

A business boot camp for women

Firms' owners seek guidance

By Maggie Galehouse
Scottsdale Republic

SCOTTSDALE — *I love my job; I love my boss; I am self-employed.*

A roomful of laughing women chanted that mantra over the weekend at the Women Entrepreneurs' Small Business Boot Camp in Scottsdale.

Spearheaded by Susan Ratliff, owner of a local trade show supply company, the event drew more than 200 people to the Hilton Scottsdale Resort for fluff-free advice on micro-businesses.

This year, there will be about 4.7 million self-employed women nationwide, an increase of 77 percent since 1983.

Women-owned businesses in Arizona are growing faster than any other state except Utah, according to the Center for Women's Business Research.

"Micro-business owners bring a lot to the economy," said Ratliff, 50, "but it's funny. We all try to give the

impression that we are larger than we are, and no one talks about it."

Ratliff decided to create an event that offered practical advice and renewed energy to female entrepreneurs.

"The speakers are micro-business owners in town," said Ratliff, president of Exhibit Experts, in Phoenix. "People can meet them, shake their hands and really talk to them. When women get together there is an outpouring of sharing. We are not afraid to expose our foibles, and I think we're better for it, because we divulge our mistakes and learn from them."

Breakout sessions covered topics including:

■ How do I get paid for the services I provide?

■ How do I increase my business by 20 percent?

■ How do I network and prospect for new clients?

"I really want my business to grow," said Sara Knab, 46, president and co-founder of

See **BUSINESS** page 2

S2 MONDAY, JANUARY 10, 2005

89

BUSINESS Camp + help for women

From Page 1

Web Strata, a Chandler-based Web design and development company. "I came here today because I need a boost."

Knab's partner just left the company, so for the first time she is running it alone. She said she got valuable advice from Ratliff's opening remarks. "I liked her saying to expect more than you think is possible and to surround yourself with people who are positive and enthusiastic."

Speaker Sharon Maloley, who took the "boot camp" title to heart and dressed in camouflage fatigues, hammered home the importance of creating an efficient billing system for every type of business.

"The primary goal is payment in full on first contact," said Maloley, who runs A.R. Systems Inc., a consulting and collection agency.

Bills should be specific, she said. They should never say "payment is due in 30 days," but rather "payment is due on Jan. 10." Get cellphone numbers in addition to work and home numbers, she added, and never accept a post office box as an address.

Millie Gonzalez-Scott, who had a number of questions for Maloley, is vice president of the Scott Business Group, which provides recruiting and staffing services.

"We struggle with getting paid, even when we do business with midsized companies," said Gonzalez-Scott, 51. "When you're a small business, you don't want to be financing someone else's business. ..."

Some of the attendees were preparing to launch new businesses and needed tips on networking and mar-



Cheryl Evans/Scottsdale Republic

Speaker Sharon Maloley took "boot camp" to heart.

keting their products.

Amy LaDow, a realtor, is starting a children's clothing line with her mom and cousin. Under the name Tiger Lily, outfits will be in the \$30 range and funky, with an Asian influence, she said.

"Ideally, I want to get these clothes into boutiques," LaDow said, "but I need to figure out how to do mass media marketing and how to get people to go to a Web site."

LaDow attended a session on networking and prospecting led by Connie Kadansky, CEO of Exception Sales Performance, a Phoenix-based consulting and performance-improvement company.

When you fall in love with someone, it's because that person makes you feel good about yourself, Kadansky said. Similarly, business owners should leave prospective clients feeling good about themselves.

Quality prospects, Kadansky added, are easy to spot: They have an immediate need for your service; they have a problem you can solve, and they can pay today.