




The Mobile Chapter of SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives) is a part of the national nonprofit organization of more than 10,500 volunteer business counselors who provide free, confidential business counseling and training workshops to small business owners. 

What to Do Today to Grow Your Business Tomorrow

Achieving steady, sustainable growth in a small business is one of today's more difficult challenges. General economic ups and downs get in the way, as do regional issues, government policies, tax laws — and even the weather.

It also may be your internal approach to generating and managing growth that's producing slower sales than expected, even in the face of what seem to be bright opportunities. Your approach to fostering growth may simply be too hit-and-miss. Perhaps you had a detailed business plan when you first started. What type of plan does your small business have now for moving into the future?

The everyday marketplace tends to be a chaotic universe where things rarely go according to your original design. A growth plan that acts like an internal compass can be a helpful tool.

Start with your day-to-day actions. If you want your business to grow, that goal should be the focal point of everything you do. Gather the financial details about what's happening internally. Then put your plan in writing. It does not need to be lengthy and ultra-detailed. Just the basic points will do. For example, how has your business done in fulfilling your original mission? Did you start with a bang only to see things flatten out? Perhaps you aren't delivering what you first promised to your customers. Fix any problems or shortfalls quickly.

Keeping up with changes in your marketplace is crucial, so you might have to conduct some new research to stay up to date. This doesn't have to be formal research. Start with a simple customer survey, for example, or check for available online research. Make adjustments as needed in your approach.

Communicate your growth vision to others involved with your business, including outside vendors and contractors as well as partners, investors and employees. Don't just dream — delegate specific actions to reach those goals.

Find out what objections customers are raising to your sales effort — why they have purchased or declined your product or service. Adjust your sales process to place greater emphasis on closing.

Two helpful books on small business growth planning are *Strategic Planning for Small Business Made Easy*, Entrepreneur Press, \$19.95, and *The 7 Irrefutable Rules of Small Business Growth* by small business growth expert Steven S. Little available for \$18.95.

For more advice on how to succeed, contact the Mobile Chapter of SCORE, operating out of the Mobile Area Chamber. For a confidential one-on-one counseling session at no charge, call 431-8614.

CEO Profile



Jake Bell

Company: Mercy Medical

Title: President/Chief Executive Officer

Hometown: Plano, Texas

Education: Bell holds a bachelor's degree in biology from Southern Oklahoma State University and a master's degree in administration of long-term care and retirement facilities from the University of North Texas.

First job: His first job was working for a roofing company.

Previous experience: Most recently, Bell served as executive director of a retirement community in North Carolina. Prior to that position, he worked as a nursing home administrator in both New York and Oklahoma.

Career-changing moment: "Opening the car door for a successfully rehabilitated patient to get in after nine months in our facility," Bell said. He explained the patient was admitted under hospice care expecting to live only a couple weeks because of complications from a stroke. "Getting to know her and her family and the improvement we made in their lives was one of the most rewarding experiences I have ever had."

Secret to success: "Hire the best and brightest people, give them what they need to do the job and get out of the way," he said.

Which historical figure would you like to invite to dinner and why? Bell said he would like to dine with Winston Churchill. "I suspect that the dinner and conversation would be fascinating."

Family: Bell and his wife, Traci, have one daughter.

Brief company description: Mercy Medical operates an inpatient rehabilitation hospital, two skilled nursing facilities, three assisted living facilities, two independent living communities, and home health and hospice agencies in Baldwin and Mobile counties. Mercy Medical has served the Gulf Coast since 1949.

Who's In Town?

September 2009

The Mobile Bay Convention and Visitors Bureau (MBCVB) provides a list of the current month's conventions coming to the bay area.

For more information, contact the MBCVB at 208-2000.

Sept. 5-7
USS Helena Organization
 Delegates: 300
 Phone: 603-624-1450
 Hotel/Location: Renaissance Riverview Plaza Hotel

Sept. 8-11
Alabama Retired State Employees Assoc.
 Delegates: 100
 Phone: 334-834-9116
 Hotel/Location: Renaissance Riverview Plaza Hotel

Sept. 16-20
USS Lexington Reunion
 Delegates: 100
 Phone: 309-365-4281
 Hotel/Location: Renaissance Riverview Plaza Hotel

Sept. 17-20
USS Indiana
 Delegates: 100
 Phone: 510-703-2597
 Hotel/Location: Renaissance Riverview Plaza Hotel

Sept. 20-26
National Newspaper Association
 Delegates: 350
 Phone: 540-891-5171
 Hotel/Location: Renaissance Riverview Plaza Hotel

Sept. 24-27
Navy Fighter Squadron VF-92
 Delegates: 50
 Phone: 303-833-3103
 Hotel/Location: Holiday Inn Bellingrath Gardens

Sept. 24-27
USS Redfin
 Delegates: 50
 Phone: 610-760-0458
 Hotel/Location: Ashbury Hotel & Suites

Sept. 28-Oct. 4
Alabama Primary Health Care Assoc. Inc.
 Delegates: 150
 Phone: 334-271-7068
 Hotel/Location: Renaissance Riverview Plaza Hotel

Sept. 30-Oct. 4
Tarvin Family Reunion
 Delegates: 100
 Phone: 972-540-2951
 Hotel/Location: Ashbury Hotel & Suites