



# TEC *Saved* My Business.

## **"I am still in business today because my TEC group trashed my business plan,"**

said Jerry Messerman, CEO of a Tampa company which manufactures and markets office furniture.

When he joined TEC in the late 1980s, Messerman was developing a new desk/work-station product to complement his printer stands, computer tables and tape racks. The new line had low, middle and high-end versions, each with its own sales materials and target markets.

### **Critical Meeting**

During his first TEC business plan review, Messerman described his three price points and different marketplaces. He also revealed some of the problems he faced, including difficulty financing the marketing for three separate lines and some confusion among his reps. The TEC process calls for members to go around the room and ask questions to clarify the subject. Members went around and around the table until all their questions were exhausted.

The questions burrowed down into the real issues," said Messerman. "They exposed things I never thought about."

After the questions, each member offered an opinion about the plan. "They had a field day," he recalled. "They said we had too many commodity offerings. No brand. No niche. There were too many quality levels in the new line and no way to finance them all."

Messerman said he felt pretty stupid. He had carefully crafted his plan and thought he knew what he was doing. How could he have missed things that seemed so obvious to the others? He left the meeting hurt, angry and ready to quit TEC. However, he took the tape of the business plan discussion that TEC always provides the member whose issues were covered.

"When I listened to that tape and really heard them, I realized they were right," he said. "We did need a niche strategy. The TEC group got me to focus on the right thing, and that made all the difference."

### **Streamlined Approach Paid Off**

Messerman jettisoned the middle and low end of the line and focused instead on the high-end product. He built a 100,000-square-foot manufacturing facility for the new line and renamed the company Design Options. Plus, he stopped manufacturing commodities.

"TEC's advice literally kept me in business. I saw other commodity manufacturers go out of business while we grew by 15 percent every year between 1991 and 2001,"

Messerman said. Even during the post 9/11 economy, Design Options' revenues held steady while the sales of other office furniture companies plummeted by as much as 30 percent.

"TEC is always urging us to find new niches," he said. "The health care and education markets we had developed earlier sustained us through the hard times."

Messerman continued, "If you are an entrepreneur and do not have a sounding board like TEC, you may stumble. That could cost you time, money – even your business. The collective wisdom of a TEC group helps you avoid mistakes."

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Jerry Messerman



*TEC, formed in 1957, is dedicated to increasing the effectiveness and enhancing the lives of chief executives. There are more than 10,000 members internationally. There are 54 TEC groups in Florida, where Chief Executives meet monthly in groups of 12 to 17 to give and receive business advice, share experiences and hear from outside experts.*

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