

Helping fledgling businesses to fly

Business Link Enterprise Awareness Champion Fiona Lascelles comes face to face every day with the fall-out from company job cuts. But she brings a positive message to her workshops, which offer practical advice to those considering setting up their own business, and firmly believes redundancy can offer the opportunity of a lifetime to do what you always wanted to do. Sarah Chambers takes some lessons in enterprise



Fiona Lascelles.

REDUNDANCY has been in the headlines a lot recently, as struggling companies slash their workforces and brace themselves for the fallout from the recession.

But business expert Fiona Lascelles believes that while it is a painful experience, for those bold enough to go it alone, it can offer a new beginning.

“Redundancy is an awful thing to happen to anyone. It really is. But for some people it’s an opportunity to say it’s where I am so now’s the opportunity to do what I have always wanted to do in my life,” she says.

“This is the time to do what you really want to do with your life. We are very, very positive about stuff in a realistic kind of way.”

Fiona sees up to about 50 people a week as she travels Suffolk and south Norfolk getting the enterprise message across.

Armed with Business Link’s “No-Nonsense Guide to Starting a Business” and her own

practical knowledge of managing a business – she has a music business she runs in partnership with her husband – her message is upbeat without being patronising.

Even those facing up to the realities of unemployment after many years in the job soon warm to her message that going into business for yourself is not as terrifyingly complicated as it sounds.

“I see an average of 30 to 50 people a week and I guess not a week goes by when I don’t have a new business idea that I haven’t come across before. And yes, you do inevitably get areas of business that people are more interested in than others,” she says.

Fiona has been helping new businesses and pre-starts get up and running since the inception of the regionalised Business Link network.

“Business Link itself works very closely with the organisations that are geared up to help companies that are

looking towards redundancy to address their particular problems and what we’ll do is go in in partnership for example with JobCentre Plus and run workshops or provide information for people considering setting up in business,” she explains.

Some individuals will want to set up what she describes as “lifestyle” businesses as sole traders, very much geared around their own talents, while others will go down the route of creating a limited company, which at a later date could go on without them.

But before taking the plunge, it’s important to ensure that people know what they are doing, what it will cost, that they have done their market research to ensure there is demand out there for what they plan to sell, and that all contingencies, including falling ill, are included in the business plan.

“It’s making sure they get it right because what none of us want to do

is to see them use their redundancy to invest in something that is not successful. The main thing I do is I run workshops. The workshops I run will be tailored to the needs of the people who are in it,” she says.

She talks to employees, students, the unemployed and other diverse groups and tries to show them how they can adapt their ideas and turn them into viable businesses.

Her message is: “If you are where you are, take advantage of the opportunity”.

“It really is saying to people that it can be an opportunity and I absolutely recognise that self-employment or setting up your own business is not for everybody,” she says.

To find out if stating a business if for you seek information and advice from Business Link on 08457 171615, or visit www.businesslink.gov.uk/east or to book a workshop, phone 0845 6011000 or visit www.bookevents.org.

No regrets for Richard

RICHARD Jennis, an Ipswich-based web professional, left his job as technical director of a local firm in October 2008 to set up his own company. His new business, Simple Click Solutions Limited, specialises in the design, setup, marketing and ongoing management of websites.

A year on and Richard has formed an experienced team to build a set of innovative website management tools which have been well received by its customers. Crucially, Richard has enjoyed his new challenge and has no regrets.

“Setting up on my own has made me appreciate how

stagnant my career had become. I was stuck in a rut. Having my own business has given me more satisfaction especially when winning new contracts.”

Richard began the process by researching the web to understand the legal aspects of setting up a company and spoke to friends who had done it themselves.

“I had a business idea, based upon my previous experience within the website development sector,” he said.

“During the first six months we concentrated on software development. At about four months, I sought advice from Business Link. I was



Richard Jennis.

recommended to speak to Tony Franklin who has been very helpful. He has given me advice on intellectual property rights, company structures, marketing, business plans and networking.

“There’s a lot of help out there such as Business Link and Suffolk Chamber and you also need to do your homework. Research and understand your

market and what customers need. To begin with it is nerve racking setting up alone. You need to be self motivated and patient. You need to be willing to learn and take on more responsibilities that you may not have had experience of before.

“Our principles are to provide an honest jargon-free service that is backed up with simple to use yet powerful products. At the moment customers want to see value for money and as a start-up with low overheads we are able to offer excellent service as a competitive rate.

“I have no regrets whatsoever.”