

IVIE Motivator Newsletter Fall 2021

Message from IVIE President

Welcome to the quarterly IVIE Motivator Newsletter!

My name is Teresa Gregg, and I am the newly elected IVIE President. I am honored to be here. It is my goal to expand the IVIE membership and to be consistent with our message and offerings.

To begin I am a mom of two grown children and five grandchildren! I am totally blind with two prosthetic eyes. I was born with congenital glaucoma and uveitis. I had enough vision when I was younger to use large print and a CCTV.

My work history includes: a Marketing Associate for an assistive technology company; an Executive Director of a small nonprofit helping blind children in Nebraska; and then I started my own company as a Certified Life Coach in my early 40's.

My ACB involvement has included: created and was President of the Iowa Council of the United Blind (ICUB) Across Iowa At Large Chapter and was also on their state board and helped with the state convention committee.

I am a Certified Life Coach with a focus on relationship pertaining to sexuality/sensuality within the disability community. Becoming aware of your emotion and social intelligence, behavioral economics, sexuality/sensuality and communication/advocacy skills, is my passion. Whether you are working on your self-awareness, working on a relationship in the workplace or at home, or trying to find a job, it is crucial in understanding your emotional and social intelligences.

IVIE Projects

Since I became the IVIE President we have been working on the following:

- Updating our website and obtaining a dedicated email to IVIE. Special thanks to Ardis Bazyn and Norma Boge.
- Creating a schedule of topics for our newly named Entrepreneur Exchange Community Calls on the second Sunday of each month via Zoom.

- Creating our quarterly Motivator Newsletter.
- Created a Book of the month club on the 4th Sunday of the month at 8:00 PM EDT via Zoom. Thanks to Ron Brooks for being our first facilitator in October.
- Reinstating our nonprofit status. Special thanks to Nancy Becker from the national office, Norma Boge and Ardis Bazyn.
- Reviewing the IVIE Constitution/By Laws to make sure we are in compliance. Special thanks to Ardis Bazyn and Carla Haze.
- Forming a committee to create a schedule for every trimester of speakers for a 3-hour panel presentation relating to blindness and business via Zoom. Thanks to Dave Trevino, Ron Brooks and Annie Davis.
- Planning on a future Expo.
- A podcast is in the works for interviewing our business owners to be added to our business directory. The podcast will also feature motivating topics of interest. We thank Carla Haze for organizing this endeavor.
- IVIE has signed on and is supporting the Medical Device Nonvisual Act.

IVIE is always open to suggestions and feedback!

How the Virus and Getting Fired Launched My Future By Ron Brooks, IVIE member

I was sleepwalking through life when everything changed. It was March 11, 2020, and my younger daughter and I were on a five-hour flight from Tampa back to Phoenix. I had just wrapped up a couple of meetings for the company whose business I was helping to build. My daughter was on Spring Break, so I brought her along to hang out in the hotel pool while I worked, and to share the downtimes roaming the beautiful Tampa Bay region. She was watching videos on her phone, and I was on my PC browsing social media when the news flashed that the National Basketball Association was temporarily suspending operations because a player had tested positive for the Corona virus. We had been hearing about Corona for a few weeks, but in Phoenix, where we lived, almost no one had it. It was someone else's problem. But when I read that headline, I knew that this was a big deal. I mean, the NBA. They wouldn't literally shut down and lose millions per day for nothing. And boy was that ever true!

We landed in Phoenix and went back to life as usual, but within a small handful of days, everything was different. School was at home; work was at home; Zoom fatigue was a thing; restaurants were either closed or takeout only; and we couldn't buy a roll of paper towels at any price for weeks on end. And my transportation career began to swerve off course.

At this point, I could share a blow-by-blow account of how my employers managed the storm—the belt tightening, the consolidation of call centers and the corresponding shift to a more virtual work force, the “voluntary” pay cuts we all took and all the rest. But at the end of the day, we were facing the same pressures as so many others. Put simply, we were in a war of attrition with the pandemic, and as the virus peaked in the West in January of 2021, picking the ultimate winners and losers was anyone’s bet.

For me, the end came on March 12, 2021—exactly one year and one day after my daughter and I surfed the Internet back to Phoenix. I saw it coming—the cancelled meetings, the lack of new projects, and the growing sense that I was no longer doing actual work. My boss and the CEO had scheduled a call for noon; it was a Friday, and after the pleasantries, they let me go. It wasn’t personal; it was business—a change in direction, a need to focus on current business instead of expansion, and a lot of conversation about how things might have been different had it not been for the virus. They were kind, and I harbor no ill will. In fact, the people on that call gave me a gift. It wasn’t the severance package, or the promise of a positive reference should I ever need one. It was the necessity for me to begin again.

