

## Liberty Naud of SMaRT Education

As the founder of a small business in May of this year I knew that I was going to encounter challenges ahead of me due to the current economic climate and the fact that I had never, ever, started my own company before. I took a list of my strengths and weaknesses and those of my staff and support group. What I discovered was that despite the extremely talented pool of individuals surrounding me, not a single one of us had a background in business or public relations. So I set about to find mentors – those whose paths I had crossed before that had left a real impact on me and who could help me shore up those weak spots in my experience.

Then I discovered this incredible organization, SCORE, and could not believe my luck. Right here was a group of retired professionals dedicated to one purpose: to assist the small business owner. Well, needless to say I was tickled pink and made an appointment right away. I knew that if I was going to succeed that I had to build a solid foundation for my company to grow on, and the SCORE representatives had that knowledge to make it happen. It was a great day that I got to meet with Mr. Roy Breneman and Mr. Andy Lorenz.

These two gentlemen were so very receptive to everything I had to say. They were taken aback at first because I already had a business plan, a marketing plan, incorporation letter and business license. I had already piloted my program in various places with incredible results. At first we were unsure how to proceed, but they quickly identified three items that I did need help with: 1. My business plan did not have an executive summary and was not succinct. 2. My elevator speech was more like a slow walk-around-the-block speech, and 3. I needed assistance finding financial support.

Then I threw them a curve ball: *SMaRT Education* (Science Math and Robotic Technology Education), my newly formed small business, is a non-profit corporation. I explained that my entire operation is dedicated to inspiring our next generation of leaders and innovators by providing exciting hands-on exploration of science and technology to the students and young adults of the Coachella Valley. In a pinch – I teach kids how to build and program robots and then assist them to participate on a competitive platform to build self-confidence, communication, and leadership.

While helping me to find traditional means of financing through the SBA was not possible, these two worked tirelessly to put me in touch with foundations, organizations, and programs that we could gain support from. I have been able to make so many of those much needed connections that non-profits rely on for support, to include partnerships with other local non-profit organizations dedicated to youth programs. They also helped to open the doors to the La Quinta Rotary Club and First Tee of Coachella Valley.

Roy and Andy also helped me develop my elevator speech so that now, instead of taking 20 minutes to discuss my incredible programs, I can do it in one minute and still get across all of the passion and enthusiasm of what we do. Roy has been very helpful in this, emailing me to follow up and making sure that I stayed on top of deadlines.

They directed me to the Coachella Valley Economic Partnership (CVEP) where I have been able to join in the Career Pathways and Pathways Initiative programs that will help me to get my robotics programs into the local school systems. I will also be able to continue mentoring other young adults myself, something I am very passionate about. And with our new connection to CVEP we may be able to gain the support we need to bid on a world festival that would bring thousands from across the world here to the Coachella Valley for four days.

Through other SCORE members, like Mr. Marvin Schurgin, we have been able to make the connections to The Living Desert, where we may soon feature interactive robotics camps in their Discovery Center. He was able to put us in touch with Integrated Wealth Management's coordinator for the Kraft Nabisco LPGA tournament's "Tickets for Charities" program that will generate some much-needed revenue for us.

What is wonderful is that I was able to take such inspiration from Roy, Andy, and Marvin. I realize that I am not their typical client, but that didn't stop them and I am not only realizing *my* dream but hundreds of children are getting the opportunity to realize their own dreams...that at 9-years-old they CAN build and program a robot That they too can be somebody.

And it just keeps going. Without SCORE, my once fledgling non-profit would not be the incredible growing enterprise that it is today. In a very short period of time SCORE has helped me gain the validation and business practices needed to thrive. And when we ask of the children of Coachella Valley, "Have you built a robot today?" I have no doubt that in the next five-years every student will have had the opportunity to say, "YES!"

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