

Don Loewel



Don Loewel is a business development guru of sorts. He's not only owned his own consulting company dealing in healthcare products and software, he now works for an agency that provides the software for major companies.

"I work for a software startup company, a SAAS model healthcare software company. I'm the director of business development, which means that I identify large sales opportunities, I manage partner relationships, such as resellers or Value Added Resellers (VARs).

When it comes to understanding what smaller companies go through to survive, Don has been there, done that. "As an entrepreneur, the biggest challenge was making payroll, finding new business, and keeping a consistent amount of new business coming in. It's a challenge for everybody."

His clear understanding of what it takes to be an entrepreneur is one reason his expertise is so valuable at the SBDC hosted by Pasadena City College. After Don was introduced to director Salvatrice Cummo, he volunteered to sit in on some consultations. When he started offering input, Salvatrice decided his advice was valuable enough to make him part of the team of advisors at the SBDC.

"My focus is usually commercial strategy, everything from marketing, sales strategies, personnel, compensation plans, positioning, all of this falls under commercial strategy," Don said. "I also teach the lean launch startup methodology. We do that as part of the SBDC branch and I also do that at USC, and Cal State LA. So it's equal parts commercial strategy to drive more revenue, as well as overall startup strategy, customer discovery, and agile product development," he said.

Don has seen a number of small businesses take off because of his advice during his time at the SBDC. "I've advised Click and Carry, Pacific Electric. I'm most proud of a startup that went on to raise a little more than 4 million dollars in funding. That's the biggest milestone success story."

And while businesses often come and go through the SBDC, Don is proud of the fact that he still remains in touch with his clients, following up on their progress. "I'm pretty proud of twenty solid clients still in touch on a regular basis. They still meet with me once a month, sometimes more. So I'm still connected with them as they grow. I have 5 or 10 customers and clients that are friends. We're in touch every 2, 3, 4 weeks to get an update. Another twenty remain in touch, just not as frequently. I have about 150 or 160 clients that I have consulted with."

Every now and then a small business owner doing well may come to the SBDC to learn to do even better. But for Don, there's nothing like the challenge of helping a struggling entrepreneur turn their business around.

"It's really fun to see some companies come in at a loss, put a strategy to work, put their efforts in the

right things, and see them get a return on that investment. And then to keep in touch is really fun, really rewarding," Don said. "When they come to see us, many of them are in bad shape. Many are stressed, concerned, frustrated. When we can get them beyond that into a successful business, that's really gratifying."

The main objective for Don is to help entrepreneurs understand the business they have. "The methodology includes having them go out and talk to customers to see if there's any value there. We throw in basic financial analysis, and gauge the general health of the business, and whether or not it has potential for strong growth and profitability. If we recognize it's a futile effort, I'll talk to them about the overall basics of their business."

The SBDC provides a strong support system for entrepreneurs, Don said. "There are many businesses where one person is responsible for the business. After a while, they need support and new ideas. If you're willing to get advice, willing to get another group of people's input, you'd be crazy not to get that input whether you use it or not."

The added bonus? The advice from top business counselors is free for clients. "The fact that it can be provided at no cost, makes it a no-brainer, even if you're just confirming what you already know," Don said. "It's kind of crazy not to seek out other resources that can help them and get a huge return on their business. The ROI of the SBDC is ridiculous compared to some of the alternatives. Instead of paying a branding company or a marketing firm, business owners can go to the SBDC and get a wide variety of resources like commercial strategy, book keeping and accounting, social media. And the advisors are not just generalists. Small business owners are getting lots of really, really good advice across key business areas."