

Arizona Daily Star

Estimated printed pages: 3

June 5, 2006

Section: BUSINESS

Page: D2

Tutoring Solutions' boss no longer bogged down

Tiana Velez, ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Even academic tutors can use a little hand to learn new skills, now and then.

Last July, Tutoring Solutions owner Debbie Rodriguez-Baggese was trying to get some new programming off the ground in time for summer school.

Started in 2003, the service provided one-on-one tutoring to school-age children and young teens, but Rodriguez-Baggese had some ideas on how to expand.

The problem was while she had a lot of ideas, she had no time to put them into action.

She admitted her life lacked balance.

"I worked all the time. There were no vacation, no set schedules or hours," she said last year. "I'd think, 'Am I working on the things that I need to be working on?'"

Rodriguez-Baggese knew she was getting bogged down in the daily administrative duties of running a business, and that prevented her from working long-term on new programming and building relationships with clients.

Seeing her need for work-life balance, business and personal coach Cheryl Vallejos sat down with Rodriguez-Baggese and worked on a plan to give her more focus.

They started with some basic lists with short and long-term goals and moved on to the hiring of more personnel, including more tutors and an administrative assistant.

The assistant, Vallejos said, would help clear Rodriguez-Baggese's schedule of some tasks and give her the ability to manage her work flow better.

At the time an assistant wasn't viable, but an answering service was.

Rodriguez-Baggese contracted with a service to field calls, take messages or route clients to her when necessary, thereby freeing up the time she would have spent on the phone.

Earlier this year she was able to not only hire an assistant, but also move from her home office to one at East Broadway and Rosemont Boulevard.

The office suite "makes me seem more real," she said. "People, parents, wanted to meet in an office."

She added that students and teachers have a central place to drop off reports or homework, and "also I realized as I was getting busy that it was a good time-management decision."

Having a physical office to bring families and clients to meant less time on the road driving around town for various meetings.

The new location was a big change for Tutoring Solutions, but it was only one in a seemingly full year.

Along with the move, she had her Web site - www.tutoring-solutions.net - redesigned, improved her online strategy, hired 20 new tutors for a total of 30, and found an assistant. And Rodriguez-Baggese got married.

That added an entirely new dimension to the work-life, and now family, balance she continues to strive for.

"It's definitely been a challenge, but it's fun," she said. The business' growth "has been gradual, but not without its little glitches."

Internal business systems and processes are a constant work in progress. For example, the process by which tutors report their hours and performance outcomes has shifted online from faxed and typed documents.

The system is still being fine-tuned, but it has helped eliminate some inconsistencies in the reporting and payment of tutors.

"We're trying to automate the process. We got rid of some unnecessary information and kind of streamlined it for them," Rodriguez-Baggesen said. Before, "the possibility of error was much higher."

With the help of her assistant, she redesigned her Web site and included new features such as a recommended book list.

From last year, Tutoring Solutions' client list has grown about 50 percent and tutors are available throughout most of Tucson and Pima County.

This summer finds Rodriguez-Baggesen still eager to implement new ideas.

For starters, she's working on marketing her services to adult students and has already updated her advertising and Web site with wording and images to reflect her broader audience.

"We still talk about balance and making sure that I can have a family and still keep the business up and running," she said, referring to her continued contact with Vallejos.

Though she's achieved many of her main goals, "there are some things that we definitely want to work on," Rodriguez-Baggesen noted.

////

The profile

The business: Tutoring Solutions LLC, 5151 E. Broadway, Suite 1600, 250-9014

The services: One-on-one tutoring for children and adults

The president: Debbie Rodriguez-Baggesen

The consultant: Cheryl Vallejos, Endorse Success LLC, 730-4456

The date: July 18, 2005

The challenge: Prioritize business tasks to foster work-life balance and focus on growth.

Copyright 2006 The Arizona Daily Star