



CEO Roundtable Guide

Our Mission:

The CEO Roundtable is a collaborative program designed by the Fitchburg, Middleton, Sun Prairie and Verona Chambers of Commerce in an effort to provide another level of value to chamber members. Our mission is to provide a structured and confidential environment for executives to give and receive the benefit of their experiences to help resolve business challenges.

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PURPOSE

The Executive Roundtable Program provides a structured and confidential environment for executives to share best practices and resolve their business challenges. By participating in the roundtable, members can expect to make better decisions, improve communication skills and build long term relationships.

GROUP PROFILE

Each roundtable consists of 8-12 peers with similar company sizes in non-competing industries. Meetings are held monthly at a member's business, private club or restaurant. Each Roundtable is self-led, prioritizes issues to be discussed and develops its own agenda. A typical meeting could include discussion on an issue such as managing growth, finding and retaining top talent, enhancing compensation programs, healthcare costs or retirement plans.

PARTICIPANT COMMITMENT

To ensure success of a CEO Roundtable each participant must make a commitment to each other to:

- Attend an orientation and establish guidelines for the group.
- Attend meetings regularly: the strength of the Roundtable is contingent on the participation of all members
- Maintain complete confidentiality: as you share business challenges and experience, your Roundtable will develop unique relationships
- Remain in a non-compete status. No competitors or vendor/client relationships. Although business relationships may develop over time, the CEO Roundtable is not a platform for sales presentations
- Have a desire to improve yourself, team members, and the Roundtable itself

ESTABLISHED SUCCESS OF CEO ROUNDTABLES

The format of our CEO Roundtables is based on the successful program criteria given to our chambers by the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce (MMAC) and the Green Bay Chamber of Commerce (GBCC). MMAC has more than 400 CEOs, CFOS and Senior Executives in the Milwaukee region count on this Roundtable Program to fill the void that often comes with being one of the senior decision makers of a business. GBCC started in 2005 and has more than 6 CEO Roundtables successfully operating. Our thanks to these chambers who have helped us bring this program into Dane County for our chamber business leaders.

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PROGRAM OVERVIEW

This exclusive program supports members primarily through monthly Roundtable discussion groups. Each Roundtable group is unique and consists of 8-12 peers with similar company sizes in non-competing businesses. Special events throughout the year provide additional networking, educational and promotional opportunities to all group members.

The purpose of the Roundtables is to provide a structured and confidential environment for executives to give and receive the benefit of their experiences to help resolve business challenges. ***A Roundtable is not intended as a venue for casual, social conversation; to serve as a platform for sales presentations; or to be an occasion for guest speakers.*** However, experts may be invited to speak if group members do not have relevant experience to address a special business issue.

BENEFITS

Benefits gained from the Roundtable experience are largely a result of the effort and commitment made by each member to be an active program participant. When members attend meetings on a regular basis, they expect to:

Make better decisions. Drawing from the group's experiences, executives are able to make well informed decisions.

Improve communication skills. As a result of participating in a structured discussion group, members learn to listen better and organize their ideas more persuasively.

Gain a safe outlet for confidential issues. All information shared at Roundtable Meeting is confidential. The opportunity to openly and honestly share difficult and sensitive issues with trusted peers can enhance the overall business experience.

Build relationships. As you share business challenges and experiences, Roundtable members develop a unique synergy and group members often become close confidants.

MEMBERSHIP CRITERIA

To be eligible for a Roundtable, all applicants must be:

- A current member of the Fitchburg, Middleton, Sun Prairie, or Verona Chamber of Commerce
- CEO participants must be the top-level executive of a company (regardless of title)

Regarding my experience as a member of the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce's (MMAC's) CEO Roundtable program. I started my business 19 years ago and while I certainly had an understanding of my industry, I had no idea as to the complexity of being a business owner. Issues from managing cash flow, banking relationships, human resources, marketing and employee benefits, to a multitude of other items can be overwhelming. My Roundtable provided a platform for support, quickly becoming an advisory group for me. The opportunity to surround myself with like-minded, experienced CEOs in a confidential and non-judgmental setting has been invaluable. It's been an important part of Creative's success as well as my professional development. I strongly believe in the Roundtable experience, a resource for growth.

Gary Zimmerman, Jr.
Creative Business Interiors, Inc.

MEETING FREQUENCY AND VENUE

Communication Exercises: Newly-formed Roundtable groups engage in a four-hour session of communication starters and timeline exercises as one of their first meetings together. It's a great way to get to know each other personally and professionally. The exercises are designed to build trust among members and contribute to honest and open dialogue when discussing confidential business matters.

Monthly Meetings: Roundtable groups typically elect to meet once a month, on a pre-determined day (i.e. **second Thursday, last Friday**). Meeting dates are reviewed and exceptions identified at least 3-6 months in advance. New groups start out by meeting for 1-1/2 to 2 hours and may adjust the allotted meeting time by unanimous vote. Roundtable groups meet at an agreed-upon location, such as a member's business, a private club or restaurant.

