Five ways to help your business prosper
By Jim Kendall
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C’mon. We’re so past the New Year’s resolutions stage. To replace them, however, here are five suggestions for your “Things to Do for My Business” list — positive steps to take during the next dozen months:

Ÿ Learn to sell. Bring in a sales consultant for some one-on-one training — for you. Learn how to discover a prospect’s needs, how you best can fill them, and how to close a sale. Sign your staff up for a similar session or two.

Ÿ Find some new buddies. Even if you have 30, 40 or more employees, making the ultimate decisions can be a lonely job — even lonelier if there are just a handful of people in your business.

Explore the several peer group organizations in the suburbs. Check out the NAWBO (National Association of Women Business Owners) Chicago chapter; the President’s Resource Organization; Vistage; and Renaissance Executive Forums, among others.

Your chamber of commerce may have a similar discussion group you can join.

Ÿ Get help. The two SCORE chapters that serve suburban businesses — SCORE Fox Valley chapter in DuPage, Will, Kane and McHenry counties; SCORE Chicago in Cook and Lake — both offer free one-on-one mentoring for existing businesses and startups, and low-cost workshops.

So do the Illinois Small Business Development Centers that you can find at most community colleges — and elsewhere. Go to www.ildceo.net (the web home of the state’s Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity), click business assistance, then entrepreneurship, innovation & technology to find the list.

Ÿ Get the family into, or out of, the business. In addition to the issues all small and mid-size businesses face, those with family involvement have a whole ’nother set of issues. Though there are others — the University of Illinois at Chicago, for example — one of the best places to find, meet and talk with other family business owners is the Family Business Center at Loyola University Chicago.

Ÿ Plan to sell your business. Even if you’re just starting up, chances are your business ultimately may be intended to send your kids to college or provide the support for retirement.

If you’re closer to retirement than tuition, selling the business may be a particularly stressful issue — especially for Baby Boomers who once assumed their businesses would fund those golden years.
Make adjustments so your selling plan incorporates a stretch of profits and a senior team that could help a new owner. Keep an informal list of potential buyers, and don’t ignore the fact that your now teenage daughter may be the eventual buyer.

You can find the people and organizations here, and others like them, through a web search. If you’re lucky, your accountant or attorney may have the people you want as clients. SBDC managers can give you contact information.