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Chamber Business Expo starts Tuesday

BY JIM FABER, *The Island Packet*
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It's networking time again.

Networking is always among the top three reasons members give for joining the Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Chamber of Commerce, and the biggest networking event of the year, the Business Expo, will be held at The Westin Resort on the island Tuesday and Wednesday.

The expo allows people to meet new members of the business community and cultivate clients, but it also offers another advantage, said Charlie Clark, chamber vice president of communication.

"It is also a really great place to check out the competition," she said.

The formula behind the expo, which has been an annual event for more than 20 years, hasn't changed much, but it works. This year, 2,000 people are expected to visit the more than 100 businesses represented at the expo.

One new twist for this year's event is the "passport." By visiting at least 10 of the booths and having those companies mark the passport, visitors can enter a drawing to win one of six weekend getaways.

After-hours events will give people a chance to mingle in a more relaxed setting.

And seminars by entrepreneur expert Allen Fishman and The Referral Network Group will dispense business and networking advice.

"You take what you learn and walk down the hall and use it," Clark said.

Even if you don't run your own business, Fishman is sure the strategies he's collected in his years as an entrepreneur and business commentator can help make your life more fulfilling.

The CEO of The Alternative Board and the author of "7 Secrets of Great Entrepreneurial Minds" says the hardest step in the seven-step program is persuading people to take an honest look in the mirror to figure out their strengths and weaknesses.

Fishman tells the story of coaching a company manager who insisted that marketing was his greatest strength. His employees emphatically disagreed, saying there were better choices to head up marketing.

While getting people, whether successful business owners or those starting careers, to honestly assess themselves is difficult, it is also essential, Fishman said.

"You never compete with your weaknesses," he said. "You compete with your strengths."

Fishman suggests that people start by creating a personal vision to set goals for the next five to 10 years in terms of material success, ideal work role, family relationships and other factors.

"What I hear over and over again is people are so tied up with putting out the day-to-day fires that they haven't spent the time to strategically live their life," Fishman said.

Contact Jim Faber at 706-8137 or jfaber@islandpacket.com.

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