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Advice plentiful for entrepreneurs at meeting

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By DAVID GURLIACCI

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That was some of the advice offered to people who want to start or grow their small business at a May 11 panel discussion and networking event in White Plains. About 20 people attended the event, organized by the Westchester/Greater Connecticut Chapter of the National Black MBA Association.

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Asked what they had to do "absolutely right to succeed," a panel of three small-business women offered several nuggets of advice:

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"For me it was marketing, marketing, marketing," said Lisa H. Whaley, a consultant, motivational speaker, business coach and author of "Reclaiming My Soul from the Lost and Found," a book about balancing work and nonwork aspects of life.

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Whaley said she put a lot of effort into having a good Web site, and she tried several different ways of getting publicity for her book and business.

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"Whenever I would see a story in the paper that was relevant (to her expertise), I would shoot the reporter a note (saying) 'I really loved your story ... by the way, I'm an expert on this subject. Feel free to contact me,'" Whaley said. She eventually got quoted in stories, which helped people learn about her book and her business.

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Whaley also contributed articles to magazines on the Internet and even signed cards that described her book and left them in public places.

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"I actually got back orders that way, and I actually got a coaching client that way," she said.

NETWORK

But more important than other marketing methods was networking, Whaley said. She kept in touch with people she knew during her 22-year career with IBM and got most of her clients through referrals

Denise Lawson, owner of the Datum Group Inc., a White Plains computer consulting company she started in the late 1990s, agreed that networking is important, adding that it needs to be done the right way to succeed.

After the meeting Lawson said she learned she had to avoid the "hard sell" "â€"â€"â€" pushing a prospect to make a decision "â€"â€" in nearly all networking circumstances. She also found out that someone she met who wasn't a client could still be very useful if that person recommended her to others.

KEEP YOUR DAY JOB (for a while)

"My advice to the entrepreneur is don't quit your job ... until you reach a comfort zone," Whaley said. Until the business starts making money, having a regular paycheck and job security is a big help, she said.

Simone Dewey, founder of Simone's Gallery Ltd. in Pelham, agreed with Whaley. Dewey recalled that when she started her gallery, she had recently been laid off from her job, but she'd taken another job, which she held until the gallery was more established.

The gallery recently closed its Pelham location after six years, but Dewey is continuing her business on the Internet and with trunk shows.

Also speaking at the meeting was Nancy Caballero, a program manager for the Workshop in Business Opportunities (WIBO) in New York City. She described the nonprofit organization's 16-week course, "How to Build a Growing, Profitable Business," which is offered twice a year and costs participants less than \$170.

The three-hour seminars and workshops are taught by small-business owners or executives expert in their fields and targeted toward

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members of minority groups, Caballero said. All participants have homework assignments. Subjects covered include creating business plans, marketing, record-keeping, taxes, selling strategies, making financial decisions, long-term planning and managing employees.

WIBO holds classes in various areas around New York City and in Bridgeport, Conn. The next classes begin in September. For more information, call (212) 684-0854 or visit the WIBO Web site at www.wibo.org.

Dayneen Preston, president of the Westchester/Greater Connecticut Chapter of the National Black MBA Association, said the local group is about 15 years old and has 70 members.

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