Throughout the pandemic, I had spent a great deal of time reflecting on who I am and on my life’s purpose—call it “my mission.” And I figured out that the common thread running through everything I had ever done—from my first entry-level transit job to the meetings I was attending in Tampa—all of it represented my desire to transform mobility for everyone and especially for people with disabilities and blind people like me. The problem was that instead of pursuing my mission, I was working for the missions of others. In most ways, the goals of the organizations for whom I worked aligned with mine, and I am proud of many of the projects I managed and the services I helped to deliver. But more often than I’d like to admit, I had to do work that did not contribute to better mobility for the people I sought to serve. Put another way, my efforts were being diluted by competing priorities, and I was beginning to feel more dissatisfied and less fulfilled.

I had thought about starting an accessibility-focused training and consulting business for years but had never gotten around to doing it. I was always too busy, and if I’m being honest, scared. However, with the world shut down, and with the growing sense that I was in the wrong place doing the wrong work, I decided to take action, and on Tuesday, May 19, 2020, I sat down at our kitchen table, logged into the Maricopa County Clerk’s online portal and filed the Articles of Incorporation for our new business, Accessible Avenue. Filing the papers cost money, so hitting “Send” represented a tangible commitment, but I stuck with my so-called “day job” for as long as I could. As a result, progress on Accessible Avenue was very slow, and I remained afraid. How could I give up a stable (all be it reduced) salary and benefits to build a business from scratch? What would happen if I were to fail? How would I make the house payment, pay the utilities, save for college for the kids, buy wine, and plan for the future? Why would anyone trade security for uncertainty? I wanted to pivot, but I didn’t know how.

Recognizing that I wasn't ready, I started completing low-risk tasks—opening a checking account, designing a logo and building the website. And I focused on me. I began journaling every morning, reading books about shaping my vision, defining my goals, and managing my time. I enrolled in virtual sales and marketing trainings, and I began participating in morning accountability calls that began at 5 a.m. every weekday - something I still do to this day. I began surrounding myself with highly successful professionals, entrepreneurs and other entrepreneurs in training—like me.

Through these efforts, I began to recognize that I could launch a business. I could do the work, set the goals, make the calls, give the sales presentations, close the deals and achieve success. In December, we celebrated the holidays, but as soon as the presents were unwrapped and the Christmas dinner eaten, we launched the Accessible Avenue website and a brand-new LinkedIn company profile, and I began to work in earnest.

And I was still uncertain! Throughout January and February, I intensified my efforts to save my day job even as I ramped up efforts on behalf of Accessible Avenue. I figured I would push both balls as hard as I could until I had more clarity. In fact, on the day they let me go, I had two documents sitting on my desk: a list of HR-type questions if they let me go, and a series of sweeping ideas for saving the company's business (and my job) if they didn't. As it turned out, my HR questions came in handy, and Accessible Avenue was transformed from the thing I had been simultaneously pursuing and avoiding into the means by which I would either sink or swim.

On Monday, March 15, I got busy. I called and emailed everyone I could think of hat in hand and looking for projects. I reached out to trade associations and bartered webinars for membership dues. I ramped up my posts on LinkedIn and started participating in industry-focused virtual speed dates. It took a couple of weeks to get our first small contract, a few more weeks to land a second, and a little less time than that to find our third. And although we're not totally secure just yet, Accessible Avenue is moving forward, and my life has been utterly transformed.

So many people suffered so much as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and there is no way that anyone's success can sugarcoat the suffering of so many. However, as the old saying goes, "Every cloud has a silver lining," and for me, the Corona virus provided several. First, it gave me the time and space to reflect and to recognize that I was in the wrong place doing the wrong work. It gave me the opportunity to build skills I did not possess, and it ultimately gave me the impetus (disguised as an economic crisis) to overcome fear which had probably held me back for years. Better still, my wife and I, who celebrated our 25th anniversary in July, are on an exciting new journey together. We are building a business that is giving us an entirely new set of skills to master, decisions to make and subjects to hash out over our morning coffee and cocoa.

