



## The Star-Ledger

### Entrepreneur groups tout work-life balance

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When Alan Fishman set out to unravel the secrets of highly successful entrepreneurs, he went looking for people with a lot more going on in their lives than running a successful business.

"I excluded people who are totally focused on business," Fishman said. "I believe success means mastering your business and work life, but also having passions outside business. I've been fortunate enough to meet people who have really fulfilled lives."

Aspen, Colorado-based Fishman has met hundreds of entrepreneurs since 1990, when he founded The Alternative Board, a franchise that brings entrepreneurs together in peer support groups that serve as a kind of outsourced board of directors.

TAB groups are small, less than 10 companies each (there are more than 20 such groups in New Jersey), and they get together monthly at four-hour sessions that include a TAB-trained facilitator. None of the group's members can be competitors or suppliers; they have to feel comfortable speaking frankly about sensitive issues. TAB members are looking for the kind of CEO-level advice that is routinely available in big corporations, but nearly impossible for a small business owner to find.

One result of his many conversations with well-rounded entrepreneurs is Fishman's book, "The 7 Secrets of Great Entrepreneurial Masters," (McGraw Hill, \$21.95) a discussion of key behaviors Fishman has identified in entrepreneurs who've managed to balance business and personal success. These include the "personal vision" -- a written, long-range dream of what you want to get out of life, and the "look in the mirror" -- a written self-analysis that identifies your strengths and weaknesses.

"Most business owners don't take the time to analyze themselves the way they analyze their business," Fishman said. "You need to go where your passion is; that is what will push you and separate you from everyone else."

The conventional wisdom is that people should do what they're good at, but Fishman contends the work you do well won't always ignite your passion.

"I'm blessed with lots of accounting ability, but I have zero passion for it; accounting was just a way for me to make money while I worked my way through law school."

After a long career as a retailing executive, Fishman would find his greatest work satisfaction from TAB, because, "what I enjoy is helping others by empowering them to do things to bring their companies and maybe even their lives to the next level."

Glenn Tippy is president of the Flanders-based insurance agency Gerrity Baker Williams, and for the past four years has belonged to a TAB group moderated by Robert Zelnick, who has five TAB groups in the Morris County area.

"We all have a tendency to get buried in our businesses," Tippy said, adding TAB can spur entrepreneurs to tackle problems that they've shoved to the back burner. "These people are your peers, and you don't want to have to say that you have this problem, and then do nothing about it."

TAB companies tend to be eager to grow and are looking for ideas. Zelnick said, adding one goal is to

help entrepreneurs set the bar higher. "TAB members get skilled at clarifying their expectations, and demanding more."

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