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Six-Squared, entrepreneur program takes off

October 16, 2012



In the last 18 months, LaSonya Berry (**pictured left**), president and CEO of McPherson, Berry & Associates, has expanded her business and built lasting relationships with five other entrepreneurial professionals. *"I might not have ever met any of these entrepreneurs if we had not gone through [Six-Squared] together," Berry said.*

McPherson, Berry & Associates is a multifaceted consulting firm dedicated to providing human resource consulting, leadership development, performance and talent management solutions to a diverse clientele. Berry, along with five other small business owners, were the first members of the Georgia Southern University Center for Entrepreneurial Learning and Leadership (E-Zone) Six-Squared Program.

In October of 2010, the E-Zone paired up with the Lowcountry Small Business Hub Inc. and the Technical College of the Low Country. The program Six-Squared was designed to enable peer-to-peer learning through a development program for local small business owners, entrepreneurs and managers.

Over the past 18 months, Six-Squared has offered a learning platform for these six entrepreneurs to examine their own business problems with the support of like-minded individuals. The program was structured around regular group meetings every four to six weeks for approximately three hours. *"Each meeting includes presenting challenges, talking about proposed action plans, and reviewing actions taken," one of the facilitators of the program Dr. Luke Pittaway said.*

Pittaway is also the director of the Center for Entrepreneurial Learning and Leadership at Georgia Southern. Six-Squared is one of the many projects Pittaway has been working on over the past 18 months. Originally from England, he worked with the same type of program at the University of Sheffield located in South Yorkshire. With a successful program helping over 30 entrepreneurs in England, Pittaway was enthusiastic to bring Six-Squared to the U.S.

Members for the program were recruited after graduating from the Lowcountry Small Business Hub Fast-Track program. D’jaris Moore, project manager of the Hub, along with Pittaway, helped to get Six-Squared on the ground and running.



Six individuals, hence the name Six-Squared, were involved in every “learning set” or meeting. Each set followed American theorist David Kolb’s learning cycle (**pictured right**) which involved four different phases. First the group worked on problem identification, followed by action planning, action, and reflection. After the group went through the cycle, it repeated the steps to maintain a strong learning process.

“It is referred to as ‘action learning’- the idea that entrepreneurs learn more effectively when what they are doing is focused on the business, and on challenges they experience in their everyday work,” Pittaway said. “We know that entrepreneurs learn from doing and problem solving. So that’s why the learning sets are designed around this action learning idea.”

Louise Hodges, owner of Green Bug Inc., was also one of the entrepreneurs that participated in Six-Squared. Greenbug Inc. manufactures and sells effective, green and safe pest control products for both people and pets, indoors and outdoors. Hodges claimed that Six-Squared has helped her company tremendously. *“Meeting with other entrepreneurs with similar struggles offers tremendous insight and solutions!” Hodges’ exclaimed. “We were all learning together through each other’s circumstances.”*



Besides learning from each other, the participants of Six-Squared also learned from mentors. Once a week, mentors provided guidance on different business problems addressed at the meetings. In addition to mentors, the six individuals made trips to visit each other’s businesses, during the meetings or on their own time individually. *“One of the greatest assets is that these people understand my business,” said Hodges (Green Bug products pictured left). “We served*

as each other's advisory boards and held each other accountable to decisions and commitments. I have absolutely been helped!"

Along with Hodges', Berry believed relating to other entrepreneurs helped overcome obstacles. *"After building a trust with one another we were able to share some of our challenges and learn from one another," Berry said. "We were able to connect with one another and help one another with different areas of business development."*

One of the biggest accomplishments for Berry was being able to expand her business by avoiding mistakes. *"When you have your own business you think that you're going through everything by yourself, when really you're not," Berry said. "With [Six-Squared] you can share with others and learn from them. It helps you not to repeat the same mistakes."*

In the future, Pittaway and Moore plan to develop the program. *"The Lowcountry Small Business Hub actually has had to reduce its activities due to lack of funding," Pittaway said. "Therefore, Georgia Southern is working on expanding the program."*

Director of the Bureau of Business Research and Economic Development of the College of Business Administration at Georgia Southern Dr. Dominique Halaby and his Budget Manager Joy West just recently submitted a proposal to the Blackstone Charitable Foundation for a grant for Six-Squared. The proposal was in response to the request the foundation released that targeted organizations that focus on entrepreneurship and innovation.

"The grant that we submitted is a unique opportunity for us not to just connect with the Black Stone Foundation, but to launch a program with statewide ramifications from right here at Georgia Southern," Halaby said. "Instead of following [other universities], we have the opportunity to be a leader in economic development in the Six-Squared program right here."

Halaby is interested in having Six-Squared become a sustainable and ongoing program at Georgia Southern. *"I would like to see it really launch into every corner of the state so that we have Six-Squared cohorts not just in the coastal region, but multiple regions," Halaby said. "It is a great opportunity to brand the Georgia Southern name beyond just our immediate borders of Bulloch County."*

If accepted, Georgia Southern will be awarded the grant in December of 2012.

The following is a list of the Six-Squared participants and their companies:

Kurt Andrzejczyk with A & E Air

Louise Hodges with Green Bug Inc.

Barrett Collins with Bluffton Brittle

LaSonya Berry with McPherson, Berry & Associates

Josie Anderson with Josie's Creative Designs