

## Albert Napoli



Albert Napoli doesn't only know about entrepreneurship, he teaches it.

"I'm a professor in the entrepreneurship department at USC. It's the oldest entrepreneurship department in the nation, consistently ranked in the top 5 year after year."

In fact, the department usually places first or second only to Babson College each year. Albert teaches several classes at USC, educating students on everything from finding opportunities to looking for a pain or unmet need in the market and providing a unique solution.

He also teaches feasibility. "Once you have this idea for this pain or unmet need in the market, it's basically, will people buy it? That class is the centerpiece of the entire program. What you do during feasibility is customer discovery. Students do lots and lots of interviews with what they think

is their target market and asking them what they want."

Albert prepares students for business pitch competitions, helping nearly a dozen students each year win more than one hundred thousand dollars from venture capitalists. He also teaches research of product market fit and a family business course that he affectionately calls "group therapy twice a week for students."

The class works with students whose families own a business, and during the class Albert provides straight talk designed to help the business. "I'm not here to convince you to go into your family business," Albert tells his students. "I'm here to give you a bunch of assignments to help your family business, then you can decide to join it or not. Just because your last name is on the building doesn't always mean you should be running the business."

He brings that same straight talk as a business advisor to clients at the SBDC hosted by Pasadena City College.

"I'm the first person clearinghouse, I'm one of the first few consultants they talk to. If they're there for strategy then they speak with me," Albert said. "Strategy depends on where they are, how will they enter the market, grow it geographically, introduce new products and services, a wide variety of strategies."

For SBDC Pasadena Director Salvatrice Cummo, bringing Albert aboard as an advisor was a no-brainer. Since the two have been friends since childhood friends, she knew that his entrepreneurial know-how would provide a great benefit to clients.

"Salvatrice put a gun to my head and said you will be an advisor here," Albert quipped. "All kidding

aside, our families have known each other for 50 years. Our grandfathers used to go hunting together, and my parents and her parents were all in the same kind of social network. When she heard I was consulting and providing strategy and family business advice, she said 'Hey I need you over here, and I said sure!'"

Clients at the SBDC receive a team of advisors with specialties in a variety of areas designed to benefit the new or existing business owner. "Larry Johnson works to get best matches for grants and helps clients prepare to tell their story to a bank or investor. He also knows all about food products. Marketing is Lindsey Heisser, Don Loewel knows sales and sales management, Andrew Cohen knows all about consumer products and manufacturing. And there are so many others," Albert said.

Clients have a variety of reactions when they first arrive at the SBDC. "They come in here looking for the other shoe to drop," Albert said. "The reaction is usually, 'I can't believe this is all free.' Don't worry!" he tells potential clients, "You're not going to get a Nigerian e-mail scam!"

But services at the SBDC are completely free for clients. "If you were to hire any one of us individually, our per hour fee would be 150 to 300 dollars per hour. The SBDC is your tax dollars at work that takes this incredible pool of knowledge that 99% of startups could not afford and puts it at our clients' disposal. This is truly one government program that works!"

The benefits clients receive at the SBDC are tremendous, but for Albert, advisors receive a great benefit also. "The great thing about being here is that we see everyone. People from fitness training, to coffee and bar businesses, to those with high tech ideas. What I get out of it is seeing people, the ones that are serious, seeing them hit milestones, and seeing them realize 'I can really do this.' Seeing them launch a business, obtain financing, bring products to market, and watching their success is very fulfilling."

As a professor, Albert also can't help but study the people and businesses who come through the doors of the SBDC. "I like being able to see the breadth of different people and business ideas come in. The volume of people coming in here helps me see mindsets and trendsets, and see what various industries

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