Socials: Occasionally, socials may be scheduled in lieu of or in addition to regularly scheduled Roundtable meetings. During the summer, golf outings, pontooning and fishing trips are popular activities. During December, many groups plan holiday dinners or cocktail parties with spouses or significant others.

DISCUSSION PROTOCOL

Members speak from experience rather than give advice. Giving advice or telling someone what to do is a matter of opinion. By sharing experiences, members end up with information that allows for better decision making. Adapted from Gestalt psychology, the use of the discussion protocol is a key component in creating a safe environment where members will feel comfortable sharing knowledge and expertise.

Use the past tense. Say "Here's what worked for me..." rather than "Here's what you should do..."

Empathize. Try to understand the situation from the presenter's point of view. Remember that no one else has to live with the consequences, and what works for one person will not necessarily work for another.

Ask questions that prevent defensiveness. Try to explain the purpose of your question before asking it. Don't treat the presenter like a defendant.

Share experiences that have both positive and negative outcomes. This boosts your credibility and shows you're able to learn from your mistakes as well as your triumphs.

Listen well. Write your thoughts and questions as they arise. This frees up your mind to listen until it's your turn to speak.

Paraphrase before you respond. Confirm what you think you heard before you reply. This ensures that you respond to what was said, not what you think was said.

CONFIDENTIALITY

For a Roundtable to be successful, members must share openly and honestly. To enable this level of communication, members are required to maintain complete confidentiality. Nothing discussed in a Roundtable ever leaves the room. This includes sharing information with partners, co-owners, spouses or significant others. A breach of confidentiality will result in removal from the group and adversely affect future eligibility for the Roundtable program.

DEVELOPING A GROUP CONSTITUTION

Each Roundtable group agrees on a structure and level of formality that best meets the needs of all members. We suggest each Roundtable develop and document its own constitution detailing how their group will operate and resolve issues. The constitution may include the following:

Mission Statement: A mission statement takes a generalized sense of purpose and shapes it into a declaration or direction. To create a mission statement, consider values and beliefs of each member (remember, missions are not goals).

Membership Criteria: Members must be in a non-compete status with all other members. Roundtables will have no more than 12 participants and no fewer than 8. Groups under 12 are encouraged to recruit new members by unanimous approval.

Attendance Policy: Members are expected to arrive on time and participate for the full length of the meeting. In the event of an emergency or unavoidable conflict, members are asked to contact their group leader or meeting host immediately.

Discussion Protocol: Members promise to share relevant experiences, not give advice. Everyone speaks. No one dominates the conversation. No idea is "wrong." Be open and honest.

Confidentiality: Nothing discussed in a roundtable ever leaves the room. A breach of confidentiality to anyone outside the Roundtable is grounds for dismissal.

Non-Compete. Group members commit to remain in a no vendor/client relationship between each other. If over time, business relationships occur between members, business is conducted off-line of the Roundtable meetings.

Majority Rule: All protocol issues and differences of opinion are resolved by majority vote. This section may also include the role of meeting host, term and role of group leader, grounds for termination of membership, and frequency and venue of Roundtables.

The process of drafting a constitution and gaining agreement from members to abide by it can bring the group closer together. A sample constitution is provided to each Roundtable group leader and is available to all Roundtable members by contacting their Chamber of Commerce (Fitchburg, Middleton, Sun Prairie or Verona).

ROLE OF GROUP LEADER

A designated group leader serves as the liaison to their Chamber of Commerce. He or she will facilitate meetings; ensure agreed-upon roles such as timekeeper, process observer and parking lot attendant are filled; and prepare the agenda for each meeting. Leaders meet twice a year as a group.

- Suggested term for leadership is 12-18 months.
- Regular rotation provides other group members an opportunity to learn by leading other leaders.
- Group members share the role.
- It provides a graceful exit for a group leader. This is useful if no one speaks up when a leadership change is needed.
- Each leader brings his/her own style, changing the group's dynamic.

THE PARKING LOT

After the Business/Personal update (see format at right), the Parking Lot is the next step to identify issues for discussion. The Parking Lot is the Roundtable's tool for prioritizing presentations. It provides the leader and the group with a fair system and a mechanism to stay focused by reserving time to devote to other issues.

Important-Not Urgent	Urgent & Important
Quadrant III	Quadrant IV
Not Urgent—Not Important	Urgent—Not Important
Quadrant I	Quadrant II

When a member raises the possibility of discussing a particular issue (via the Business / Personal Update), it can be deferred to the Parking Lot. During the housekeeping section of the meeting, the Parking Lot can be re-visited to determine the next presentation.

Issues in Quadrant 4 come first, followed by Quadrant 3, Quadrant 2 and Quadrant 1. You may decide that an item in quadrant 4 requires an emergency Roundtable meeting. Over time, a group will hopefully spend most of its time on the Quadrant 3 issues because the "crisis" issues that fall into Quadrant 4 will be less frequent.

SAMPLE MEETING FORMAT

One-Word Opener

- Members say one word that describes his or her feelings.

Confidentiality Reminder

- Leader reminds members that everything discussed is confidential.