I'll close with a short vignette that has nothing to do with the pandemic. On March 1, 1999, my mom passed away back home in Indiana. It was a sad day for my family, but

on that same day, my sister-in-law out in Central California gave birth to a baby girl. To this day, March 1 is a day that reminds me of the circle of life. ... The pandemic created so many, many sad endings. But it also created opportunities for new beginnings, and in my case, this meant the opportunity to reinvent my entire way of showing up, to build a business and to unleash my own power in the pursuit of my reason for being here. And although this story is about my journey, I suspect that many others are on the same journey, and I can well imagine that still others are poised and ready to go themselves; they just need to take that first scary step.

Tips To Succeed in Business

By, Ardis Bazyn, IVIE member

(Ardis Bazyn gave permission to edit this article. Contact Ardis Bazyn for the complete article.)

- Promote your business: You must get the word out about your business: Promoting a business is an ongoing challenge for small businesses. Whether you're just beginning or have been in business for years, there are many strategies to consider. Consider the following opportunities:
- plan your marketing: Your marketing activities must be specific not random. Identify who your best prospects are and then determine the best way to reach them. Who is the decision maker of the company or organization? How will you find them on LinkedIn, Twitter, Google plus, Pinterest, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram? Would you be more likely to find them at in-person networking business meetings? Where will you find contacts who could recommend you prospects? What about advertising? Will customers be searching for your type of product on social networking sites? What time of the year would your prospects be more likely to purchase your products or services? Know the answers before you start any new marketing.
- Set up a website: Having a working website for potential customers is important for marketing a business. Your website shows your brochure online, your list of products and services available for purchase, and is an information source. If you can't afford a custom-design website, have someone create a site using Squarespace or GoDaddy templates. Be sure the design looks good, is responsive, and is easy to read on mobile devices desktop and laptop computers.
- Create a blog: Blog or other articles on your site inform your customers and prospects. The content improves your chances of being found in search engines. You don't have to be a professional writer to add a blog. Just write information

your customers will find helpful. Provide tips and hints on using what services you sell.

- Use basic SEO: SEO stands for search engine optimization. Setting up your web pages so the search engines understand the content of the pages and may link to you when someone searches for what you sell. There are a number of things you can do yourself to improve the SEO of your site without spending a lot of money like the following: using a different title for each page on your website; using phrases people search for in the page title; including your business name, location and phone number on all pages on your site; and set up a listing for your business in search engine local directories like Google and Bing - both offer a free listing for local businesses. To get listed on Google, go to google my business. To get listed on Bing, go to Bing Places.
- Create your business profile: Be sure your business profile includes a good description, keywords, and a link to your website. Look for groups or conversations that talk about your type of products or services. Participate in the conversations. The best sites to use for this are LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Pinterest.
- Share business cards and print information: Your business card, letterhead and envelope tell prospective customers you are a professional. Be sure to list your website address on your business card, letterhead, and any handouts. Hand out business cards. Get your business cards into the hand of anyone who can help you in your search for new clients.
- Send out emails: Be sure you ask for permission to send an email before putting any person's email name on your list. To build an email list is to give something away. It could be a free E-book, or even a free tip-sheet on how to do something related to your business. You might offer people who sign up for your free newsletter a tip sheet with "10 easy ways to..." If you don't have anything to give away, try offering a sign-up discount on products or services as an incentive. An email service makes it easy to manage your list.
- Talk to all the vendors.: Give vendors your business card and ask if they can use your products or service. If they have bulletin boards where business cards are displayed, ask if yours can be added to the board.
 - Attend meetings of professional groups.: Groups such as the Chamber of Commerce, American Business Women's Association, Business Network International, other local business groups, or civic associations. Have business networking events either in person or on Zoom. Provide a business card when you speak to them. Ask those you meet what they do and really listen to them.
- Pay for membership in groups attracting your target customers. If the group has a website and publishes a list of members on the site, make sure your name and website link get added.

- Become actively involved in groups. This will give you more opportunity to meet possible prospects. You can make real contributions to all of them by offering useful ideas and helping with projects when possible.
- Post interesting information. The information or photos you post should be interesting to your audience. Tips on how they can improve their life or business, or special offers are likely to get the most likes and shares. You may wish to pay to boost your most popular posts. Publicize interesting services. Look for something unusual about what you do and publicize it.
- Send out press releases: Send to local newspapers, radio stations, cable tv stations, and magazines whose audiences are likely to be interested in buying what you sell. Post the press releases on one or more online press release services, being sure to include links to your website. To increase your chance of having the material published, send along a photo with your press release.
- Help reporters find you: Reporters are constantly looking for sources to quote in their stories. They use services that distribute their request for sources to publicists, experts, marketers, and others. Sign up for these lists and scan them regularly. One such service is Haro (help a reporter out) and is free: <https://www.helpareporter.com>. Write an article demonstrating your expertise.
- Publicize your publicity: Whenever you do get publicity, get permission from the publisher to reprint the article. The publicity clips give credibility to the claims you make for your products or services. Ask for work or leads.
- Network with others: Network with people who are in the same field as you.
- Offer to be a speaker: Industry conferences, volunteer organizations, libraries, and local business groups often need speakers for meetings. You'll benefit from the name recognition, contacts, and publicity you gain from being a speaker at these events.

