

Executive forums, atmosphere to learn and grow

One of the biggest challenges business executives face in today's economic climate is how to use the crisis for game-changing innovations. What are the risks and rewards in changing how work is conducted and governed? What is being done by other leaders and how can their practices fit in your own world? Where can you find the support and resources you need to move initiatives ahead more quickly and make new things happen?

Many Central Ohio executives are turning to TechColumbus' executive forums to help find the answers to these questions and others, and to build a strong network of trusted peers as well.

Currently, TechColumbus offers eight executive forums, each targeted to a specific business leadership category. The idea began in the 1990s with the former Industry and Technology Council (ITC), which became part of the Columbus Technology Council and ultimately TechColumbus when the organization was formed in 2005.



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their every day business dealings, but they also have the ancillary benefit of bringing the tech community together and strengthening and stimulating innovation in Central Ohio."

The forums are held monthly at various locations and include targeted discussions, knowledge exchange and practical solutions to creating cultures that sustain innovation and business advancement. They usually start in late afternoon and continue through dinner. "Interestingly, the groups are small, encouraging a camaraderie and casual sharing atmosphere that many of these leaders would not experience otherwise," Haynes said.



Charlotte Collister,
owner, The Collister
Company

Charlotte Collister, owner of The Collister Company business consulting firm and facilitator of four forums, echoes Haynes' assessment. "People have told me they love the informal format," she said. "The smaller group is conducive to a trusting atmosphere and open discussion on a wide range of topics."

The forums are confidential, and range from five to 15 participants. Collister's forums include CEO, CFO, Innovation and Contact Center. Participants in the forums cover a range of company sizes – the largest in the CEO forum is a \$2 billion company; the smallest a \$10 million company. "The large company participants like to offer assistance to the smaller companies, but they also recognize that smaller companies have a nimbleness for implementing change that larger companies don't have," Collister said. "So they really learn from each other."

Participants in all the forums possess a wide range of tech and business knowledge and

experience in their companies. "Some companies are tech-based, while some are simply tech-enabled," she said.



Doug Whiting,
Regional Vice
President of
Customer Operations,
Midwest Region of
Time Warner Cable

Doug Whiting, Regional Vice President of Customer Operations, Midwest Region of Time Warner Cable, participates regularly in the Contact Center Forum. About a year ago, Whiting helped Collister set up the forum, originally known as the Call Center Forum. The name changed because customers today have many more points of contact with service representatives than just the telephone.

"Perhaps the best thing about the forums for me is the ability to meet my peers in other industries. It's good because they bring perspectives to the table I wouldn't otherwise see," he said. "I think we all share the common goal though, that we're interested in providing the best service to our customers."

A sampling of topics covered in the forums includes: outsourcing; how to motivate employees; new technology; and the impact of the economy on business opportunities. "It's really a broad range because a number of times, we'll be discussing one topic where an idea is being presented and that will spiral into other ideas," Whiting said. "The ideas keep coming and they build on one another."

Chris Robino is a serial entrepreneur in Central Ohio who at various times has been a member of the CFO and COO forums. CEO of Halcyon Group Inc., Robino has just helped to form a Chief Sales Officer forum. That forum and the Chief Marketing Officer forum are facilitated by Cheryl McClellan, President of Efficio Sales

Improvement Services.

"I have been involved in these forums for a long time and they offer so many benefits to entrepreneurs," Robino said. "What I really enjoy is, because I have so much experience, I can share my successes and failures with other leaders and I get a lot of value from that."

Robino said being involved in both the COO forum and the Chief Sales Officer forum has dual advantages. "Being in sales gives me a good basis to inform the COOs that they need to interface well with their sales and marketing people and visa versa, so they can both be more effective in their respective roles."



Chris Robino, CEO,
Halcyon Group Inc.

Robino advises executives considering applying for the executive forums to participate in those that are most useful to their businesses. "You don't have to go to everything that's offered to you," he said. "That's the beauty of the variety of programs that TechColumbus offers – you can pick and choose

and try out things to see if they work for you. If they don't work, you can always move on to a different program TechColumbus offers."

Participants in the forums are required to be members of TechColumbus as well as meet other eligibility requirements. Those interested in being considered for participation in any of the forums may contact Charlotte Collister at (614) 481-0229 or by e-mail at collister@columbus.rr.com.

TechColumbus Executive Forums

- Chief Executive Officer
- Chief Information Officer
- Chief Operating Officer
- Chief Financial Officer
- Innovation Executive
- Contact Center Executive
- Chief Sales Executive
- Chief Marketing Executive

"It started with a CEO forum and then a COO (chief operating officer) forum. They were working so well that after TechColumbus formed we decided to ramp them up by adding others," said Tim Haynes, TechColumbus Vice President of Marketing and Member Services. Haynes was a member of the COO Forum during his previous position at Mettler-Toledo in Columbus. "What's interesting about the COO forum is that it still has a lot of the original members and has added new ones as well. New and old members share many of the same issues, yet bring different perspectives to the table."

The COO forum continues to operate and is facilitated by Frank Henson, former head of the former Industry and Technology Council.

The forums are valuable to business leaders in many ways, but two reasons stand out, Haynes said. "They catalyze the exchange of ideas and solutions to problems that help executives in

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