BUILDING



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A Message from the Executive Director

Required Reading

Looking for a few good books to read this summer? I'd like to make some suggestions.

NSCA recently launched an online bookstore featuring a few of our business-related favorites. Check out these short summaries, and give one a try this month!

Keep Swinging Jay Myers, President/CEO, Interactive Solutions

Starting a business is easy. Growing a successful business – not so much. Less than 20% of businesses started each year survive their fifth anniversary. Jay Myers, founder and CEO of Interactive Solutions, Inc., built a company that, by tapping into the demand for high-tech video conferencing and communication equipment, continues to grow even beyond its 10-year anniversary. Finding the way, however, wasn't easy. Facing cash-flow problems, a partnership divorce, and an embezzling employee, there were many days Jay thought he would end up just another statistic. In this book, Jay shares how he overcame adversity and achieved small business success.

The New Rules of Customer Engagement Daniel Newman, President, BroadSuite Consulting

Imagine a world where you never had to sell anything. Every day, the ideal number of clients with needs aligned perfectly to what you offer would walk through the door and shout: "I'll take it!" But selling isn't quite that simple. And customers aren't ready to buy. But, in a very subtle way, brands are driving buying decisions long before the sales department ever becomes involved. In an informed economy, we have a new way of doing business. And there are new rules for customer engagement that are impacting everything transactional. It's a scary and exciting time – and the perfect opportunity for businesses to embrace these new rules.

Under the Social Influence Chuck Wilson, NSCA

Each part of "Under the Social Influence" captures specific (positive and negative) influences that can impact the stages of a successful life and career by using unique, and sometimes humorous, examples. The book appeals to Gen Y workers seeking their first "real" job, and employers who want to figure out why their Millennial workers act the way they do. The stories help everyone put life into perspective and focus on what's really important. This is a cut-to-the-chase, no-nonsense, real-world, tough-love playbook for those struggling to get ahead (and those under the influence of negative social situations).

Hitting the Curveballs Jay Myers, President/CEO, Interactive Solutions

Most small businesses are happy to simply survive these days. After weathering the storm and successfully establishing his business, Jay Myers, founder and CEO of Interactive Solutions, Inc., is back to talk about a conscious decision he made in 2007 to "not participate in the recession." He talks about how he once again weathered personal and professional crisis to not only strengthen – but grow – his company like never before. He shares solid tips and practical advice that small business owners can appreciate and apply. Don't just hit the curveballs that are thrown your way, but use them to grow your business.

These are just a few of my recent favorites. You can find them online at www.nsca.org/nsca-store. If you have ideas for books we should add, please let me know!



Chule R. Wilson

Chuck Wilson
NSCA Executive Director

Upcoming Events

June 24

WEBINAR

Driving Sales Growth During Change
Presented by: Bob Lobascio, CTS – Senior Associate,
Corporate Sales Coaches

July 15

WEBINAR

A Guide to Gross Margin for Integrators Presented by: Brad Dempsey, Solutions360

Aug. 19

WEBINAR

Move Beyond Just Talking about Recurring Revenue Presented by: Daniel Newman, BroadSuite Consulting

Sept. 15-16

CONFERENCE

Integration Business Survival
Conference & Technology Showcase
Sheraton Gateway Hotel • Atlanta, GA

Sept. 23

WEBINAR

Understanding Labor Cost, Productivity, & Efficiency
Presented by: Leslie Shiner, The ShinerGroup

Nov. 6-7

CONFERENCE

Integration Business Survival
Conference & Technology Showcase
Embassy Suites Phoenix North • Phoenix, AZ

MEMBER ADVERTISEMENT



DON'T LETTRAINING COSTS DRAIN The affordable Integration Survival Conference head The affordable Integration Business YOUR BUDGET

Survival Conference heads to Atlanta and Phoenix next, combining business and technical training with a hands-on Technology Showcase



The Integration Business Survival Conference maps out ways for you and your staff to get the technical training you need while learning how to create efficiencies that will improve productivity across your entire organization.

This two-day conference also helps professionals with technical minds learn to put themselves into business roles – and vice versa. (And did we mention that you can earn 11.5 RUs, too?)