Utilize federal and state agencies: Find federal, state, and local government programs to help you get started in business. Most programs offer free business counseling, and some can put you in touch with government agencies and large corporations that buy from small and disability-owned businesses. Take advantage of the small business development centers and score representatives.

- Send out sales letters: Be sure to describe your business in terms of how it can help the prospect. Mention certifications. Learn to drop a business card in every letter you send.
- Make "cold calls": Call people who might be interested in your business. Briefly describe what you do and ask for an appointment to talk to them about ways you can meet a need or solve a problem. Give assistance when you can.

- Offer free samples or free consultations: Get samples of your product or your work into as many hands as possible. Offer a free, no obligation consultation to people you think could use your services.
- Ask for referrals: A satisfied customer is often glad to refer you to their friends. Help them remember to do so by asking for referrals. Leave extra business cards or fliers. If someone gives you a lead, follow up on it right away.
- Partner with other people to sell your product or service: Look for affiliates, resellers or people who will generate leads for you in return for a commission on sales. Be sure your pricing structure allows for the fees or commissions you will have to pay on any sales made.
- Run a contest: When you offer a contest, make the prize something desirable and related to your business. It could be a gift basket of your products or a free service.

Meet IVIE Member Edward Cohen

By, Edward Cohen

Meet Edward Cohen an IVIE member with the business EZ2See® Products LLC located at <https://www.EZ2seeproducts.com/>

As of 2021, he has been married for 38 years with two children and two grandchildren. Edward Cohen was born with RP. He was very near sighted along with night blindness which gradually increased. From childhood till age 40 after cataract surgery, he wore those glamorous coke bottle thick glasses.

As a youth, his hobbies were assembling all sorts of plastic models along with paint-by-numbers and other art projects. He enjoyed all sorts of music and even used a real-to-real tape recorder and copied music off an AM radio while he played being a disc jockey.

He was always mainstreamed. While STEM classes were his favorite, he took drafting classes throughout high school. At the same time, he managed to get set of drums and was part of a 3-person band playing the music of the 60's.

While baseball was his early favorite sport, during certain lighting conditions he couldn't see the ball well enough to get a hit. He found far more success with basketball since the lights in the gym never varied. He played on a club team throughout high school. He pass the needed tests and served as a life guard at both a community center and a city pool

He was accepted as a Purdue University engineering student, but came to see his path was more in the area of design. After 2-years there, he transferred to Indiana University. There he graduated with a BA degree after crafting a multidiscipline course of study that combined academic and creative courses. While living in Washington DC, he took additional electronics classes and earned an FCC License with Broadcast Endorsement. Then in 1979, he earned a Residential Energy Auditor certificate from the University of Wisconsin at Madison through their Energy Center.

His volunteer history includes:

In high school, serving as the president of his local religious youth group

In the spring of 1970, on the first Earth Day as a freshman at Purdue, he staffed an information display

In 1974, he designed, built and operated lights for a traveling theater group in Bloomington Indiana

Later that same year, he helped create the first local public access cable TV studio in the public library

While the 2-years he lived in Washington DC in from 1975 to 1977, he volunteered with the Center for Inquiry and Discovery, a hands-on-place place for children to explore science topics.

In 1978, he established the Indianapolis Sun Day committee and coordinated setting up and staffing information tables to promote energy awareness.

From 1978-80 Indianapolis, he organized and coordinated a cooperative purchasing group that combined the purchasing power of some of his neighbors to buy certain items in bulk.

During those same years, he served on a local economic development organization called, Eastside Community Investments. He helped launch their housing rehab program.

During the first few years of the 1990's, he co-founded and served as president of the not-for-profit Ecology House of Indianapolis. An organization established to convert a downtown dwelling into a facility to showcase conservation and energy saving products and practices.

Within a few years of joining his Indianapolis blind organization he served as vice President until moving. Then joined the board of his Rochester Mn blind group, During the 2000's he was the Indianapolis contact for the national climate awareness group called, 350.org. During those years, his group put on multiple small and large events.

