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# Getting biz down to ness

BUSINESS INNOVATION ZONE



## Upcoming Events

### **November 15** **Breaking Up is** **Hard To Do...** **So Prepare For It**

Whether you call it "divorce small business style" or "love is sweeter the second time around," long time entrepreneur [Tej Dhawan](#) will share some hard earned wisdom on the management of expectation within a business partnership at the November BIZ Luncheon.

Tej, partner and president of the nation's most successful software and services company focused on Corrections, saw his first partnership dissolve in

### **The Interview Checklist – Get the Background Check So You Don't Get Taken!**

The folks at [Davis Brown Law](#) have some great resources in their [StartupLaunchpad](#) website. If you have

not created your account, you may want to do so. I was reading their "Conducting Effective Interviews" checklist recently and was impressed by the completeness of their offering.

They have organized the document into three sections: before, during and after the interview. Each section had several good suggestions beyond the basic checklist. The one that always gets my attention is the background check.

I am always amazed how many employers hire without a background check. The employer has a good feeling about the person and does not want to "waste time" getting a proper background check done. Wrong! I have three



2010. While the breakup was amicable, it was not without its stresses, giving him some insights he wants to share in hopes of sparing others unnecessary anguish through up-front planning.

\$12 admission fee (lunch included)

11:30 A.M.  
**Tuesday**, November 15, 2011  
 Greater Des Moines Partnership  
 700 Locust St., Suite 100  
[Get Map](#)

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clients who have had very bad experiences that a simple background check would have avoided. One of them is out several thousand dollars!

Get the check list. Do the background check.




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## Getting Down to BIZness...the blog!

Twice a week Mike blogs about topics that are trending or important to entrepreneurs in Iowa. [Sign up now](#) so you don't miss out!

[Is your pitch about you or the customer?](#)

[You asked for it. Here it is: Social Media Strategy Workshop—Sign up now!](#)

[So why do I need a financial model?](#)




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## Hemesath Entertains and Educates on Bootstrapping Business



“Today isn’t really about me trying to preach anything, it’s really just about me sharing some stories.” And so began a flurry of anecdotes and insights gleaned from a decade of habitual entrepreneurship as Brian Hemesath, CEO at Catchwind and President of Volunteer Local, educated and entertained a room full of attendees at the September BIZ luncheon. Billed as “Lessons Learned While Bootstrapping Business: The Non-Fundraising Path,” Brian did not disappoint. He shared his experiences from five successful tech

startups, all launched without an infusion of venture capital.

Setting the tone for a presentation that would be about frugality and personal fulfillment more than self-promotion and wealth, Brian shared some childhood experiences explaining, “The moral here is have some fun, do something you

enjoy, but realize this isn't a hobby.”

The Iowa native and refugee from early corporate experiences suggested that you begin with the talent you were born with and add in the skills you have learned. Once you find where these two things intersect with the passion that gets you up in the morning, you have found your starting point. He went on to explain that when you sit down and write a business plan, you are now on your way from “hobbyist” to “entrepreneur.” As a bootstrapper, he warns, you must scrutinize your business plan more diligently as there is a smaller margin for error.

In lieu of large infusions of cash, Brian declares the bootstrapping entrepreneur needs to:

- **Have support from those around.** The family needs to be on board, even if they don't fully understand.
- **Make use of the community resources** such as the BIZ, which are much more plentiful now than 10 years ago. And support yourself. You need to learn to be honest with yourself about what you are building and spending your time on.
- **Execute.** “Execution is not about building your product, it's about following through on your sales and marketing goals,” said Brian, noting that the hard part comes after development and launch. To do this, contrary to Nike's admonition, they must remember that life is NOT short, so slow down and do things right. Don't build your business in a hurry; it will pay off in the long run.
- **Work hard AND smart.** Do both while being constantly frugal, and assuring that the critical roles of creation, promotion, selling and support are filled by competent partners if not by themselves. If there are competent partners, make sure the paperwork is in order.

Woven through a biographical review of Brian's many successful start-ups were a series of insights, including:

- Stay as lean as possible.
- Understand your client's needs.
- Network in the real world, sharing your story with people—It's not enough to tweet about it.
- Learn how to say “no” and when to say “yes.”
- Build trust.
- Understand your competition and the market.
- Communicate with your customers.
- Someone has to be in charge.
- And the quintessential rule of marketing taught to Brian by a college friend: “To be seen, you have to be seen.”

