

Is a Chamber membership a leap of faith?

Betsy Alles, For USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin Published 5:06 p.m. CT June 2, 2017 | Updated 5:06 p.m. CT June 2, 2017



(Photo: Photo courtesy Sheboygan County Chamber)

Last Friday I woke up feeling immensely grateful for members of the Sheboygan County Chamber who continue to keep their membership active year after year.

At times I'm sure it must feel like your annual investment is an act of faith. You are asked to believe the chamber will help secure the economic success of our county and its businesses in a meaningful way.

The chamber provides the events, the work, the education, the social opportunities -- chances to showcase your business and build relationships in a variety of ways. But ultimately it's up to you and your employees to make the most of it.

When we ask why members drop their membership, we receive some interesting responses. Some say they don't need the chamber anymore, some say they haven't noticed any new customers from the chamber and some say they are too busy to participate.

These comments make me think we have not effectively communicated the true purpose of the chamber. A chamber of commerce is not something you join and simply expect to get something back. It's an organization comprised of businesses working together to **help each other** be successful and to elevate the entire area.

Members who join with the idea that more business will simply come knocking at their door are often disappointed – in fact they will likely drop their membership. That is so unfortunate. We know now, through national research, that chamber participation is a key indicator of future business success.

It's my personal observation through the years that those who succeed in business share some distinct values and behaviors. This is true whether you are a CEO of a major brand or a small retailer and every other role in between. The chamber provides an excellent forum for you to exercise these behaviors.

1. You want to see others succeed. You jump right in to help others make valuable connections and you make introductions before you expect anything in return.
2. When successful, you give back. You offer to help others, you willingly teach what you know and you offer your time, talents and treasures to help elevate everyone.
3. You are grateful. You recognize no one gets there alone and you openly appreciate all the roles that others have played in your success.
4. You are optimistic and understand that complaining is never a solution. You move toward an issue and work to help solve it.

When you join the chamber and make the effort to make connections with others you will always be pleasantly surprised at what you find. Whether you join a peer roundtable or a Deep Dive group, attend a Business After Hours, join an issues task force or participate in Leadership Sheboygan County, you will always end up receiving much more than you expect.

As I always tell our chamber staff, our job is to bring people together and to support their work in every way we can. A chamber of commerce is only as good as its members.

In the end, it isn't so much a leap of faith to continue your commitment to membership, but a desire to help strengthen the business community and ultimately share in the rewards that come from that effort.

Bravo to our members!

Betsy Alles is the executive director of the Sheboygan County Chamber. The chamber brings businesspeople together to solve problems and build their futures. You can reach her with your comments at betsy@sheboygan.org (<mailto:betsy@sheboygan.org>)

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