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Building an entrepreneurial business by helping others succeed

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*Illustration 1: Transition
counseling guru helps
others find their passion
Photo: SK Group, LLC*

Americans come to entrepreneurship from a variety of past careers. There is no grand master key that once possessed unlocks the door to small business ownership. Rather it is a series of events or a series of frustrating experiences that leads an individual to look through the keyhole to glimpse an enticing new life. Once the vision that glimpse created is seared into your brain, it is impossible to ever see any other career choice.

For Stan Krejci, founder of the [SK Group, LLC](#), the look through the keyhole came a few years ago when he underwent emergency heart surgery for an aortic valve replacement. Nothing frees the mind like a near-death experience followed by weeks of recuperation with hours of quality time for quiet and introspective thought.

Stan used this time to reassess what he wanted to do with the rest of his life. He was a successful businessman, spending the last 14 years in the Executive Search field, most recently at [The McCormack Group](#) in Arlington, VA, where he worked with major corporations finding qualified senior executives or filling Advisory or Board of Directors positions. As an active networker, Stan was also involved in 14 different non-profit organizations and he admits was “over-committed and constantly on the go”. Besides, he felt it was time for him to move on from these organizations and open up his spot for the next generation to take over with new ideas and fresh inputs.

Finding the passion

As with most emerging entrepreneurs, Stan looked inward to find what he enjoyed doing and then figured out how to fashion a business around that interest. He decided on a consulting business where he could utilize his decades of business experience and his vast network to counsel others going through transition.

Stan enjoyed working with college students which he had previously done on a volunteer basis. Clearly as students get closer to graduation, they are transitioning from a sheltered and structured environment to an independent adult world and most are unprepared for the challenges that accompany their first job search. Helping these young adults understand their strengths and fashioning a job search around those became one of the services he would offer.

The current volatile economy presented another opportunity for consulting with established professionals looking at career transition possibilities. Sometimes it is nothing more than the grass being greener on the other side of the fence. Stan helps refocus these mid-career clients on finding what will create the ultimate job satisfaction for them - whether it is staying where they are with a renewed sense of purpose, enthusiasm and potential for success or mapping out an entirely new career path.

The career transition consulting ultimately led to retirement counseling. Today's active seniors are not interested in putting in "rocking chair time". Helping them find meaningful outlets for their creative energy is an entirely different type of counseling and one that Stan finds just as rewarding.

Interestingly, retirement counseling has led to counseling retiring career military officers who are not interested in jumping into a retirement lifestyle. Stan says "the hardest thing for these officers to assimilate is that their passion is no longer the Navy, they have to discover where their new passion is and then pursue it".

When anger is a factor

But Stan isn't done yet. There is another area of transition counseling that is driven by the turbulent economy - outplacement. This is a different type of counseling because it has more urgency. Stan's client is trying to find the next opportunity in the shortest period of time. There is another difference that is more subtle - anger and how that manifests itself in prospective employer interviews.

Stan believes in the tough love approach. He gives the terminated employee permission to spend the first 5 minutes of the meeting just venting. Let out all the emotions, the anger, the frustration, the what-if's and the why-not's. Then it's done and the past cannot be brought up again. The focus has to be on the future.

"People in transition are the [Don Quixote's](#) of the world" says Stan. "They are searching for things that don't exist and waking up angry and depressed. I can help them repackage their record of success, determine a game plan and begin the disciplined steps of implementation."

Advisory & Board of Directors Positions

Stan's final area of counseling expertise lies in helping entrepreneurs find qualified and independent advisors. Many highly talented and experienced professionals want to serve on corporate or non-profit boards and many entrepreneurial companies need that expertise. Stan works with both sides of the equation to help each determine the best possible fit.

A piece of advice?

When Stan was asked for one piece of advice for other small business owners, he was quick to say "you have to be very nimble, let the market show you where you need to be."

For Stan, there is no doubt he has followed his passion and found his niche. The entrepreneurial world he saw through that keyhole 2 years ago has become a reality.