

Ignite INSIGHTS

ISSUE

ONE

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IGNITING GROWTH AND INNOVATION

FRESH PERSPECTIVES, FRESH **STRATEGIES**

THE FAMILY BUSINESS **BALANCING ACT**

DEVELOP YOUR **SECRET WEAPON** – A GREAT MORNING ROUTINE

THE **POWER OF ROLE PLAY** IN SALES TRAINING

THE BLEND THAT BUILDS **BETTER LEADERS**

QUARTERLY.

FRESH PERSPECTIVE. REAL STRATEGIES.

IF YOU'RE A LOCAL BUSINESS

LEADER, you know the pressure that comes with growth. The world moves fast, and it can feel like you're expected to have all the answers, while still making payroll, leading your team, and building something that lasts. That's why we created Ignite Insights: a quarterly newsletter built to deliver straight-to-the-point, real-world insights for leaders like you.

Each issue is packed with ideas you can actually use from marketing and IT to leadership and operations. No fluff. No jargon. Just real advice, real ideas, and real results, delivered right to you, four times a year.

But this newsletter isn't just a standalone resource. It's part of something bigger. It's one piece of a platform built specifically for leaders ready to do more than just stay afloat.

It's part of blaze.

WHAT IS BLAZE?

blaze is a growth platform built for local business leaders who are ready to lead boldly. Powered by Fierce Creative Solutions, blaze exists to equip, connect, and champion those who are driving the future of business in our communities.

Through the weekly Torch Talk podcast, monthly Spark Sessions workshops, this quarterly Ignite Insights newsletter, and the annual blaze Business Expo, blaze provides actionable strategies, fresh ideas, and real connections, all tailored to the unique challenges of running and growing a business today.

This isn't about top-down advice from people who don't understand your world. blaze is shaped by real business conversations happening across our region. Whether you're a founder, a manager, or a multi-location leader, blaze is designed to meet you where you are and help you take your next bold step.

blaze

WHY WE'RE DOING THIS

We've talked with hundreds of business owners and leaders over the past few years. And while their industries may differ, their stories sound surprisingly similar:

"I KNOW I NEED TO MARKET BETTER, BUT I DON'T HAVE TIME TO SORT THROUGH NOISE."

"I'M TRYING TO GROW, BUT I FEEL LIKE I'M DOING IT ALONE."

"I NEED NEW IDEAS. SOMETHING FRESH. SOMETHING THAT WORKS."



INTRODUCING THE BLAZE EXPO

And now, we're taking things even further.

In March 2026, we're launching the very first blaze Business Expo. It will be a one-day, high-energy experience designed to fuel serious business growth.

The blaze Business Expo will bring together everything blaze stands for:

- Practical insights from experts
- Real conversations with local leaders
- Hands-on sessions that spark action
- A community that actually shows up for each other

It's not just another conference. It's a gathering of people who are tired of surface-level networking and want real impact. Whether you're looking for fresh strategies, strong partnerships, or just the space to think bigger, the blaze Business Expo will deliver.



SAVE THE DATE

MARCH 12, 2026 | WOOSTER, OH

More details (and registration) are coming soon, but if you're reading this, consider yourself invited.

BLAZE WAS BORN OUT OF THOSE CONVERSATIONS.

Our mission is simple:

To help local leaders grow, connect, and lead with confidence.

This newsletter, Ignite Insights, is part of that mission. It's a place where leaders like you can find trustworthy information, sharp perspectives, and the occasional kickstart when momentum is running low. Because we believe leadership isn't just about keeping the lights on. It's about creating something that matters, and having the right people and tools around you to do it.

INSIDE INSIGHTS

YOUR LOCAL BUSINESS RESOURCE



THE FAMILY BUSINESS BALANCING ACT

RUNNING A BUSINESS IS HARD. Running one with your family? That's a whole different kind of leadership.

Family businesses are built on trust, loyalty, and shared values, but they also come with blurred lines, emotional dynamics, and tough conversations. When your coworkers are also your closest relationships, leadership requires more than strategy. It takes clarity, empathy, and maturity.

