

# Chambers host joint meeting

By [Vershal Hogan \(Contact\)](#) | The Natchez Democrat

Published Thursday, July 22, 2010

FERRIDAY — The merger between the Vidalia and Ferriday chambers of commerce needs to be a win-win situation, or both parties need to walk away.

That was the message Rick Ranson, vice president for the Central Louisiana Chamber of Commerce, brought to a joint meeting of the two chambers earlier this week.

A situation where someone is a losing party is always a bad start for a merger, Ranson said.

“Don’t settle for compromise,” he said. “Consider a third alternative — my way, your way or a better way. What is a better way?”

A successful merger will mean that attitudes will have to change, but that change has to start at a personal level, Ranson said.

“Nobody can force change, it has to be from within,” he said. “It has got to be in each member first and then it goes on to the group level.”

Members will also have to ask themselves why they want to merge, Ranson said.

“If you are both independent, why do you want to merge? Hopefully it is because you want to move to the next level, interdependence,” he said. “By coming together, we can achieve more than the two independent organizations.”

To become interdependent, the two organizations need to start with the end in mind, what they want to see happen.

“What is the first thing you need to know when you’re making a cake?” Ranson asked. “You need to know what kind of cake you want to make.”

The new organization’s mission statement is the metaphorical cake, and the mission statement can be extended into long term goals, but the parties involved need to know what the mission is first, he said.

“Make up your mind, do you want to be a social chamber or an action chamber?” Ranson said. “If you are going to be a social chamber, merging will just make your parties bigger.”

The new chamber will also need clear leadership.

“Don’t mix up leadership and management — leadership is doing the right thing, management is doing things right,” Ranson said. “You have to have leadership with the vision before you have the management.

“Many projects fail because people get into managing with efficiency and setting goals before they have clarified their values.”

That’s going to have to mean those orchestrating the merger make a determined effort to understand what the other side is saying.

Many people fail to communicate because they think they already know what the other party is going to say, Ranson said.

“Maybe you know what somebody is going to say, but do you know what they mean?” he said.

“I would rather somebody understand what I am trying to say rather than agree with what I said.”

As the process goes along, Ranson said those involved need to constantly re-evaluate what is happening and understand where they are as it is happening.

And the area will ultimately be better off with a combined chamber, he said.

“The only people who worry about political lines are politicians,” he said. “It doesn’t matter if it is Mississippi money or Louisiana money, it is all money.”