



Joanie Stephen (far right) came up with the idea to start Smart Work Ethics after hearing how area employers were struggling with the soft skills related issues. Pictured with Stephen are Kristel Flood, Marcy McKee and Terri Kearns. Not pictured is Donna Weber.

# Smart Work Ethics

“As the economy improves, getting a job will get easier. Keeping a job will not,” says **Joanie Stephen**, owner of Smart Work Ethics. The Fairhope-based company – the Mobile Area Chamber’s Small Business of the Month – addresses workplace ethics by training facilitators to teach soft skills.

Stephen came up with the entrepreneurial idea when she heard a Mobile Area Chamber staff member describe how area companies were struggling with the same employee challenges at a Society of Human Resource Management meeting. After researching what other job-readiness programs were providing, she found her niche and, in 2007, started Smart Work Ethics with Donna Weber and Terri Kearns.

“We heard from the business industry that attitudes were lacking. Employees wouldn’t show up on time or wouldn’t show up at all. They didn’t

dress appropriately or know how to work as a team,” says Stephen.

The company trains facilitators to conduct a series of workshops outlining workplace ethics, split into four days, and matching it with interactive exercises. Topics include getting along with the boss, co-workers and customers; taking responsibility; making informed choices; problem solving and critical thinking; having a positive work attitude; attendance; timeliness and more.

“It’s not about getting a job. This is about keeping a job. It’s about contributing ideas and contending for raises and promotions,” she says.

According to Stephen, managers think these soft skills are common knowledge and employees should just pull up their bootstraps and do what needs to be done. She says that isn’t the case. “They don’t know what they don’t know.”

Stephen is a certified master facilitator in workforce development and temperament style training. The former middle school teacher has a varied career that includes sales management and corporate training. Weber is a licensed professional counselor and business coach, who also owns another company. Kearns brings the presentation and professional image skills to the partnership.

The Smart Work Ethics team has also created a youth program for students in grades 9-12 to help transition from school to work.

Stephen credits her website for how customers from all over the world, find her. “This is not just a challenge locally, but nationally and internationally.”

Visit [www.smartworkethics.com](http://www.smartworkethics.com) or call 251-990-2507 for more information on Smart Work Ethics.

Go to [mobilechamber.com/award.asp](http://mobilechamber.com/award.asp) to submit a Small Business of the Month nomination, or contact Danette Richards at 251- 431-8652 or [drichards@mobilechamber.com](mailto:drichards@mobilechamber.com).