"Great discussions! Always interesting to hear what other companies are finding. Amazing sessions!" - Jarrod H, Hillman AV

Thanks to our partnership with Commercial Integrator, the Integration Business Survival Conference & Technology Showcase offers reasonably priced education, hands-on product introductions, and training that will help you:

- Generate more revenue
- Improve staff productivity
- Close more sales
- Create efficient processes

- Get more projects into the pipeline Turn a higher profit

The regional events kicked off in Chicago on May 15-16. More than 75 integrators came together to learn about technical topics like making the AV analog-to-digital transition, wireless microphones for every application, and MNEC design criteria.

They also discussed business pain points, like determining the financial impact of slippage, properly managing subcontractors, developing accountability for different departments, increasing T&M revenue, and keeping service techs productive and happy.

We're headed to Atlanta on Sept. 15-16 and Phoenix on Nov. 6-7 next. Mark your calendars and plan to attend this affordable, regional event that will provide hundreds of ideas and proven processes for you to try. \triangle

\$99 for NSCA members \$199 for non-members

Atlanta Sheraton Gateway Hotel Sept. 15-16 **Phoenix** Embassy Suites Phoenix North Nov. 6-7

OPEN DISCUSSIONS

The Real-World Guide to IT Certification CompTIA & NSCA

Do you have IT training to keep up with AV, security, life safety, and healthcare communications systems that now reside on the network? With so many IT certifications available from various organizations, we'll show you where to start.

Pardon the Integration NSCA & Commercial Integrator

Get the latest updates on licensing, labor, prevailing wage, healthcare, and regulations, and learn how these issues are affecting integrators and contractors.

Sales Strategies that Work Corporate Sales Coaches

Even if you're not in sales, everyone in your organization is responsible for "selling." Through customer-focused approaches, learn how to establish trust and credibility, and establish processes that prove your firm's value.

"The instructors utilize several real-world applications and experiences, as well as participant examples. Their broad experience allows for a versatile, dynamic presentation. Good classes for junior and intermediate project managers to attend." - John B, RP Visual Solutions

SESSIONS

10 Ways to Become Even More Profitable Leslie Shiner, The ShinerGroup

Unique cost-saving measures you can implement as soon as you get back to your office, along with new ideas for efficiency tools and

- Recognize the importance of good processes for estimating, production, accounting, and analysis
- Find out how to generate greater profits—and peace of mind—by utilizing best practices

Minding Contractual Obligations

Nadim Sawaya, Enterprise Performance Consulting

Practical tips and advice on understanding project contract terms and conditions so you don't put yourself and your firm at risk.

- Review contract methods and types
- Recognize and mitigate project contractual risks

What Do Labor Cost, Productivity, & Efficiency Have to Do With It? Leslie Shiner, The ShinerGroup

We help you figure out the cost of your field labor, including how to adjust for labor efficiency, so you can price jobs correctly.

- Determine costs that should be included in a fully burdened labor rate
- Uncover direct job costs hiding in overhead costs
- Utilize the correct data and information to determine billing rates

Proper Project Planning and Scheduling

Nadim Sawaya, Enterprise Performance Consulting

This session outlines the most efficient process for project planning and scheduling to maximize the likelihood of project success and profitability.

- Explain the different schedules types (Gantt, CPM, and Milestones) and pick the one that will work best for your organization
- Effectively schedule internal labor and subcontractors

Understanding Breakeven, Markup, & Margin

Leslie Shiner, The ShinerGroup

Play the "what-if" game to forecast the consequences of changes in overhead, margin, and sales volume.

- Use Excel® to create a breakeven forecasting tool
- Analyze how changes in pricing structure impact the bottom line
- Measure margins in order to price jobs with enough markup to cover overhead and create profit

Smooth Project Management

Nadim Sawaya, Enterprise Performance Consulting

Manage the project implementation phase effectively through proper documentation, correctly supervising field work, and controlling scope creep.

- Develop and maintain a daily logbook to keep correspondence current
- Document and pursue change orders

Using Dashboards to Plan for the Future Leslie Shiner, The ShinerGroup

The right dashboard can provide real-time feedback about financial stability so you can make smart decisions.