In a recent Torch Talk, Matt Shanlian of Cross Country Mortgage shared what it's like to grow a business alongside his father, spouse, and close friends. For Matt, success has meant creating a culture where roles are respected, communication is open, and people feel valued for who they are, not just what they do.

"YOU CAN'T SEPARATE YOUR BUSINESS VALUES FROM YOUR PERSONAL ONES," MATT SAID. "WHO YOU ARE AT HOME IS GOING TO SHOW UP AT WORK."

- Setting clear roles and expectations
- Having hard conversations with care
- Celebrating shared wins
- Investing in both the relationship and the result

Because at the end of the day, a family business isn't just about profit. It's about legacy. And legacy is built one honest moment at a time.

WANT MORE INSIGHT FROM LEADERS WHO'VE BEEN THERE?

Check out Episode 2 of Torch Talk featuring Matt Shanlian, available now wherever you get your podcasts.



DEVELOP YOUR SECRET WEAPON

– A GREAT MORNING ROUTINE

BY: LINDA ALLISON

I LOVE TO STUDY NEUROSCIENCE. The ability to peer into the brain and see how it operates has been exponentially improved over the last few decades. This new frontier has taught us much about how our brain operates and makes decisions. One thing that has been discovered is that our brain can get tired. We have all felt this, so it is comforting to have science validate it. A phenomenon called decision fatigue says that as we go through the day and make decisions, our brains get overloaded and tired, and we either do not make decisions or do not make the best decisions. One way to battle decision fatigue is to make fewer decisions during the day, and a good way to do that is to develop routines. A routine means that you have made a group of decisions about how you will do things, so it is just action, not decisions, that achieve your goals.

I have many routines, but the one that benefits me the most is my morning routine. I like to start my day with the things that matter most before the daily whirlwind (or inertia) blows me off course, and I spend my time on less impactful things. To do that, you must have a clear understanding of your priorities. For me, those are faith, family, and health, so my morning routine is organized like this;

1. I get up at the same time every day (I also go to bed at the same time every night, which makes that easier). I make my bed immediately.
2. I make coffee for my husband and me (unless he gets there first). I spend about half an hour drinking one cup of coffee with my husband.
3. I get up, do arm and leg strength exercises, and walk for cardio. This part of my routine requires the most discipline because I like it the least, so I ensure I do it early.
4. I read the Bible or another spiritual work for half an hour.
5. I am ready to start my day.

The only decision I have had to make is to follow my routine! I have saved my brain energy for more important decisions later. Every person will have a different routine depending on available time and goals. I think you will never regret getting up early to get the best done first.

You need to evaluate your priorities and available time to develop your routine. Checking the important things off your list early in the day gives you peace of mind and freedom to use your time on other things without feeling neglectful of your priorities. And organizing your life around your priorities is the best decision you can make to make life satisfying!

Linda Allison is a leadership coach and business strategist who helps leaders turn ideas into action and build teams that thrive. She believes effective leadership starts with clarity, consistent follow-through, and a genuine commitment to people. You can reach Linda at linda@lindaallisonresults.com or call her at 330-466-2350.



**WANT TO HEAR MORE
OF HER STORY?**

Listen to her full conversation in Episode 7 of Torch Talk
– available now wherever you get your podcasts.



THE POWER OF ROLE PLAY IN SALES TRAINING

BY: JORDAN MULLET

WHEN PEOPLE HEAR THE WORDS “SALES ROLE PLAY,” MANY GET UNCOMFORTABLE. I get it. Pretending to be a prospect while your coworkers watch can feel awkward.

But this simple practice is one of the most powerful tools we have in sales training, and in building confidence.

Why?

Because nothing shows where you need to grow like role play. It's a safe place to try things, mess up, and learn, without risking a real sale.

Over the years, I've seen huge breakthroughs during these exercises. Salespeople discover:

- They try to pitch too soon. When a buyer mentions a need, many reps jump in with a solution instead of asking more questions. Role play helps them slow down and understand the real reason someone wants to buy. Like we teach at Sandler, people buy for their reasons, not ours.
- They avoid tough questions. Many reps fear upsetting a buyer, so they skip key conversations like talking about money or how people make decisions. Practicing builds the courage to ask the important stuff. Proverbs 27:17 says, “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.” Role play helps sharpen our skills.
- They don't follow a clear system. In real meetings, nerves can get in the way. Role play gives reps a chance to practice using tools like the Up-Front Contract, a simple agreement before a meeting starts so everyone knows what to expect.

