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Helping companies reach their full potential



Michelle Rowell, left, John Heymann and Lisa Toller are the three principals of NewLevel Group, which recently opened in Napa. SUBMITTED PHOTOS

NewLevel takes businesses to next level

By KATHLEEN DRESSEN
Register Correspondent

Imagine a business where success isn't measured only in profit margins. This business would actually count "satisfaction" as a goal.

"Our idea is to create a different model for a successful business," said John Heymann, one of three principals in NewLevel Group. "Traditional success is achievement, the bigger, the better. We've learned that achievement isn't by itself enough. For success, you need happiness."

NewLevel Group, which opened earlier this month at 1303 Jefferson St., works with businesses and non-profits to help them reach their full potential. Heymann sees a relationship between the business and non-profit sector. "You achieve happiness by giving back, creating a legacy," said Heymann, former CEO of the wine business consulting firm MKF in St. Helena. "There's a balance in the community that keeps shifting. Business helps communities be stronger and non-profits are the social engine of the community. We help both become more effective to build the community."

Heymann said his years working for the Peace Corps in South America helped shape his conclusions about community. "(The Peace Corps) was fantastic, life changing," he said. "In a way, it led to this venture. I learned the importance culture plays in different mindsets. Understanding this helps with cultural and organizational issues."

Office culture, Heymann said, can have an impact

— sometimes a huge one — on the organization's effectiveness.

"We're interested in how to help agencies be more effective," said Heymann, a resident of Yountville. "Businesses and non-profits are filled with passionate people, and if they get more effective, everyone benefits. A winery can be an example. A person gets into the business because they're passionate about making wine. They don't know about the details of sales and marketing."

Heymann is an advocate of "venture philanthropy," businesses not simply donating money, but offering business help to struggling non-profits.

Heymann said his company operates in three ways. "We have a collaborative team approach, we tap into each other's expertise. We focus not only on the plans, but implementing them. We work side-by-side, especially with smaller companies who can't hire a full-time person for their expertise. Finally, we measure the results in how we get there. We don't bill by the hour."

Their clients might be surprised by some business solutions suggested by NewLevel. "We offer a holistic approach," said principal Lisa Toller. "They may come to us needing marketing help, only to discover that they have leadership issues. We do relationship building, finding out their pain and listening to their goals. Perhaps it's a family dynamic or a health issue. We pull together the team to help."

"We specialize in smaller companies and our expertise lies in how we can help them and make it affordable," added Toller, whose background is in business management and marketing. She lives in St.

Helena. "Our strength is in listening, in reading between the lines. We work with people who need help, and are prepared, willing and able to take the steps needed."

What if someone in the organization is resistant to change? "We offer empowerment, rather than judgment," said Toller.

Heymann acknowledged that people's sensitivities have to be taken into account. "I recognize that a struggling director may feel threatened," Heymann said. "We ask the question, 'How can we make you successful?'"

"Non-profits have complex issues, political considerations and feelings of ownership. We work through the issues on the table as an objective source. Businesses, too, can be struggling to redefine their business model," said Heymann. "People in the company have to shift their thinking to operate in a new way. It can be easier knowing someone will help them through the process."

Michelle Rowell, another principal in the company, said they do more than point the way. "We get emotionally involved," she said and smiled. "The critical thing is to have the plan and walk with them every step of the way. We become part of their fabric."

Rowell, whose background is in wine marketing, helped a family-owned company work through its struggles marketing its product. "They had a small staff and a great product. We put together a plan and they're acting on it," she said. "The family now sees the path they need and they can get there. Everything

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fell into place and everyone knows what they need to do."

"Issues are interdependent. Some consultants fixate on the word 'sales,' but we tackle all the elements that are affecting sales."

A familiar face for more than 20 years in Napa's healthcare community, Jim Tomlinson is a recent addition to NewLevel's board of advisers. "There's a need in the community to bring

resources together, to learn how to efficiently and effectively work together," said Tomlinson. "(NewLevel) can use business strategies to make non-profits more efficient. On the other hand, non-profit funders will see the agencies operating more effectively and feel they're getting more for their donation, and that their money goes further."

Tomlinson envisions coalitions of non-profits and businesses working together. "Non-profits can work together so their mutual goals can be satisfied. They'll work collaboratively, not competitively," he said. "We can bring funders together and figure out how each can stay

true to their (business) mission and still meet the critical needs of the community."

NewLevel Group relies on an extensive list of associates and advisors to share their knowledge of business and non-profits. Consultant to Napa's Community Foundation, Dorothy Lind, commented on the company. "They give their customers what they need most, honesty, creativity, a push for excellence and a path to a new and exciting business direction with powerful results," said Lind. "Everybody else does the same old thing. NewLevel is just that, a new level."