



## **David Hendricks: San Antonio business owners find help from their peers**

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The quality of life in any city depends more than anything else on the success of the city's business owners.

How well they do their jobs determines the tax base, jobs and incomes that set standards of living. No one can help business owners, though, like other business owners in overcoming barriers to growth and success — in essence, serving as their board of directors.

There are several peer group organizations in San Antonio. One particularly effective one started nine years ago and has quietly helped business owners find success and growth.

John Dini started the San Antonio franchise of The Alternative Board in 1997. It grew so quickly that by 1999 it ranked as the largest among the 150 TAB franchises operating in three countries, with as many as 100 members — 94 at the present.

In TAB, approved members are assigned to one of three types of boards comprising peers but not competitors. Each board has five to 10 members and meets monthly for four hours, orchestrated by a professional facilitator, to discuss solutions to operational problems that members face.

Private coaching also is available to members.

"I'm a big fan of TAB," said San Antonio accountant Steve Bankler. "I joined two years ago and was in my practice 28 years before that. During the 28 years, I was accountable only to me. It was easy to do things mañana.

"Now I set a goal every 30 days. I'm accountable to outsiders for the first time. It's a great tool for business owners. You learn how to spend time on your business, not in your business."

The difference, Bankler explained, is that he now sets aside time to chart the direction of his business, determining his niche and developing a marketing strategy instead of concentrating just on client work.

TAB also stages seminars and workshops and brings in nationally known speakers. Allen Fishman of St. Louis, who founded TAB in 1990, will speak Nov. 1 to San Antonio members, followed by personal finance writer Jordan Goodman in February.

Dini is a former business consultant who moved from Malibu, Calif., to San Antonio in 1994 for the family-friendly atmosphere. He still traveled too much, though, so he phased out his consulting practice. With partner Carlos Zubillaga, he started MPN Inc., a business brokerage that also operates the TAB franchise.

The San Antonio franchise became TAB's largest because of San Antonio's large community of small businesses and because of the city's rapid growth during the past decade, Dini said.

"The average member already is successful, not in dire straits," Dini said. "They have owned their company for more than 10 years. They've put everything into their company.

"They are not holding anything back. But they want to become bigger, better and more profitable, and they do not know how to do that."

The 11 San Antonio TAB boards each contain an average of 200 years of management experience on which each member can draw during the confidential monthly meetings.

All business owners rely on a three-legged stool, Dini said. Legal help and financial backing are two legs. The other is advice on operations — running the business day to day. Issues include human resources, compensation and knowing when to acquire other companies or to be acquired yourself.

TAB is not the only peer process available to area business owners. SCORE, or the Service Corps of Retired Executives, has long been vital in the San Antonio business community. Other organizations include the Entrepreneur Organization — formerly the Young Entrepreneurs Organization — and the Young Presidents Organization. Various chambers of commerce also operate peer processes to assist members.

"If you believe in the peer process, it doesn't have to be us," Dini said. "Just find someone to discuss your operations."

San Antonio, after all, counts on its business owners to succeed.

#### More information

- **Fees:** The San Antonio franchise of The Alternative Board charges monthly fees of \$360 to \$610 to approved members. The amount depends on the size and age of the owner's company.
- **3 types of boards:** The members are divided between three types of boards, which meet monthly to discuss operational barriers —
  - Entrepreneurs board.
  - Presidents board, for companies with \$1.5 million to \$7 million in annual revenue.
  - Chairmen and chief executives board, for companies with more than \$7 million in annual revenue.
- **Outlook:** The San Antonio TAB franchise now operates 11 boards, but franchise owner John Dini said he is ready to double membership. Half of the current members are referrals from others members.
- **For contact info:**
  - [www.tabboards.com](http://www.tabboards.com)