

# Company offers alternative to board of directors

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**BEN PILLOW**

[bpillow@beaufortgazette.com](mailto:bpillow@beaufortgazette.com)

843-986-5537

A Savannah remodeler who restores historic mansions wants to put together an incentive plan for his employees, something he's never done before. Instead of paying a consultant \$10,000, he gets a plan from a lumber yard owner, tailors it to his needs and engages his people about buying into it. As a result, the productivity of his business significantly rises.

According to Bernie Moscovitz, that's the sort of thing that happens through The Alternative Board, an international company that brings owners, chief executive officers and managing partners of noncompeting businesses together in a confidential, "think-tank" atmosphere.

Moscovitz brought The Alternative Board, or TAB, concept to the area three years ago. He oversees three boards as the franchise owner for the Lowcountry and Georgia's Coastal Empire, one with 13 members from Hilton Head Island, Bluffton and Beaufort and two in Savannah with 10 and nine members.

Established in 1990 by Allen Fishman, The Alternative Board company's guiding principle is essentially to act like a board of directors for its members.

"(Fishman) just basically tried to figure out what was it that made the best big companies successful, and he thought it was through independent boards of directors whose only agenda was success for the shareholders," Moscovitz said. "So he wondered how small business could be helped and he came up with this idea called The Alternative Board."

There are about 3,500 TAB members across the United States who work through approximately 150 facilitators such as Moscovitz. There are also franchises in Canada and South America, and the company is planning to expand into Europe, first in France.

Each board meets once a month for four hours "on the issues and challenges and opportunities that they face."

"The board isn't just kind of airy, fairy discussion. There's a lot of very serious and contentious issues that they deal with," Moscovitz said.

For example, one of the local boards spent three consecutive four-hour meetings on immigration and employment issues.

"We brought guest experts in on the legal aspects of things, (and) we brought people in from every side of the argument," Moscovitz said. "We brought educational people from the state in and it was really very, very helpful for these owners to understand it."

Each board member has a private coaching session once a month with Moscovitz, who has several clients that only take part in that process. TAB also employs a "strategic business leadership" concept, which explores "how you integrate your personal vision and your business vision so that the business serves what it is you want to get out of life," according to Moscovitz.

"These people seem to have an edge over those who don't do things like this," he says.

Moscovitz's TAB members include landscapers, custom-home builders, architects, accountants, attorneys, educators, copying-machine distributors, publishers and computer consultants.

"And when you watch them help each other, it's astonishing," he says.

Members pay monthly dues that vary across the country from \$250 to \$1,000 in places such as Silicon Valley or New York City. In the Carolinas, dues run between \$450 and \$650 a month.

Prospective members are invited to join after Moscovitz holds a private session that involves much probing.

"You ask them some significant questions about their business and whether this is good for them and would they be good for it," he says.

There's also the confidentiality issue. Moscovitz says not even his wife knows what goes on around a TAB table.

"I have two architects in Savannah, two pretty important architects in that part of the world," he said. "They're on separate boards. They couldn't possibly sit together because they compete for the same stuff."

In the coming year, Moscovitz plans to start a board made up of family business owners and an executive forum.

"From my perspective, I've never been happier in my life," Moscovitz says. "You see and feel palpably the people being helped, the differences that it makes in their businesses."

For more information, visit [www.tab-lowcountry.com](http://www.tab-lowcountry.com).