

[Columns](#)

posted: 8/13/2017 1:00 AM

Consultant scores with different approach, MBA outreach

[Jim Kendall](#)



Paul Vragel has a different approach to consulting: He listens to the employees who do the work at the businesses where Vragel has been brought in to solve a problem.

That's an idea worth some thought.

"Ninety percent of a (struggling) business' issues are embedded in the system," Vragel explains. That's core principal number one at Vragel's Evanston-based [4aBetterBusiness Inc.](#)

Core principal number two feeds off number one. The client's employees "are the world's experts in knowing what they do every day," Vragel says. "Most consultants use magic beans and do a lot of stand-up training," he continues. "We go directly to the underlying system. 'I talk, and I listen,' I tell (the client's employees).

"We will find the real issue."

Like many consultancies, 4aBetterBusiness is essentially a one-person operation with a cadre of professionals that can be brought in as needed. For smaller companies, that structure is relatively common. Actually involving employees in finding a solution to a client's problems is different -- and apparently effective: 4aBetterBusiness is nearly 30 years old.

Vragel's approach might not work for every consultant, but looking at the uniqueness of what your business offers might be worthwhile. So might Vragel's evolving strategy to be better known by "people who have influence" in an industry. He's been successful in the broad manufacturing and engineering; and distribution, transportation and services sectors where 4aBetterBusiness works.

Last month, however, Vragel made his first presentation to an MBA program, presenting a challenge case study to weekend MBA students at the University of Michigan's Ross School of Business. The idea, of course, is that "down the road" the students Vragel addressed at Michigan will turn to him to help solve business problems.

The presentation was based on an actual situation, a company that was struggling with 50 percent on-time delivery in spite of steps management had taken to improve results.

"They got it!" Vragel says. The Ross Weekend MBA candidates "are employed. They're millennials who have had consultants come in (at their companies) that didn't work out."

Vragel's Michigan presentation, which incorporated 4aBetterBusiness' "different way of working and getting outcomes," didn't come by accident. Earlier, Vragel was at the university for a private equity event -- but with a plan to meet up with a Ross MBA program leader who happened to be the first person Vragel saw at a planned event.

Sometimes serendipity works. Vragel was prepared to make a presentation pitch; the two talked, and Vragel's subsequent July appearance was successful.

He's scheduled for another Ross presentation -- and now has the Michigan Ross School MBA experience to use as a credibility factor when he suggests similar programs to other universities. Remember the purpose: To talk with MBA candidates who ultimately will be in a position to recommend 4aBetterBusiness.

One other piece of information: Vragel's client with the delivery issue was up to 86 percent on-time within five months -- then reached 96 percent.

© copyright 2017 Kendall Communications Inc. Used with Permission.