



WORKING ON THE BUSINESS INSTEAD OF IN IT DOUBLES PROFITABILITY

Shannon Thomas applied to the Next Level Northwest business accelerator program and was accepted in early 2020, less than a year after opening Knockout Prints. Her design, screen printing and embroidery skills attracted a number of customers while her on-time turnaround and standout customer service led to more referrals.

Behind the scenes, however, Thomas had to step back and manage the business at a higher level in order to maximize her profitability. That was one of the key lessons she learned from Next Level Northwest coach, Sybil Ege.

“My name is on the business so it was very hard to let others take on responsibilities for me,” Thomas said. “I’ve poured my own blood, sweat, tears, and money into this, so I wanted to make sure everything was perfect.”

Thomas knew how to create designs and how to treat customers, but she had not had to hire employees since early in her corporate career at American Express. That was a second big win she earned by working with Ege.

“I’m glad the program lasted as long as it did (90-days) because it was an ongoing reminder,” Thomas said. “Sybil saw how I was managing at an employee level and helped me improve my interview process with probing questions versus telling candidates what I expected.”

By hiring employees who specialized in complementary areas, Thomas was able to dedicate her time to high budget projects and customer services as the face of the business.

2 NEW EMPLOYEES HIRED

2x INCREASE IN PROFIT MARGIN

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Shannon Thomas - Knockout Prints Owner

"This program taught me how to choose the right team members to help my company grow successfully," Thomas said. "I thought I would need someone who wore 10 different hats, but my expectations changed. Now I realize it's better to have somebody who is an expert in a few things rather than one who has basic knowledge in a ton of areas."

By working on the business in the background, Thomas has been able to focus on managing balance sheets and finances. She knows time is money, so she is intentional about profit margins and minimum orders. She's focused on a target audience that includes medium to enterprise-sized customers, municipalities and organizations with recurring business. She hired two new employees and plans to hire more later in the year as companies scramble to use up their annual marketing budgets. And all of this, beginning with Next Level Northwest, has doubled Knockout Prints' profit margin.

Thomas started Knockout Prints in late 2019 in order to have more control over the second half of her life, which she didn't want to spend in Corporate America. Now, she has more control over her business's growth, while sustaining the high quality customer service that has always defined her career.

ABOUT NEXT LEVEL NORTHWEST

Next Level Northwest is a not-for-profit business accelerator program that supports existing local businesses. The program was founded by five Northwest Chicagoland municipalities—Elk Grove Village, Hanover Park, Hoffman Estates, Rolling Meadows, and Schaumburg—as a public-private partnership to support regional and local businesses through collaborative and innovative initiatives to help grow local economies. To learn more about Next Level Northwest or to submit an application for your company to join the next class of companies in the business accelerator program, visit www.nextlevelnorthwest.org.

THE PATH TO SUCCESS STARTS HERE



To get started, visit NextLevelNorthwest.org and/or contact your local Economic Development Director for more information.

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