

Learning to lead in Asheville

Mindspring Consulting brings in national clients

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ASHEVILLE — Having a high IQ will get you only so far up the career ladder.

Haydn and Terry Hasty help corporate leaders boost their “EQ,” or emotional intelligence, which can help them handle conflict and difficult colleagues.

The Hastys have come a long way since they opened their company, Mindspring Consulting Inc., 14 years ago in a small office on Haw Creek Road. Last year they opened a new training center on Tunnel Road, and their firm is now nationally known, training leaders from the U.S. Forest Service, Centers for Disease Control, Mission Hospitals and the city of Asheville.

Mindspring is an example of a growing sector of businesses that fall under the “Rejuvenation Cluster” of the Asheville Hub, a community initiative to boost the area economy by exploiting its existing strengths. Hub leaders say people are attracted to Asheville not just for health care at Mission Hospitals or spa treatments at the Grove Park Inn, but to improve their minds.

“Our goal in this whole cluster is to be as inclusive as possible. We want to look at anything that makes Asheville different, and a unique service like Mindspring offers is very valuable to us,” said Bruce Thorsen, president of Mission Healthcare Foundation and head of the Rejuvenation committee for the Hub.

Haydn Hasty readily admits the company could probably double its revenues if they were in a larger metropolitan area, but “then you don’t have access to the Blue Ridge. The location here is fantastic.”

Their clients fly in from across the country, eager for the small-group encounters in three-day intensive sessions that typically cost about \$2,000 per person. That enrollment brings in business for others in Asheville as well, as Mindspring clients typically book around 1,000 hotel nights a year.

Mindspring clients also add dollars to local restaurants, shops and tourist attractions. Their clients like what they find outside the training sessions. “God, the food in Asheville,” Terry Hasty said. “We’ve got great restaurants, and we’ve got great microbreweries.”

Haydn Hasty said the courses are about transformation, not the latest fad in business leadership training. He defines emotional intelligence as the “ability to direct the energy, flow and intention of your emotional makeup regardless of the circumstances, no matter if the boss has criticized you or the customer is yelling at you.”

That ability to handle conflict can give individuals and businesses a competitive edge, he said.

Their clients agree, eager to understand their personal strengths and weaknesses in ways that can help them in their careers and home life.

“It’s intense,” said Janet Millsaps, vice president of WestCare Health Systems in Sylva, who was at Mindspring for her second session of a three-part leadership training program. “I think it’s a healthy mix of both therapy and training. It helps you to quit the mind games.”

Tavares Stephens, a teacher at the Clayton County Schools’ Success Academy in Jonesboro, Ga., said the training gave him clues to how to better deal with the disadvantaged children he works with. “You learn how your growth level affects the people who are supposed to be leading and helping to grow.”

The Hastys hope to keep growing their business. With the help of consultant Bob Collins, they are setting their sights high for more contracts. Collins said the company is wooing the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Coast Guard for leadership training. They will be offering the leadership training to Asheville city managers March 3-5.

The Hastys’ success speaks to the local business climate, Collins said. “They show you can make it here in Asheville and you can expand outward with national clients.”