



# Cleveland business executives to address entrepreneurs group

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It can be lonely being an entrepreneur. Many people, including your employees, don't share your vision or passion. It's difficult to find someone to confide in. If you don't have a board of directors or advisers to call on, it's not easy to seek help.

Next week, members of The Entrepreneurs' Organization are bringing together at least 100 Northeast Ohio entrepreneurs and top executives to share ideas on how to make their businesses grow faster.

The Entrepreneurs' Organization was founded 20 years ago to create forums around the globe where business owners can be frank about business issues. Giving members advice is against the rules. Each month a member is called on to share experiences with one goal in mind: Helping members learn from the member's triumphs and disasters.

"EO is all about experience sharing," said Joel Goldstein, an Independence public relations person who is an organizer of the event. "The practical advice I get from other members in our chapter has had a tremendous impact on our strategies and how we grow. It's inspiring."

In celebration of the Cleveland chapter's 10th anniversary, the organization is holding "Best Practices: Lessons Learned from Cleveland's Best Business Leaders" on Feb. 28 at Cleveland State University's Wolstein Center. Speakers include members of the chapter, other entrepreneurs and a few corporate executives. The all-day event coincides with National Entrepreneurs Week.

Presentations include a panel of serial entrepreneurs discussing their greatest business triumphs and most painful lessons as well as other panel discus-

sions on sales, Internet law, making acquisitions work and leveraging technology.

Here's a snapshot of what some of the speakers plan to discuss.

## Keynote speaker

David Grizzle, senior vice president of customer experience, Continental Airlines.

Grizzle believes every company should focus on customer service. He plans to tell how he has become obsessed with that task. A new flight experience survey is among his latest projects.

"We at Continental believe if you're going to be customer-driven, as opposed to simply calling yourself that, you have to create ways to hear what customers are saying so you can respond," he said.

"We want to hear directly from the customer what they're experiencing so that we can make our whole engagement with them more appealing. Every discreet event makes up an entire customer experience."

## 'Driving Demand for Breakthrough Sales'

Panelist, Jim Ryerson, president of Sales Octane in Alto, Mich., plans to talk about jump-starting sales.

With lots of competing products available online, Ryerson believes entrepreneurs have to bring more to the table. His message centers on bringing value to customers beyond products and services. He will share points on what it takes to become more likable and trustworthy, learning how to influence people and how to create a referral mechanism.

"You've got to be more methodical and persistent with your sales process," said the former Cleveland business owner.

## How to make acquisitions work

Panelist Randy Markey, managing partner of Capital Acceleration Partners, said people underestimate how risky mergers and acquisitions are. Deals go as planned less than 25 percent of the time, he said, which means organic growth sometimes is best.

Markey has been on both sides. He has worked at companies that have merged and works now as a consultant.

"Aggregating companies is easy," he said. "Integrating the acquisition is where the value gets created, and that's the hard part."

## 'Building a Winning Employee Culture'

Len Komoroski, president of the Cleveland Cavaliers, will talk about the team's fans: the national reputation Cavs' fans have for creating a home court advantage, how the team reaches out to fans for ideas, and how much planning goes into keeping fans happy.

So what does sports have to do with entrepreneurship? The message he hopes his audience will take away is that no matter what kind of business they have,



Ryerson



Grizzle



Markey



Komoroski

it takes passionate employees to make a venture successful. Empowering employees is critical.

"If you don't have passion for what you're doing, you will not be successful," Komoroski said.

Komoroski said he will never forget how captivated and motivated he once was by a garage door salesman.

"If you find your passion," he said, "at that point you'll be doing what you truly love and you'll be creating a platform for succeeding beyond your wildest dreams."

Registration for the event is \$150 per person or \$125 for COSE members. For more information, call Lisa Heckman at 216-952-1515 or go to [ggcomm.com/lessonslearned](http://ggcomm.com/lessonslearned)

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