Understanding what the client needs and delivering it has helped me build a repeat client consulting business and it has carried through to the jewelry business.

Our biggest achievements in the last year: I trained sales in Prague with a translator and had to be very focused on adapting our U.S. sales style to a more conservative approach. With Design-Your-Gift, I introduced a “repurpose your jewelry box” service where customers bring in broken jewelry or “orphan earrings” and we take those beads and make something new.

One change our company implemented to survive the downturn: Added webinars because I found companies around the U.S. did not want to spend T & E dollars to bring me to their companies. And local

companies did not want their employees away from the job for half days or full days — they wanted the training in bite-sized, 75-minute programs. Design-Your-Gift has been growing every year despite the economy.

Challenges our business or industry is facing now: Getting companies to realize that ongoing training and coaching is critical, even with limited budgets, to develop employees and show them they are important.

Why I chose this profession: I fell into training 39 years ago. I was working as an insurance claims reviewer for New York Life (boring!) My apartment in New York City was burglarized and I needed a second job to buy back all the things the “bad guys” stole before my folks came to visit. I answered an ad for telemarketing (\$3.10 an hour) ... and the rest is history! Jewelry appeals to my right-brain creativity. When I’m too old to trek around the country and the world training (maybe in about three years), I can sit in Bonita, making lovely jewelry and helping others tap into their creativity.

My business background/education: I have a B.S. in international relations, an MBA in management/human resources and many courses on training (ASTD). Have taken lampwork/glass bead-making classes as well as other jewelry classes.

Three things I need to get through the workday: Coffee, chocolate and a wonderful husband who supports all I do. When I work late at the studio, dinner is on the table. When I travel for a week, he’ll come with me and we’ll add extra days to enjoy a new place or he will keep the home fires burning! Couldn’t do it without Jon.

Last book/magazine I read: Jack Reacher book, Time magazine (and OK ... People too).

My favorite movie/TV show: “Dirty Dancing,” “The Good Wife.”

My favorite celebrity or fictional character: Meryl Streep — she’s incredible in every movie part she’s done.

Three words co-workers would use to describe me: Committed, fun, honest.

On Saturdays you will find me: At the studio for “play-in-the-bead-box” for hours until noon (or later if someone calls). Then, off to the pool or beach!

Best thing about working in south Lee/Collier County: I can play hooky on Fridays and go to the pool or beach.

Person I admire most: Hillary Clinton — grace, extremely intelligent and dedication to our country.

Best business advice I’ve received: Add email marketing. That opened up so many more customers for training and the jewelry business. Every small business should do it and I’m so surprised at how many people I meet at networking events and never hear from again — no “great to meet you” email and no tips emails to keep me informed about what they do, what they could do for me. Can’t understand why they go to networking events and don’t do any follow-up.