



# Business Miniversity

2025

Business skill development for cheesemakers, farmers, and food producers of all flavors

12:00-1:30 p.m. • Wednesdays, March 5, 2025 - April 30, 2025

[vtcheese.com/bmini](http://vtcheese.com/bmini)



FULLY VIRTUAL AND RECORDED

<b>Session 1</b>	Attract, Engage, Retain: Make Every Hire Count	March 5
<b>Session 2</b>	Understanding Financial Statements and Key Metrics	March 12
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<b>Session 5</b>	Branding: Selling Your Product Through Story	April 2
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## March 5

## Attract, Engage, Retain: Make Every Hire Count

In today's competitive job market, finding the right talent is only the beginning. Organizations must go beyond recruitment to create a holistic strategy that attracts top candidates, engages employees from day one, and retains high performers for the long haul. Today's discussion will explore best practices, innovative strategies, and real-world examples of how you can optimize their hiring process to ensure every hire counts.



### Laura Daniels, Hitch Pin Consulting

Laura Daniels has been working with family businesses and building teams for over twenty years. She started as a dairy cattle nutritionist focused on maximizing profitability through science and sound management advice. Increasingly drawn to the human side of the cow business, her focus now is on helping businesses manage their greatest resource: their people. Laura has led or helped the building of many high-performing teams, including those of her own dairy (Heartwood Farm of Cobb, Wisconsin, where she served as General Manager in charge of the day-to-day operations for fifteen years) and of Dairy Girl Network (DGN), the national non-profit organization she founded to connect dairy women across the world. Laura has walked managers through dozens of new hires,

protocol designs, effective training tactics, terminations, conflict resolution, and long range plans. Now the Ex-Oficio President and a member of the Advisory Board of DGN, Laura owns her own leadership training and strategic planning consulting business, Hitch Pin Consulting. Her "retirement" from milking cows (the best job in the world) has allowed Laura to hit the road to deliver pro⊗ag and motivational speeches across the country. She inspires people to hone their skills and use their valuable talent and strong voice.

**March 12**

## **Understanding Financial Statements and Key Metrics**

This session includes an overview of business financial statements including the income statement, the balance sheet, and the cash flow statement. Learn what the reports tell us about the current operation of our business and how they help us plan for meeting our future financial goals. We will see how to read the financial health of our business and look at year-over-year trends, so we can understand where we are headed and what is needed to meet our goals.



### **Elisa Clancy, University of Vermont Extension**

Elisa Clancy is a Farm Business Advisor—providing farmers with one-on-one business planning and coaching—and coordinates the UVM Extension Farm Viability Program with the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board. She works with farm owners in developing and updating business plans and enterprise analyses, and creating cash flow projections. Over the course of her career, she has provided management consulting and business skills development training to business owners, including farmers, food product producers, and a wide range of small businesses in Vermont. Elisa has worked extensively with economic development, cooperatives, and associations, building community and exploring synergies for mutual benefits. She holds a B.A. from St. Lawrence University and

an M.B.A. from the University of New Hampshire. In her free time, Elisa works the land on her homestead and recreates close to home in Vermont's Northeast Kingdom.

**March 19**

## **Quality & Culture: Simple Leadership Practices for Team Success**

In this engaging session, discover how key mindsets and practical leadership moves can cultivate a remarkable workplace culture - no management degree required! Leave with ready-to-implement tools and action-steps that build trust, foster learning, and create a positive environment where both cheese and people can thrive. Bring your workplace challenges; we'll workshop them together and provide possible strategies.



### **Amy Beth Kessinger, Community College of Vermont**

Amy Beth is an award-winning educator, master facilitator, and ICF-accredited coach who helps teams, leaders, and organizations build thriving workplace cultures through nature-inspired systems thinking and immersive experiences. Whether sparking transformation in the boardroom, the classroom, or under open skies, Amy Beth brings a fresh, fun, yet grounded approach that celebrates curiosity, cultivates compassion, and sparks new perspectives. Drawing on her expertise in experiential learning, conflict engagement, and community building, she creates dynamic sites and spaces of possibility where people develop the imagination, courage, and capacity to transform

how they connect, communicate, collaborate, and innovate to build resilient organizational ecosystems.

**March 26**

## **Fundamentals of Grant Writing**

Writing grants can be intimidating! In this session, we will walk through the basic sections of a grant and how to write them, learning to understand the questions funders are asking, the nuance between questions that sound similar, and which questions can seem throwaway but are critical, such as "Describe why you and your staff are qualified to complete this project." If you can, please bring a grant application you are interested in applying for to the session.



### **Rose Wilson, Rose Wilson Consulting**

Over the past 20 years, Rose Wilson has helped more than 450 farms and food producers with business launch, expansion, and exit; enterprise analysis; market development; and grant writing/capital raise. Rose has an 80% success rate helping her clients secure national, regional, and local funding, totaling \$11 million to date. Rose's clients range from national NGOs to state agencies; established companies such as CROPP/Organic Valley; emerging brands such as Kingdom Creamery of Vermont; and small-, mid-, and large-scale farms of all varieties. Rose is a member of the NOFA-VT Revolving Loan Fund Advisory Board, the Vermont Farm Fund Advisory Board, the Vermont First Advisory Board, and the Vermont Organic Farmers' Executive Committee.

