

AIM sets sights on clients' transitions, while assisting generations of leaders



President Andrea Fredrickson ... Professional training and development firm grows long-term relationships with clients due to understanding of family businesses and family-friendly approach.

By Michelle Leach

For 20 years, Andrea Fredrickson vacillated between calling her father by his first name, Wayne, or just “dad,” as he was both her business partner and mentor. Now Fredrickson is president of the American Institute of Management and she uses her family approach and understanding to train and develop professionals (many clients are also family-owned businesses) - and gauges AIM’s success through her family of clients’ success.

“We help them create a measurable result that moves their business forward, and our long-term relationships allow us to gauge our success based on their success,” Fredrickson said. “The people we work with hire us to accomplish their goals, but partner with us because we understand the family business.”

The professional training and business development firm at 300 W. Broadway in Council Bluffs touts clients throughout the country, ranging from teams of five to companies with more than 3,000 employees. As Fredrickson said, many clients stick with them—FBG Service Corp., an Omaha-based company that specializes in green cleaning solutions, is one of AIM’s oldest clients.

“They have branches all over

the U.S. and we go out there all the time and have multi-level discussions—with ownership to the people who are fulfilling the work,” Fredrickson said.

AIM facilitated the strategic direction of the company when its founder, Wayne Simmonds, transitioned his daughter, Terri Gogetap, to president of the company.

According to AIM information, the six-month process included management development training and facilitating the development of processes to measure FBG’s progress and gauge performance.

The AIM Website features more family businesses the firm has partnered with—including No Frills, which used AIM’s guidance to develop store managers, resulting in increased productivity and lower turnover for the supermarket chain—and Sheppard’s Business Interiors, which credits AIM’s eight session program, Getting Results Through Others, for the company’s strong teamwork and enhanced accountability.

Fredrickson said no matter the client, the process begins with free initial conversations, whereby company goals are identified and participants complete assessments. It’s not until a proposal or course of

action is crafted that costs are discussed.

During the training process, AIM staffers meet team members for face-to-face interviews.

“Almost every event and every process we have is in multiple sessions, because the process of changing attitudes and changing behaviors and building confidence takes a series of repetitions,” Fredrickson said.

Between sessions, facilitators contact participants’ supervisors to get updates about their on-the-job performance and provide support.

The program culminates in a graduation celebration, she said, but the relationship continues—they’ve been working with some companies for 15 years.

AIM got its start in 1989. At the time, Fredrickson’s father, Wayne Nielsen, had 15 years of management experience and had operated several businesses.

Fredrickson, whose degree is in teaching, wanted to apply her passion for business and service outside of the classroom. It was then that the father-daughter decided to create AIM—to provide not only jobs for their family but for generations to come.

Now Fredrickson’s brother-in-law serves as Vice President of Virtual Training and her brother and mother work for ones of AIM’s sister companies.

AIM’s sister companies, with branches in Iowa and Arizona, tout more than 150 employees and provide another differentiator for the family firm, Fredrickson said.

“We have what we call a lab—we use everything that we use with our clients in our own business,” she said. “So this is not just a bunch of market people and partners that get together and say let’s start a business.”

“We’re a family business, so we understand and treat everyone like family.”

Most of the time they take their brand of training and development directly to the client’s environment—offering offsite training. But onsite training is also available,

especially as new employees are added so as not to duplicate sessions more tenured employees have already completed.

Upcoming sessions include Powerful Presentations, a program designed to encourage presentations that engage team members and prompt audience participation, Fredrickson said.

AIM also offers free workshops annually. This year’s theme: “In Times of Change...How Do You Lead?”

“We’ve had up to 200 people attend these events,” she said. “It’s kind of a game to see who can sign up first.”

Fredrickson recalled an exercise where executives were asked to make origami boxes to reinforce in importance of getting the right directions and having the freedom to ask questions.

“People asked us how they could get the instructions on how to build the boxes,” she said. “They got the message, and everyone was laughing and having fun.”

In the future, AIM will have a hand in building the experience, knowledge and leadership abilities of all employees (not just those on the management track) as more boomers leave the workforce and the smaller Generation X steps up to fill the void, Fredrickson said.

“It doesn’t just mean management training, but adjusting and modifying processes to become more efficient and to do more with less people,” she said.

Fredrickson said many business owners will also be exploring transitioning their “child” of sorts, their company, onto their son, daughter, or other family member.

AIM works in tandem with their business succession planning team to effectively prepare and transition the venture for the future.

“With most privately owned businesses, the owner has so many resources in his head and hasn’t transitioned to the next generation or discussed whether the next generation wants the business or not,” she said. “It takes years for that to happen.”