Brief Business / Personal Update

- Members update each other on best and worst professionally and personally without interruption – no questions are to be asked.
- This update provides a structured format for revealing vital issues that justify group discussion.
- Updates may also include successes to report from past presentations and actions taken since last discussion.
- The leader or host should take notes on issues being shared.
- Use a timer to enforce 3-5 minute time limits and to keep the meeting on schedule. This also respects the time and preparation of other members.

Select issue for the Day

- Leader facilitates the process of prioritizing issues utilizing the Parking Lot and identifies the topic for discussion (one or two issues are selected).

Presentation

- Presenter briefly states his/her expectations. Why is the presentation being made? What decision is the presenter struggling with?
- Presenter presents topic, devoting 25% of the time to history / background and 75% to the issue. Remind the group not to interrupt under any circumstances. Questions should be written down during the presentation.
- Members ask presenter two questions. Enforce the question-only rule (that is, no advice or recommendations).
- Members share experiences related to presenter's issue. Again, no advice. Members say, "Here's what I did in a similar situation..." rather than "Here's what you should do..."

Response

- Presenter responds to members by highlighting what was helpful and expressing thanks.

Housekeeping

- At the conclusion, all written notes and questions should be given to the presenter to assure confidentiality.
- Leader reviews Parking Lot issues for future meetings.
- Members review calendar of upcoming meetings and adjust, if necessary, notifying their Chamber of any changes.
- Membership update: adding or removing members as applicable.
- Meeting review: What worked and what didn't?

One-Word Close

- Starting with presenter, each member chooses one word to capture his/her feelings about the meeting.

LEVELS OF ROUNDTABLE DEVELOPMENT

Roundtable groups typically go through three distinct levels of engagement. First, the group gets comfortable with each other and builds trust. Later, levels allow for discussion of deeper and more meaningful issues.

LEVEL 1 – DISCUSSING THE BASICS

Members talk about things they address with casual acquaintances and for which they usually have an answer.

LEVEL 2 – ISSUES OF SUBSTANCE

Members will talk about things they've discussed with a few trusted friends. There will still be emotional control.

LEVEL 3 – BREAKTHROUGH

Members discuss things no one, especially the presenter, has thought about. Emotional involvement develops.

Elements to move groups to higher levels:

Time	It will take time to build a successful Roundtable
Save Environment	No breeches of confidentiality or Gestalt discussion protocol.
Trust	Confidentiality is upheld.
Leadership	Roundtable leader taking the leap of faith to set the example.
Confidence	Being confident that one will not be judged.
Commitment	Commitment by each member.
Mission	Agreement on the purpose of the group is essential.
Issues	Certain presentations can move the group to higher levels by their nature.

Once the group has reached Level 3, it's not expected that every meeting will be a Level 3 experience. It is quite normal for Roundtables to live between Levels 2 and 3.

THE ROUNDTABLE EXPERIENCE

Each Roundtable member is responsible for his/her own experience and must take equal responsibility in ensuring the group's success.

Be Proactive.

Take the lead in risking and sharing deep personal experiences. Trust is contagious and soon everyone else will follow.

Share your concerns immediately.

If anything in the Roundtable bothers you and you do not discuss it, you do yourself and the group a disservice. An example might be that a member repeatedly fails to arrive on time. Make sure that you criticize the behavior, not the person. It is likely that someone else in the group has the same feelings. Raising concerns before they become too serious can prevent their escalation.

MEMBERSHIP RECRUITMENT GUIDELINES

Adding new members to a Roundtable group is critical to its long-term success. Without new members, a Roundtable will eventually stagnate and dissolve. Adding new members properly is also critical to the success of the Roundtable.

For CEOs and Senior Executives

Review current placement pool roster of applicants waiting for placement or ask your Chamber of Commerce for a recommendation. To view a current list of executives awaiting placement, please contact your Chamber of Commerce.

Contact your Chamber of Commerce with a list of potential candidates based on your group's membership criteria, no competing interests and similar meeting preferences. We suggest adding new members two at a time.

Your Chamber will extend an invitation to selected applicants to meet all group members at an introductory meeting. Pre-screening of a candidate outside of a Roundtable meeting may be conducted, if desired.

Prior to an applicant's initial meeting, **a Chamber representative will meet with potential new members** so they will understand the dynamics of the group and what is expected of them. New members must commit to complying with the confidentiality rules, the language protocol and the group's format.

After the introductory meeting, current members vote on adding the Roundtable applicant to the group. New members are added at the unanimous consent of current members.

As new members are welcomed to the group, communication exercises are recommended.

Throughout the placement process, your Chamber will keep you posted on progress. Members may request a transfer to another group due to a conflict after the initial assignment.

NEW GROUP LAUNCHES

New Roundtable group formation occurs when approximately 12 new applicants desire the same meeting location / time, have a similar number of employees and have no competing interests. An inaugural meeting date, based on the new group's preference, will be scheduled. The initial session is four hours. Prior to being placed in a new Roundtable group, a Chamber representative will meet with you to orient you to the program.



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