A comprehensive guide to starting and running a business as told by Florida industry leaders.
INTRODUCTION

This eBook provides aspiring entrepreneurs insight into leading Florida businesses and decision makers. By understanding what works, what doesn’t work and other helpful tips along the way, this book will give the business leaders of tomorrow the tools to succeed today.
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A WORD FROM GOVERNOR RICK SCOTT

As Governor, it has been my goal to make Florida the global leader for jobs. Since December 2010, we have created over 1,191,900 private sector jobs, our unemployment rate is down to 4.7 percent, and we've cut taxes over 50 times all while seeing increases in revenue. We know that having a job is the single most important key for someone’s success, and that’s why I will keep working every day to make sure every Floridian has a chance to achieve their dreams in Florida.

The Department of Business and Professional Regulation has put together their Business Brief, which gives insight and straightforward advice from some of the state’s top business minds.

As you venture out to start your career or business in Florida, I hope you will find DBPR’s Business Brief useful. I wish you all the success in your endeavors as we continue to make Florida the top destination for business.

A WORD FROM SECRETARY KEN LAWSON

Starting a new business can be a difficult endeavor, often with many uncertainties. But hard work, determination and the right tools can lead to great success. In the end, the journey and the lessons learned may prove to be equally as valuable as the result.

As Secretary of the Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation, I see how good business helps families everyday. When everyone has a chance to get a job, open a business, or create something in Florida, we all succeed. My top priority as Secretary has been to make opening and growing a business in Florida as easy as possible, and that starts with empowering each and every job creator.

After speaking with some of Florida’s top business leaders and small business owners, I’ve learned one thing: a single piece of good advice can go a long way. Opening a business can be an intimidating process, and that’s exactly why we put this book together. I want to share with you some of the career advice and professional stories, both good and bad, I’ve heard from some of the amazing people who make our state work. My hope is that the information here will help not only your business, but every business across our great state.
WORKING FOR YOUR OWN BUSINESS

Being self-employed or working for your own business can be one of the most rewarding experiences. These rewards are what drive individuals to become their own boss. See what DBPR licensees have to say about working for their own business.
WORKING FOR YOUR OWN BUSINESS

Some of the things DBPR licensees enjoy about working for their own business:

• The opportunity to pick and choose the clients or causes they are passionate about
• Watching employees grow and become successful
• Creating their own positive working environment for employees and customers
• Improving time management
• A commitment to the service(s) provided
• The opportunity to instill personal values into the company

In Their Own Words

“The freedom and flexibility of your own business is the best part.” - Ben S., Orlando, FL

“Being able to manage my time and set the philosophy and environment of my business and employees.” - Ramon A., Miami, FL

“The final outcome of a beautiful environment that you created for a client who is ecstatic with the end result. All the work has great rewards!” - Heddy Z., Naples, FL

“Helping families find their next, new home.” - Shirley B., Fort Pierce, FL

“It’s the guests I get to know and their families...I learned everything from parenting to networking.” - Shiela G., Weston, FL

“Everyday is a challenge, and no two days are similar. The need to call upon diverse skill sets is paramount in problem resolution and the satisfaction from achieving goals provides a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction.” - Steven C., Boca Raton, FL

“Having a team that is enthusiastic and supportive of each other. Everyone is well-informed and cross-trained, so they all appreciate the challenges of each persons individual job.”

- John Paul E., Naples, FL
“The organization was built with my own determination, sweat and perseverance. The mistakes are mine as well as the rewards.” - Lynn B., Sarasota, FL

“I am a working owner and I love being able to work the hours I want, accommodate as needed and provide what services and retail lines I choose, without having to get permission to have access to the spa.”