- Create a meaningful, company-specific dashboard
- Identify the most valuable metrics to measure (and how to capture them)

"This [conference] was very informative and valuable. I plan to implement several best practices learned." - Ronald L, Commercial Electronic Systems

Establishing and Managing an Efficient Service Department Nadim Sawaya, Enterprise Performance Consulting

Practical guidelines to help with building and managing a profitable service department, and managing the department's service technicians.

- Implement ways to keep service technicians productive and customers happy
- Efficiently manage billings and collection
- Increase T&M revenue

Technology sessions will also be offered. These sessions will cover new trends and what you need to know about designing, installing, and maintaining these systems. You'll learn about:

- Mass Notification
 Digital Audio
- Video Switching & Distribution
- Digital Signage
- Security/Life Safety
- Healthcare
- Cloud-Based Solutions

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MONITORING EMPLOYEES' Social networks offer a window into how people live their lives. But should employers look into that window? The number of people fired over social-media posts is rising, and many employers look closely at a job candidate's online presence before making a hiring decision.

According to a 2013 survey from CareerBuilder, 39% of employers dig into candidates on social sites; 43% have found something that made them deep-six a candidate (posting inappropriate photos or information, or bad-mouthing a former boss). On the flip side, 19% said they found information that sold them on a candidate.

Some advocates say employers should be doing even more than they are now to monitor social media—they should keep an eye on workers' tweets

and updates around the clock. Privacy proponents and worker advocates, however, say it's unnecessary and that accounts shouldn't be monitored unless there's a clear reason to suspect wrongdoing.

Nancy Flynn, founder and executive director of The ePolicy Institute, argues strong monitoring by employers. Lewis Maltby, president of the National Workrights Institute, says that monitoring social media is counterproductive and unnecessary. Which side do you fall on?

YES:

EMPLOYERS SHOULD MONITOR EMPLOYEES' SOCIAL MFDIA

Management has a right and responsibility to monitor how employees are using social media at all times. If companies don't pay attention, then they may end up facing serious problems. It's too easy for disgruntled or tone-deaf employees to use social media to criticize customers, harass subordinates, and otherwise misbehave. And doing so can cause workplace tension and complaints, damage a company's reputation in the marketplace, or lead to lawsuits or regulatory action. (Like e-mail, social-networking records can be subpoenaed and used as evidence.)

A significant chunk of employees acknowledge posting information on social media that they shouldn't. Consider the results of the 2009 Electronic Business Communication Policies and Procedures Survey from American Management Association and The ePolicy Institute. In the survey, 14% of employees admitted to e-mailing confidential company information to third parties, 6% sent customer credit-card data and Social Security numbers via e-mail, and another 6% transmitted electronic protected health information

Some of these examples show just how serious those types of employee missteps can be. Hospital employees have come under criticism (or have been fired) for discussing patients on Facebook, which violates not only hospital policy but also the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). A city official in Michigan accidentally put some city employees' private information on a public website, and then linked to the site from Twitter. This exposed the workers to potential identity theft, leaving the city vulnerable to regulatory action, negative publicity, and lawsuits.

In many other cases, employees have griped online about their company, or posted joke videos that put the company in a bad light and took a considerable amount of damage control to undo.

Strict monitoring allows employers to spot potential problems early, get the information offline as quickly as possible, and discipline the employees involved. Along with keeping an eye on what happens on internal computer networks and public social media, companies should also ask for access to employees' Facebook accounts and other private social media.

Some critics say it's unfair for companies to use social media as a factor in screening potential hires, leading to discrimination or screening out otherwise strong candidates who have done some things the company doesn't like (but aren't related to work).

It is important that companies don't use social media to discriminate based on things like age, ethnic background, or religious beliefs. Employers should make sure that they have legitimate business reasons for rejecting applicants. But, contrary to what critics argue, when companies conduct social-media checks on prospective hires, they typically *are* searching for legitimate evidence to withdraw or rethink a job offer, such as references to drugs or other illegal activities, comments that are discriminatory or harassing, or signs that an applicant has been dishonest about work history or abilities. \triangle

Nancy Flynn is the founder and executive director of The ePolicy Institute, a training and consulting firm that helps employers limit e-mail and Internet risks

NO:

EMPLOYERS SHOULD NOT MONITOR EMPLOYEES' SOCIAL MEDIA

Employers don't need to practice wall-to-wall monitoring of employees' social media to protect their legitimate interests.