Of course, Brian is not wholly opposed to investments. Just make sure the timing is right and the numbers are in order. "If you are out looking for an investor, maybe change it a bit in your mind so you are looking for a strategic partner with some cash," Brian said. This approach brings an additional skill or talent to the project as well as the partner's commitment beyond just the provision of cash.

Ultimately, it is about passion. While some start-ups are fueled by investor dollars, the bootstrapper is fueled by personal commitment and passion.

"You must embrace your bootstrapping," declares Brian. "You have to hang in there—and it never hurts to have a little fun."

To see Brian's presentation and get a copy of his slides, [click here](#).

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## The BIZ is Fleenor Manufacturing's Trusted Advisor

Pella, Iowa businessman Jeff Fleenor appreciates being able to talk with a business advisor and knows that any information shared will remain confidential. Fleenor is president and founder of Fleenor Manufacturing Inc., a designer and maker of hydraulic products and specialized equipment developer.

For Fleenor, a key and trusted advisor is Mike Colwell, executive director of the Business Innovation Zone (BIZ).

"When you run a small business, you can't be an expert on everything," said Fleenor. "Sometimes you need to go out-of-house for critical expertise on matters where you either have no experience or training, or flat out don't know where to go to get something figured out."

"I look to Mike Colwell for business advice. I know I can run confidential things by him for direction on a wide range of topics," Fleenor said.



Born and raised on a farm near Ida Grove, Iowa, Fleenor graduated from Iowa State University in 1986 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Aerospace Engineering. He worked for equipment makers Gomaco, Ingersoll-Rand and Vermeer, specializing in the development of mobile equipment for the agriculture, construction, mining and forestry markets.

In 1997, he started doing consulting work and incorporated his business. He began devoting full-time efforts to his own company in 2005. "I love creating and building things, and so my love of tinkering has transformed into a full-time business," Fleenor said.

"I didn't want to turn 60 years old, look in the mirror and ask myself: 'Why didn't you try?'" Fleenor said.

Fleenor Manufacturing now employs five full-time workers as engineers, designers or welders. The company also hires engineering interns. "I believe it is important for Iowa companies to partner with Iowa technical and vocational secondary schools to help train the upcoming technical talent that Iowa needs," Fleenor said. "For my company to grow, I also have to attract the technical talent to support that growth."

Fleenor Manufacturing produces hydraulic products, including a patented product for hydraulic tanks, as well as specialty filtration packages. His biggest single customer is John Deere Construction and Forestry. Fleenor Manufacturing products also go to other companies, including Vermeer, Altec, Manitowoc, Weiler and Gomaco – all makers of heavy construction or agriculture equipment.

The business also performs contract product development for client companies, designing machines from scratch, building prototypes, and providing complete Bill of Materials and detailed prints to take the new products to market. Fleenor Manufacturing is also working on a project funded by the National Science Foundation to reduce diesel fuel consumption in high-horsepower applications.

Fleenor first turned to BIZ for help in qualifying for state programs that were designed to accelerate small business growth. Fleenor said Colwell helped navigate the state grant applications process, provided advice on business matters and helped him make key contacts in the business world.

"Working with BIZ has almost been like having a magical shortcut to getting focused on the right path to your business' success," Fleenor said. "I am thankful for the guidance, advice – and at times, outright help – to get critical things done. BIZ and Mike Colwell have been a wonderful resource for such a wide range of things that small businesses can't afford to do on their own."

Fleenor plans to grow his business with aggressive new product development. “We want to grow the company and manufacture products here in Iowa,” Fleenor said. He feels that creating jobs in Iowa is in everyone’s best interest, and the state needs to cultivate a pro-business environment with resources to help small businesses grow.

“BIZ is certainly a key element in that small-business incubating culture to help a small Iowa business grow into a larger business,” Fleenor said. “If you have a strong, burning desire to start your own business, and you are willing to put in the necessary overtime to make it succeed, then you should consider working with BIZ as they can provide a wide range of help to start-up businesses.”

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