One of the best parts of role-playing is when a salesperson realizes they don't need a perfect script. They just need a simple plan and the courage to have a real conversation. That's what builds trust.

Early in my career, I avoided hard conversations. Deals stalled. I chased people who were never going to buy. It wasn't until my coach had me practice asking uncomfortable questions in role-plays that I started closing more business and being seen as a trusted guide, not just a vendor.

Now, with every team I coach, role play is a must. Not to embarrass but to prepare. It helps reps walk into meetings ready to serve.

So, the next time you hear “role play,” lean in. It could be the most important five minutes of your sales career.

Jordan Mullet is a sales coach and trainer who helps people learn how to sell without pressure and build real trust. He believes good selling starts with asking great questions and caring about people. You can reach Jordan at jordan.mullet@sandler.com or text or call him at 330-231-0998.



**DISCOVER THE FULL
CONVERSATION**

In Episode 5 of Torch Talk, Jordan dives deeper into sales strategies, leadership, and growth. Listen now wherever you get your podcasts.



THE BLEND THAT BUILDS BETTER LEADERS

**BECAUSE STRONG CULTURE STARTS
WITH STRONG LEADERSHIP.**

In today's world of fast strategies and quick wins, Branches Consulting Co. is doing something refreshingly different: slowing down enough to build leadership that lasts.

Led by seasoned leaders, Branches helps organizations grow with clarity, culture, and purpose. Their approach isn't about checking boxes or implementing the latest leadership fad. It's about helping leaders become the kind of people others want to follow.

In their Torch Talk episode, Chris Beck and Deanna Nichols-Stika opened up about how Branches started, how their work integrates faith and strategy, and why they're more focused on legacy than scale.

"IT'S NOT ABOUT BALANCE. IT'S ABOUT BLEND," DEANNA SAID. "LEADERSHIP AND LIFE DON'T SIT IN SEPARATE BOXES. THE BEST LEADERS KNOW HOW TO SHOW UP FULLY IN BOTH."

That concept of "blend" shows up in everything Branches does. From culture workshops to executive coaching to strategy sessions, they help businesses develop leaders who are deeply aware, deeply human, and deeply committed to their values.

What sets Branches apart is the clarity they bring. Chris talked about how often leaders feel overwhelmed, not because they aren't capable, but because they're pulled in too many directions without a clear plan or aligned team.

"YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO IT ALL," HE SHARED. "BUT YOU DO NEED TO KNOW WHAT MATTERS MOST AND MAKE SURE YOUR PEOPLE KNOW IT, TOO."

That's where Branches comes in. Through a combination of vision alignment, leadership development, and practical frameworks, they help businesses sharpen their focus and engage their teams in meaningful, measurable ways.

But it's not just about business metrics. At the core of Branches is a commitment to leadership that honors people, not just performance. That conviction has shaped not only their consulting work, but also their global nonprofit, Branches Worldwide, which equips high-impact entrepreneurs in underserved communities around the world.

Chris and Deanna are the rare kind of leaders who don't just talk about values. They live them. And they're helping other business owners do the same. So what's the takeaway for other leaders? If you're exhausted trying to "balance" it all or struggling to move your team forward, maybe the question isn't how to do more. Maybe it's how to lead with more intention.

"WE DON'T NEED MORE IMPRESSIVE LEADERS," DEANNA SAID. "WE NEED MORE ANCHORED ONES."

In a world that's constantly changing, the need for steady, people-first leadership has never been greater. And Branches is making sure more of it gets planted, right here in our region and around the world.



**WANT TO
GO DEEPER?**

Listen to Episode 3 of Torch Talk featuring Chris and Deanna from Branches Consulting Co. And don't forget - Branches Summit is coming up on November 6, 2025.



**GOT INSIGHT?
SHARE IT.**



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want at the
blaze Expo?

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