Yes, employers have a legal *right* to monitor employees' conduct on their work computers. But the only time employers have a legal *duty* to monitor employee communications is when the employer has reason to believe that the employee is engaged in illegal conduct.

Many successful companies do exactly that – monitor only when there is a solid reason to suspect employee wrongdoing. These policies have been in place for years and work well.

The vast majority of what employees do on the Internet has nothing to do with work, takes place during their private lives, and is done on personal computers. Employers should get involved with employees' private lives only when there is reason to be concerned.

It's simply too easy to turn social-media searches into fishing expeditions. Employers are human and cannot avoid being offended by employees' private behavior that goes against their values. Experience shows that employers fire employees for reasons having nothing to do with work. People have lost jobs because of their political opinions and religious beliefs. A photo in a bikini has cost many women their jobs. One man was fired because his employer didn't like his short stories (too much sex and violence).

Companies frequently reject qualified applicants because they don't like what they find out about them online. The majority of employers in a recent survey (77%) said they now conduct Internet searches on prospective employees, and more than one-third have rejected job applicants because of information they found. I have spoken to otherwise fair employers who refuse to hire anyone who has party pictures on their Facebook page.

Refusing to hire people because of private behavior unrelated to work is not only unfair, but also hurts the employer. In a competitive economy, companies need to hire the most qualified applicants. When HR professionals reject the top candidate because they disapprove of the person's private life, the employer loses, too.

There's more subtle damage as well. HR professionals are already hard pressed to investigate applicants thoroughly. There often isn't enough time to speak with every prior employer, or to verify the applicant's academic record. Taking time away from these crucial activities to go on Internet fishing expeditions diminishes the quality of the hiring process.

Internet searches also put employers at risk of liability. An employer who learns that an applicant is gay, Muslim, disabled, or over 40 years old – and then hires someone else – may face discrimination charges. Once the employer has such information, it may be difficult to prove that it wasn't used in making the hiring decision. Even if the employer ultimately prevails, valuable time and money are lost. It's much safer not to acquire the information.

Of course, there are situations in which an applicant's Internet activity is of legitimate concern to an employer. For example, a police department should think twice about hiring an officer who belongs to racist groups. An applicant with a drinking problem could be the wrong choice to drive a truck.

But in cases like these, employers should hire a third party to conduct the search. Employers should determine what type of information is relevant to the job, and instruct search firms to report only this type of information.

You can't blame employers for wanting to know more about applicants before making a commitment, and there are circumstances where the Internet may contain relevant information. But sending HR professionals indiscriminately trawling through social media is unfair, and causes more problems than it solves. \triangle

Lewis Maltby is president of the National Workrights Institute, a nonprofit research and advocacy organization focused on human-rights issues in the workplace.

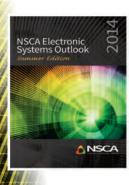
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Electronic Systems Outlook:

Ready for Download! By Emily Sohl

NSCA's Electronic Systems Outlook report is complete for summer 2014. Our report is released twice a year, and includes forecasting and systems modeling to provide updated indicators of new business opportunities. CPI, CCI, and unemployment rates are also compared to show how the economy

To create this report, we partner with FMI, a leading provider of management consulting, investment banking, and research for the engineering and construction industries. FMI collects most of this data for us. First, they generate a forecast for building construction put in place; econometric modeling is used to estimate demand.



Each market segment uses an independent algorithm based on five to eight metrics that correlate to changes in activity for that market. A preliminary forecast is generated based on projections for each metric supporting each market segment. This number is then adjusted based on database records for current/ planned projects, funding and timing of those projects, contractor backlogs, and FMI's direct interaction with engineers, architects, owners, and contractors in the field

Unlike others, our report is based off of the analysis of proprietary project records and discussions with architects and estimators to give you the most accurate resource possible. The *Electronic Systems Outlook* can help you predict when and where your business may suffer a period of vulnerability in the future. The world is unpredictable, but our report makes it easier to gauge where projects and backlogs may sit as part of your upcoming five-year plan. Business and strategic planning can also be more accurately done with smaller amounts of time and money by using our report.