- Donna P., Daytona Beach, FL

“I like being able to help the small business person make sense of accounting and taxes, then watch them grow.” - Regina B., Kissimmee, FL

“I am the sole owner of my small business which is in its 29th year. As the owner, I have surrounded myself with the best and brightest, ensuured they know their job and they do it right the first time. I have flexibility and passion for my work.” - Edmund M., Coral Gables, FL

“Concentrating on being of service to the clients and not maximizing profits.” - Adrian S., Tampa, FL

“It is a great place to practice architecture.” - Natividad S., Coral Gables, FL

“In my current job as a director and member of a volunteer organization I have the ability to help others succeed in starting and running their businesses. This is a great feeling and I am pleased to be giving back to the small business community.” - Gene B., Flagler, FL

“CPAs can see many different businesses, industries and personalities. Most days can be quite different.”

- John S., Daytona Beach, FL

“In a small business, you touch every facet of the business. You can create your own destiny and corporate culture.”

- Lorraine B., Tampa FL

“The teamwork. I believe for you to be successful at an organization you have to have great teamwork. That is what I am grateful for.” - Shaquirra B., Hialeah, FL

“The constant productive exchange of ideas between all of the professionals.”

- Patricia M., Tavernier, FL
What are the most important decisions you make as a leader of your organization?

“Becoming familiar with all of my abilities, strive to sharpen and better the skills I am good at, and then learn to recognize who to delegate the ones I am not. I hire professionals to do those tasks, after that, I do not pick them back up, I trust the individuals I have selected however, I will follow their suggestions to the best of my ability.”

What’s the worst career mistake you’ve ever made and how have you learned from it?

“We all have skills that we are good at and others where we need to hire professionals. I am good at Marketing, but not so good at accounting, I should have hired a professional from the beginning to help me keep track of the policies I was selling.

Even now, due to the amount of policies that need to be reconciled monthly, I still do not have a completely accurate account of my clients. Since then I have hired an accountant who tracks the income and we are now able to manage if we see any discrepancies in the income per company.”

If you could share one piece of advice to someone aspiring to start their own business, what would it be and why?

“Your mission field is in your backyard” Become involved in your community’s non-profit organization, sports, child’s school, Rotary, Chambers etc. Volunteer your time, you will get to know many people, become the go-to person and eventually this will bring your company visibility, people will trust you and eventually will do business with you. It will not happen overnight but it will happen. Become your community “go-to Professional.”
If you could share one piece of advice to someone aspiring to start their own business, what would it be and why?

“Make a plan, network with the population you are targeting, and then execute your plan, despite the nay-sayers. A plan allows you to see your vision on paper and workout any details that may cause a logistical problem. Once you have your plan, you can reach out to the people you are serving: get feedback, find out their needs/wants, and decide how you can best serve them. Finally, make it happen! There are always going to be people who don’t understand your vision, and that is fine, but don’t let them slow you down.”

What are some of the major roadblocks you have faced along the way?

“A major roadblock has been my struggle with patience. You have to be patient to work every aspect of the process and watch it come together as a whole. For me, it was difficult to wait on the trademark process, saving to get the money to buy the equipment we needed, and so on. My wife and I started our business while each working our full time jobs in our career fields, raising our children, and planning for our future. We knew what we had to do to turn this vision into a business, but it took time and focus. The consistency and patience paid off, though it is a continuous learning process which is always requiring patience and humility.”

What are you doing to ensure you continue to grow and develop as a business?

“We are focusing on the feedback from the customers we work with in the strength training fields. We are a young business and have only just begun. It is important that we grow with our clients and our brand is something that the lifters want to be a part of. It is not a customer and provider relationship, it is an us relationship. We are a part of the population we serve and we are the brand. We hope to continue to grow by attending more events, increasing our inventory, and marketing to those in our lifting community.”
LESSONS LEARNED

As with anything, mistakes in business are inevitable. However, many of these mistakes turn into valuable lessons later on. This chapter is dedicated to highlighting and advising future business owners and professionals on the common mistakes most businesses face early on. Take a look at firsthand lessons learned by DBPR licensees working throughout the state.
LESSONS LEARNED

Here’s what DBPR business leaders are saying about the lessons they learned along the way:

