

This Week's Edition

Leadership requisite part of Boise program

Young professionals celebrate enormous gains in first year

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by Robb Hicken

Boise Young Professionals' manager Ben Quintana smiles as he looks over the upcoming celebratory luncheon plans.

"We've got a big program laid out for the group," he said of the upcoming event with Ron Carucci, author of a leadership book. "It's more of a discussion. We're going to have corporate directors and junior executives sitting in big lounge chairs, each with their own mic, discussing issues that involve young leaders."

The focus of the luncheon is connecting emerging leaders who are hidden in their organizations with senior leaders.

"It's going to be an informal setting where everyone can participate," Quintana said.

The 29-year-old has been doing this sort of thing for the past year for the BYP. The group has put together more than 27 activities for young professionals in Boise and surrounding area. This final event is sort of the capstone event on an excellent year of growth and progress for the organization.

Quintana, a BSU graduate, has been with the Boise Chamber of Commerce for the past four years, but it's only been in the last year and a half that he's pushed forward trying to serve the young professionals. Chambers of commerce fill a need for upcoming business leaders, many of whom are over the age of 35 years of age, Quintana said. There weren't many people his age who were participating in the organization. "It was just a feeling," he said. "Here I was out of college looking around and all my friends had moved away to Seattle, Portland, Denver (pause) anywhere other than Boise."

So, he began to look for ways to get those young business leaders together and get involved.

Organizations like the chamber provide young businesses with opportunity, but don't offer any benefits to younger, not-quite-entrenched members.

The BYP is part of the chamber, as it is in many cities across the nation. It's organized to encourage young leaders and the companies they own or work for to help shape the business landscape of the Boise region. There are dues however, since a majority of the board said it makes someone feel vested in the programs and events.

It's a hiring tool for companies that bring in young professionals to work in the area. The BYP provides a social outlet as well as a business connection.

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"When we get them here, we want to show them how great this place is, and so having a program like this, and tapping into the HR side of a company, we can get those people more involved in the community and get them to stay in the Boise market," he said. "If the companies are promoting it and saying we have a program that has over 700 young professionals that's designed to increase professional development and community, you're going to have a great career here." It impacts the community and the larger employers to get involved in this program.

IBR: What's the benefit to be a part of the BYP?

QUINTANA: My favorite benefit is that you have a chance to be a part of something that's designed with you in mind. This is the one place you can go that has a program designed for young professionals and gives them a voice.

We have over 75 volunteers that help create all the programs, where you can, working in the corporate world, come here and do other things outside the corporate life.

IBR: If the BYP continues to grow, will it diminish the return to the members?

QUINTANA: I think the more people we have involved and the more people who are aware of what's happening in this area is important. If we have 3,000 people on our email distribution list who are hearing the updates of happenings that are designed for young professionals, (not everybody's going to go to every event), but if we have new faces connecting on a regular basis they are going to learn. We're not going to go to do something for everybody at every event, but if people are members they are always going to find some thing for them.

The more people we tap into the better this is going to be. This is one where the quantity is not going to diminish the quality. We're looking for a large number of people because it allows them to develop themselves as professionals, as leaders in the community as well as participate in everything from politics to the arts.

IBR: Costs? Will the membership fees go up with the number of BYP members?

QUINTANA: The plans are to keep the price point at \$50 per individual. Supply and demand means that when you are getting an obscene amount of members you increase your price because your price is too low, but again, we want to have a ton of members in this program. We don't want to sit at 700 and say "Okay, now that we have 700 let's bump the prices up to \$100." So our strategy at this point is to get more of the employees on board and have the employers support the young professionals in their company as an HR benefit.

The best programs out there have grown in that same way, are when they get into the thousands, are when the business community has jumped behind it and supported the young professionals.

IBR: What are the big events that are planned for this next year?

QUINTANA: We don't have everything lined up for this next year. We've done over 27 events in this first year alone, so what we try to do is find out what our members really wanted and test a few things to see how successful they would be.

It's been a ton of fun to create all these events - luncheons, happy hours, bringing in the mayor and all kinds of really cool events.

We want to keep that art and culture focus, community/civic engagement focus, the social focus and the professional leadership development focus. We're always going to offer something in each one of those areas, but what we offer may change as we go on.

IBR: Where does it end? Is there a final point where you say we've done what we've set out to accomplish?

QUINTANA: There's no finish line. Like I said earlier, this is a pro-active approach to make sure that Boise remains a great place for young talent to thrive, work and play. There is no end point to that.

We want to see people succeed in this market. We want to make sure that we have the workforce that will be here for those high paying jobs and the changing demographics of the companies in the area.

There is no end point to something like this. We're just basically scratching the surface in getting started.