## April 2

Despite what economists say, people do not behave rationally. Our shopping choices usually don't make the most economic sense; in truth, people's shopping choices are their way of telling the world about their personal values. And your branding choices are your way of telling the customer about your values. Making a connection between your values and your customers' values is the key to keeping them buying, the income flowing, and your business in the black. The tool to do this is as old as humanity itself: storytelling. In this interactive session, outreach and communications consultant Daniel Prial (a former NCAT/ATTRA Community Food Specialist) will walk you through the building blocks for an effective brand story and provide tangible activities for taking control of your brand story to best connect with your customers.

## Branding: Selling Your Product Through Story



### Daniel Prial, Prial Outreach Consulting

Daniel Prial has been building bridges for over 15 years, but not as an engineer – rather as a communicator and educator. For farmers in New England, that meant building bridges between them and their customers through brand management. But it has also meant connecting national parks with visitors, students with nature, and corporate business units with each other. With his diverse experiences, Daniel navigates the intersections of marketing, community work and outreach. Daniel now lives in Germany with his wife and two sons. When he's not working, or busy as a father, he's carving wooden spoons and looking for wilderness. For more on the bridges Daniel is currently building, you are welcome to visit [www.danielprial.com](http://www.danielprial.com).

## April 9

The Business Model Canvas, found on barn walls and office doors throughout Vermont, is the perfect resource for business owners to visualize key areas of business strategy. In this session, you'll learn to use the Canvas to describe, design, challenge, invent, and pivot your business model. Then we'll examine the Pre-Mortem Analysis, which is a key process for anticipating any project's risks. This form of critical analysis is vital for building sufficient contingencies into your projects, providing the fine-tuning required to increase the chances of success.

## Tools for Strategic Business Planning

### Elisa Clancy, University of Vermont Extension

See biography under the session on March 12.

## April 16

The product you craft is the result of your passion and dedication; your website should reflect its high quality! Learn some quick and easy ways to set up an attractive website and online store without needing an entire IT team. Discover how to best utilize your virtual presence to market your brand and to sell and distribute your product. We'll define related concepts (like affiliate marketing) that can also be considered for your site.

## Specialty Food Websites: Optimizing the User Experience...and Yours!



### Ashley Sandy, LONDONmiddlebury

Ashley Sandy is a Partner and Founder at LONDONmiddlebury, where she combines strategic vision with hands-on execution while fostering a collaborative team environment. With extensive experience spanning strategic development, market research, and digital solutions, she merges data-driven insights with creative excellence in brand development, website design, and user experience to deliver impactful solutions across print and digital mediums. Recently named a Vermont Business Magazine Rising Star (Class of 2024) and certified partner with Google, HubSpot, and Wix, Ashley leads a team of thinkers + doers who transform business objectives into actionable marketing campaigns. Beyond her agency work, she serves as a Marketing

Instructor for Mercy Connections' Inclusive Entrepreneurship Business Course, Start Up, and recently concluded her 9 year tenure on the Board of Directors for Special Olympics Vermont, embodying her Vermont-rooted values of community impact and connection.

**April 23**

## **Managing and Calculating Margins through a Specialty Supply Chain**

Do you know the difference between mark-up and margin? Answers to questions like this are crucial to the success of marketing your products. Understanding how to price your products throughout the supply chain is a vital component in achieving and maintaining commercial stability. This presentation will walk you through margin calculations that take into account not just the cost of producing cheese, but also costs incurred in the selling process itself. We will also discuss strategies for pricing products with future growth in mind.



### **Zoe Brickley, Jasper Hill Farm**

Zoe Brickley began exploring the world of cheese while attending The French Culinary Institute in New York City. From there, she joined Murray's Cheese; after some time spent behind the counter, Zoe became Cave Manager and American Buyer for Murray's. In 2009, Zoe joined Jasper Hill Farm where she established their foundational development, sales, and marketing efforts; today, she is Jasper Hill's Director of Communications & E-Commerce. Zoe loves to learn more about cheese through teaching, having presented hundreds of hours of content for many organizations. She is an American Cheese Society Certified Cheese Professional and Sensory Evaluator and a member of the Guilde Internationale des Fromagers.

**April 30**

## **Beyond the Label: Discover 6 Ways to Craft Packaging That Sells**

This session explores how thoughtful packaging design can help you stand out on crowded retail shelves and online marketplaces. From branding and storytelling to material choices, we'll discuss strategies for creating packaging that protects your product, attracts customers, and builds brand loyalty. Whether you are refreshing an existing design or starting from scratch, you'll leave with practical insights to elevate your packaging and drive sales.



### **Steve Crafts, Place Creative Company**

Steve Crafts has over 20 years of experience creatively launching and propelling brands into the national spotlight. He graduated cum laude from Syracuse University where he studied Communication Design. After working in New York City, he headed north to Burlington. He founded Place in 2001 with the single-minded goal of bringing a more human and "brandcentric" approach to marketing. "We wanted to cut through the big agency red tape and create more authentic and soulful brands for our clients." Steve has led integrated campaigns for Rossignol, Pete & Gerry's Organic Eggs, Darn Tough Vermont, Bag Balm, and New-Skin. In 2020, GD USA recognized Steve as a Person To Watch.



### **Michael Adams, Place Creative Company**

Michael has a unique background: one that blends traditional agency work with his client-side experience in the consumer packaged goods industry. As someone who has made their own investment into branding, he understands the value of doing it right. His CPG experience is coupled with work at Bluehouse Group as their Marketing Manager. Before that, he worked at CPASiteSolutions as an Account Manager for 179 clients, managing everything from new site builds to SEO and online marketing. In his free time, he enjoys hiking, illustration, and DIY projects. Michael has a BSBA in Marketing from Bryant University and an Executive Marketing 360 Certificate from Cornell University.

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