

Larry Johnson



SBDC Advisor Larry Johnson said his knowledge of food and investment banking bolster his role at the Small Business Development Center hosted by Pasadena City College.

"I've always been around food. My family owned a restaurant and bar and a grocery store 25 miles north of New Orleans."

Immersed in his family's business, Larry was able to learn ordering, serving, bussing tables and even sweeping the floors. So it was natural for him to start out as a food sales consultant following graduate school.

"I knew about the grocery and restaurant business, so that made it easy," Larry said. The experience carried over when Larry went to work in the investment banking field. He had established a work ethic and knowledge of business which allowed him to work at some of the most prestigious firms in the world including Deloitte and Touche and

Price Waterhouse Coopers. There he worked on mergers and acquisitions, focusing on middle market businesses with annual earnings of up to 5 million dollars as his area of expertise.

After a number of years in investment banking, Larry was able to rely on his food service contacts to establish his own company, working as a food service consultant and networking his way into a business relationship with MGM casinos. "I wanted to get them interested in commercial spices and they said 'we don't need spices, we need boneless skinless chicken breasts.' They asked for help."

He was able to provide that help working with third parties to find and deliver food the casinos were looking for. Since 2008 Larry has provided high quality specialty food products and services to large institutional buyers worldwide.

Being an entrepreneur has not always been easy. "One time, the trucking company I use to deliver specialty food to MGM decided that the driver didn't have enough time to stop and pick up a load that I needed to get to Las Vegas," Larry said. "The chef needed the product Friday for an event on Saturday. Friday morning the Chef called to say he hadn't received the food. I told him I would have the product there before 6pm. I got some dry ice in a large cooler, packed the item into my car, and I delivered it myself at 4pm. It's one of those things you do when you're in business. The chef wasn't going to be happy with any excuse. You have to think on your feet when things happen."

Larry attends many trade shows to understand what the market wants each year. The knowledge he has developed is one reason he's a respected advisor at the Small Business Development Center hosted by Pasadena City College. "The advice I'm giving is advice I have to follow myself to stay in business," said Larry. He provides direct consulting services to business owners and potential entrepreneurs at the Pasadena and other locations of the SBDC.

"The SBDC Network, an arm of the Small Business Administration, is one of the best things to come out of Washington D.C. for years. They provide no or low cost services critical for people contemplating going into business or already in business," Larry said.

Some of the advice he gives clients includes recognizing the 3 most important reasons why products and services sell. "You must make a compelling visual image and presentation so that people stop and pay attention. There must also be intellectual stimulation, and finally, you must make a visceral emotional connection with your target audience," Larry said.

Providing his clients with the services they need to run successful businesses brings Larry a certain level of satisfaction. "I like to get involved in the process. I try to identify what the client's vision is, where they want to go, and then we determine what tools they need to achieve that vision. Together we determine whether they have adequate tools, and access to the tools they need so they can advance the ball, so to speak. I enjoy that."