• Not starting a business at a younger age

• Not taking advantage of continuing education

• Not doing enough targeted marketing

• Working with clients with questionable finances

• Assuming coworkers had the same morals and ethical standards

• Choosing security over passion

In Their Own Words

“Being too aggressive when managing employees. Take a team approach rather than leader/subordinate.”
- Philip P., Bushnell, FL

“My biggest mistake was not trusting my own judgement and relying on other’s views on market and professional events.”
- Bryan D., Naples, FL

“I felt like I had no choice but work for a large CPA firm directly out of college. I learned on the job experience was much more important to the actual tasks I would be performing as a CPA. I had high expectations of the firm and only stayed one year.”
- Kim S., Mount Dora, FL

“Working in a situation that put me in a position to choose between my moral compass and employment. I learned to always stick to your principles and if the need arises to stay true to yourself, to cut ties and start over.”
- Sebastian N., Bonita Springs, FL

“The worst mistake I made was thinking I could establish a client base quickly. I have learned patience is a necessary virtue, and building a client base takes time.”
- Shawn D., Orlando, FL
“Trying to hold yourself out as an expert in an area that you are not. Taking on a project that you lack expertise in can end up costing you more than the fees you received.” - Martin R., Aventura, FL

“Not reviewing a document thoroughly before mailing out. Of course I learned to have everything proofed before. - Dietta B., Dade City, FL

“I think the worst career mistake was not focusing on accurate service time. I have learned to control time in a more efficient way.” - Cristina M., Homestead, FL

“I went to work for a Big 8 Public Accounting firm that no longer exists, right out of college. At the time it looked good on my resumé and I got jobs afterward solely because of that. I now believe that I would have been happier and done much better with a smaller firm, where I would have had the chance to work on a variety of jobs instead of being pigeon-holed as an auditor in the health care field. The “upside” was that I learned what I did NOT want to do for the rest of my career.” - Lisa E., Miami, FL

“I didn’t realize soon enough in my career what my strengths were and how to capitalize on those strengths and start my own business. I have learned to work in my strengths and my business has grown faster than when I tried to be everything to everyone.” - Ben S., Orlando, FL

“Not starting a business at a younger age. The biggest risk is taking no risk at all.” - Jim W., Cape Coral, FL

“Working for a company longer than I should have. the management presented the company’s culture, needs and expectations differently during the interview then what the reality was. I learned to listen to my instincts because I wasn’t completely comfortable before accepting the job but thought it was just the nervousness of changing jobs.”

- Brandie S., Palm Bay, FL
What’s the worst career mistake you’ve ever made and how have you learned from it?

“I worked as an International Banker with American Express Bank (20 years) prior to going into my own business. With all my knowledge I went into a business I knew nothing about (The Beverage Industry). Although I eventually made the business successful, I could have succeeded much sooner if I had known the industry I went into investing my life savings.”

If you could share one piece of advice to someone aspiring to start their own business, what would it be and why?

“My advice is that you should not go into a business or career that you do not know very well, and this includes not just knowing the business but understanding the entire industry you are going into. For instance, you may decide that you want to become a real estate salesperson because you know that the commissions are substantial. But did you know that 80% of all new realtors who do not have great connections or great knowledge end up working somewhere else to make a living?

One final piece of advice to new business owners: STAY OUT OF DEBT. Except for real estate, my company has NEVER undertaken any debt. It may sound difficult but IT CAN BE DONE. Debt service may make it very difficult to build a business. Lenders can become your worst enemy.”

What are a few resources you would recommend to someone looking to gain insight into becoming a leader?

“Read Think and Grow Rich by Napoleon Hill. That’s all you’ll need to know. The rest are details.”

What are you doing to ensure you continue to grow and develop as a business?

“Give customers a little more than they expect. And never take your eye off the ball.”

ALVARO LOZANO
President, Interstate Beverage Corporation
What’s the worst career mistake you’ve ever made and how have you learned from it?