We invite consultants and integrators to use the *Electronic Systems Outlook* report to budget for future projects, plan ahead fiscally, determine when to hire, forecast for sales teams, identify potential new markets, and narrow in on technology trends. The report can also help you benchmark your sales numbers compared with the industry, so you know exactly where you stand among your peers.

Prove that you are stable in the systems integration industry and gain more funding by sharing this information with your financial advisors and lenders. Show clients comparative solutions that fit within the average dollars spent on systems in each vertical market.

Keep your business alive and growing by using our *Electronic* Systems Outlook report to predict and plan for the future \triangle

Emily Sohl is a marketing/communications intern at NSCA.

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The VP-773 also has all the other features required for today's demanding professional AV systems. It has superior scaling quality, ultra-fast glitch-free switching, 8 inputs comprised of 4 HDMI, 1 DisplayPort, 2 VGA and 1 CV and 3 simultaneously active outputs, 2 HDMI along with 1 HDBaseT.

The VP-773 family scaling switchers won the 2014 Most InAVative Video Processing Product of The Year Award.







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Project Costs By Daniel Newman

In the integration business, we are notorious for tightly scrutinizing our project margins by looking at the gross profit on our hardware, and then the performance of our labor (install, engineering, and programming) against the estimated hours when proposing the project. This is the typical way of determining whether or not a project has made the grade in terms of profitability.

Like many things in business, this method of project measurement most likely started back when room integration started growing exponentially for integrators in the '90s; to some extent, the methods haven't changed much since then.

Most integrators do the math like this:

- Equipment Cost vs. Equipment Revenue
- Labor Cost vs. Labor Revenue

The difference (hopefully) positive is the job profitability; however, this formula seems to be missing something. Not because of its simplicity, but because there are too many costs (and revenue buckets) that integrators don't always account for - but should.

Here are three buckets you should specifically charge for in your project estimations:

- 1. **Project Management:** Integrators have become much better at putting dedicated project management resources on jobs large and small; however, many integrators don't capture any cost for this additional resource. While this is a cost that can be buried into the price, most customers would be open-minded and appreciative of an integrator that appropriately plans for and allocates expenses for project management. Project managers can often be billed out at as much as \$75 to \$100 an hour. I like the formula of including 1-2 hours per day of project labor in the estimate.
- 2. **Administrative Support:** Between order entry, vendor management, and dealing with a large pile of change orders, the general and administrative bucket is too often excluded from pricing (or the amount charged is not enough). As a rule of thumb, I used to estimate 30 to 60 minutes of administrative time per project per day, with a fair going rate of \$50 to \$60 per hour.
- 3. Logistical Expenses: Unlike the first two costs, this isn't something that can be looked at as a sunk cost. When dealing with large items like screens, flat panels, and cable spools, logistics can add huge amounts to the cost of a job. Properly capturing these expenses is a responsibility that falls squarely

on the estimator. Adding freight by line item is the best way to make sure that nothing is missed. Also, depending on the job, it is important to consider the multiple stops that a product may make: for instance, into your warehouse and then back out to a customer site. With ever-increasing transportation costs, it's important to not miss dollars on logistics. It is also key to properly allocate rather than putting them in a giant slush fund, which can make certain projects appear more profitable than they should.

There are costs and revenues with every job that must be considered when estimating to make sure margin integrity is maintained. As projects have become more competitive, the first instinct is to think of ways to charge less ... but, in the long run, companies that deliver successfully and profitably are better positioned to keep their customers happy, which leads to more sales.

Are you capturing all of your cost and revenue opportunities on the job? What are you doing that works when it comes to better managing job profitability? **\(\Delta\)**

Daniel Newman is founder of BroadSuite Consulting, based in Aurora, IL.



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Always On Your Side



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SMART **BUSINESS ADVICE**

Ever wish you had access to a business consultant who understood the industry, your company, and the challenges of running a successful integration firm in today's business environment? You know your organization better than anyone, but it can be helpful to have a fresh perspective when analyzing processes. problem-solving, or developing plans to meet goals.