From 2001 till 2008, he established and chaired the Creation Care Committee for Interfaith Alliance Indianapolis, to bring issues of global warming to the area faith community that eventually created over 17 Green Teams in various congregations.

In 2009, he with one other person, brought the Indiana, the national organization, Interfaith Power and Light. As a state affiliate, that helped promote the issue to multiple other cities.

From 2008 till 2010, he established a block Club on his street. Through it, he promoted multiple opportunities that increased neighbor interaction and communication.

In 2011, the year after moving to Rochester MN, he organized a climate awareness event involving media, a march and a panel discussion.

That same year, he joined and has volunteered on voter registration with the local League of Women Voters chapter.

From 2011 to 2017, he served on the neighborhood board in his new city of Rochester MN.

During that same period, he served on the Rochester Energy Commission and served as chair for 2-years. He received a county environmental award during that time.

While they operated in 2020 and 2021, he served on the city's Sustainability and Resiliency task force and also on the county's recycling Task Force.

He currently serves as treasurer of the local chapter of a blind organization.

He is working with others to form a Low-vision support group in his city.

Edward has always had that entrepreneur spirit. As a very young person he learned if he got up the courage to knock on his neighbor's door and ask if they wanted their driveway snow shoveled . Many said yes But getting the job was easier than doing the shoveling. His friends saw and asked how he got the jobs. he worked out with them that he'd pay them when he'd got large jobs. A few friends liked the idea and that winter, all earned some money.

In high school his dad told him of an oriental rug company that would pay strong young men to bring in, hold up and put back away heavy rugs. Remembering his youthful experience, he got 3 friends to join him just like years ago.

He even learned the skill of cold calling. His youth group annually put out an Ad Book. But it required calling past and new customers to ask them about taking out an ad. At first, he found it awkward, but quickly got the hang of it and secured several ads. Little did he know how handy it would later be to feel comfortable making cold calls.

Besides his youthful entrepreneurial exposure, he has:

- * Constructed a complex, portable light show at Perdu University where he worked with bands and public and private dances.

- * While at Indiana University, he Provided product photos for a stereo company's ads in the local newspaper.

* In the same town, was contracted to install stereo systems in local bars and record stores.

After moving from Washington DC to Indianapolis in 1977, with a partner, formed, owned and operated Silver Maple Productions that produced two, 16mm historic documentary films, radio commercials and slide shows.

* From 1977 to 1980 cooperatively purchased a large home in a historic neighborhood with two other persons. Then restored it back from 5 apartments to a single-family home before selling it.

Edward Cohen combined his science, engineering and creative side when he played the central role with the Indianapolis community Action Program to construct the city's first attached solar greenhouse to provide supplemental heat and a small space to grow food in a small inner-city house of a senior.

Then there are his current entrepreneurial efforts

Keeping track of his appointments, schedules was critical for all of his endeavors. As his vision declined especially after being legally-blind, using standard weekly planners became difficult and frustrating. He needed to use a black marker to make the dates big enough to see.

For 5years after retiring, he searched for a weekly planner that met his needs. Those needs were, large daily cells, no small print, all black ink and a black border to prevent writing off the paper's edge. Finding nothing like that, he tapped again into his creative mind, Edward created his own large print calendar with all of those features and more.

After many seniors and those with low-vision saw it, they convinced him that he needed to widely share this unique product. By then, having been involved in the blind community for 20-years, he agreed that there was a great need.

After some months of sole-searching and talking it over with his wife, he launched EZ2See Products in the fall of 2015. The quantity of both sales and sales location has grown ever since.

Then 3-years later, he came out with a second product. While he used 3M Post it® notes , he'd knew they could be better made for folks with low-vision. His yellow, 3-inch square, high-contrast sticky note pads have the same black edge as on his weekly planners.

Who would have guessed as a grandpa he was creating yet another business enterprise...and www.Ez2seProducts.com continues to grow and make helpful products.

Like a lot of small businesses, marketing and finding persons to help with the grunt work of approaching various state agencies, schools, office supply chains and other small business owners was a challenge. Once he was able to outsource some of his work with another company, he could pivot to being the “face” of the business and come up with new products.

Edward’s greatest pleasure of owning a small business is hearing the testimonials of how his products are helping those with low vision. You can call toll free to order at 800-234-8291. You can reach Edward at, Info@EZ2SeeProducts.com

He is now working on a new product with a second in the wings. The first is a total reimagining of the standard address book. A book that will never get so marked up as to become useless. Further down the road is a device to make filling those 7-day pill organizers easier, faster and more accurate.