No matter where you're located, or how big or small your firm, NSCA has resources that can help. We always offer access to our industry reports, research, educational events, and webinars, but we also offer something

> much more personal: one-on-one business strategy, coaching, and consulting created specifically for systems integrators. We'll spend time getting to know your business, and then help you find ways to meet business goals (or establish new ones). Our team works with integrators nationwide to:

- Establish solid plans for growth and profitability
- Identify specific causes of revenue and profit loss
- Create and maintain an online presence
- Develop and follow marketing and business plans
- Grow recurring monthly revenue services
- Form the best possible organizational structure based on your company and client needs
- Examine cash flow
- Analyze the opportunity to sell or acquire an existing firm
- Improve customer service
- Manage time and priorities effectively
- Discover new customers, technology solutions, and markets
- Plan for and manage IT convergence
- · Control labor slippage
- Improve margins
- Conduct accurate business valuations
- Create professionalism in a multi-generational workplace
- Demonstrate value to clients
- Begin a professional development and technical training program

If you're interested in working with NSCA in any of these areas, contact us. We can set up conference calls and video chat sessions, or come straight to your office. \triangle



The thought of a partnership can be a difficult concept for some business owners to swallow. It means having to work together to advance mutual interests and engaging in a give-and-take business relationship.

Fostering a long-term partnership with a client can provide multiple benefits, including the ability to help them make long-term strategic decisions about implementing new technology or upgrading existing solutions. Once trust is earned, your firm can help an organization map out technology integration and risk management plans – and be the first resource they turn to with questions or advice.

So how do you go about building a long-term, yet mutually beneficial, partnership with a client? Here are a few strategies to deploy as you move your business relationship in this new direction.

Tip 1: Look Beyond the Salesperson

Realize that the salesperson who initially discusses project needs is only one part of the equation. How your firm handles the project after the sale can mean the difference between finding a true partner or being dubbed as a company that only handles one-time projects. Set up meetings between your project manager and the client's team, and invite them to visit your office. If you're not shy about letting customers know how you run your business, that can help build trust and help them understand how you manage customer relationships.

Tip 2: Communicate!

Communication needs to start from the beginning of the business relationship. One of the first things you should discuss is how information about the project will be communicated. Will you hold weekly meetings to go over the progress of the project? Will any sort of electronic project management program be used to provide real-time access to status, scheduling, and open work-order information? Once a project moves from installation to maintenance and service, it's critical to maintain a constant flow of dialogue. Consider checking in with key clients to say hello – not to address a problem.

Tip 3: Consider Yourself a Consultant

Technologies are constantly changing — either with vendors developing completely new technologies, or making upgrades and releasing new versions to existing lines of access control systems and IP cameras, for example. Systems integrators wear many hats these days, and one important role as an advisor to the end-user. Be ready to share opinions about which solutions will best meet a customer's needs or provide for future growth.

Get Started the Right Way

Your sales presentation is almost like the foundation of a new building. If you get the foundation right – and if it's solid – you'll have a good base to start the project. But if you take too many shortcuts, the building you end up with won't be what you expected. If you're working with a new client, start the relationship off right by employing some of these tips:

- Set a slide presentation limitation for yourself of no more than 50 slides for the presentation. If you can't capture the most important benefits and results for the client in 50 slides, it may not be the best fit. This limitation will force you to narrow the focus of your presentation to what's really significant.
- Supply applicable customer references. If you're trying to impress a K-12 school, give them examples of projects and references from that market. Supplying them with testimonials and stories from a great healthcare project your firm completed won't make an impact. Make sure the list of customers and projects you supply represents the skills and talents needed for this particular project.
- If you include a statistic or reference a benefit, make sure you can support it (and note it in your presentation, whether on paper or orally).

Tip 4: Explain Maintenance Plans and Breadth of Products

Make sure your customers understand two things: the benefits of entering into a contract for a maintenance plan (discounts or priority on service calls and system upgrades, limited downtime by catching problems early, etc.) and the broad expanse of technology solutions you offer. Single products aren't often the solution for an end-user, so emphasize that you offer multiple brands and systems, and other solutions that can integrate and take things to another level. \triangle

This information was gathered from R3Now and Security Technology Executive resources.

3950 River Ridge Drive NE , Suite B | Cedar Rapids, IA | 52402 Ph: 319.366.6722 • 800.446.6722 | Fax: 319.366.4164 www.nsca.org

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