“Before founding Brightway with my brother, Michael Miller, I was out of college and working for a company that sold copiers. My mistake there was the disconnect I felt with my work. I didn’t believe in what I was doing. When I found myself in insurance shortly after, I realized that passion is essential for success. My first insurance job was with Liberty Mutual, and it was easy to see that the company truly cared about helping people. I felt connected to what they were doing, and was able to share that passion for helping people with my colleagues.

From then on, if I couldn’t see the benefit of what I was doing at work, I would stop and reevaluate. At the end of the day, your work should have a purpose, and if you’re passionate about that purpose and are connected to what you’re doing, you’ll lead yourself in the right direction.”

What are some of the major roadblocks you have faced along the way?

“I try to not think of any obstacles as road blocks, but opportunities. So many things that we face in life are really what we make of them. When you’re starting a business, even the smallest of issues pop up can make you doubt yourself. But what Michael and I did, and still do, is look at a difficult situation and think, “what can I do to turn this into a success, and what is the best way for me to reach a solution?” I think the biggest limitation we face in life is time. When you take advantage of the time you have and you check yourself to make sure you’re investing in areas where you can make a difference, the money falls into place. If you’re using your time wisely and investing in people who will work together, you can reach success in the most efficient way.”

What are you doing to ensure you continue to grow and develop as a business?

“At Brightway, we invest in our people. I learned early on in my career that you really are as good as your people, and when they are happy, other parts of the business will fall into place. We have an Operating Mandate at Brightway that says everything has to be a Win, Win, Win, or W3. That’s a win for our agents, a win for our employees and a win for our customers. If we can promise our people that they will be taken care of, and that they can come to work each day and find a family environment where they can feel comfortable, enjoying what they do, our service will remain untouched, and our customers will ultimately be satisfied.”
OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

With any new project or business endeavor, it’s impossible to predict the unknown. Roadblocks and obstacles present themselves, often at unexpected times. However, the response to these barriers can often determine a business’ success. The following chapter includes major career road blocks various Florida business leaders have faced during their time in the field.
OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

Some of the roadblocks DBPR licensees have faced include:

- Finding a balance between work and social life
- Not having a mentor to confide in
- Finding employees who are excited to be at work
- The proper allocation of time and budgeting
- Recognizing when it is time to make a change

In Their Own Words

“There are times when you must go without a paycheck in order to pay your staff to keep the business going forward.”  
- Edmund M., Coral Gables, FL

“People who would not promote me or give me the opportunity to show my designs and management skills.”  
- Brian B., Orange Park, FL

“Finding good, quality entry-level personnel to hire. Good personnel are necessary to grow.”  
- Robert J., Daytona Beach, FL

“There are never enough hours in the day to get everything done...”  
- Elisa A., Lake Worth, FL

“The biggest roadblock in getting started are the large commitments one has to make towards licensing, education, reference materials, etc. This can be very expensive prior to starting your own practice.”  
- Sebastain N., Bonita Springs, FL

“Being a smaller firm competing for larger projects has been difficult, especially with municipal clients, not so much with private clients.”  
- Rick G., West Palm Beach, FL

“The ability to find people who are reliable, conscientious and have a background in the entertainment industry in Florida. Any business is only as good as the people you hire.”  
- John Paul E., Naples, FL

“Changes in leadership above my position.”  
- Philip P., Bushnell, FL
OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

“Self-limiting due to a fear of the unknown coupled with failing to recognize opportunities when they arise.”
- Steven C., Boca Raton, FL

“Purchasing the business was a huge leap of faith. I had no prior business background or education on how to run a business. It has been a huge learning experience. I feel like I have learned from my colleagues and my mistakes along the way.”
- Kristen Z., Jacksonville, FL

“Finding people that actually want to work and are passionate about hair.”
- Yolanda E., Naples, FL

“Thinking things had to be perfect before I put them into place. Too much thinking and not enough action with new ideas.”
- Duane B., Tampa, FL

“Getting people to know that I opened my own company and I am still in the industry. Getting my name out there to the public.”
- Cathy C., Miami, FL

“Finding employees that you can trust and will do a good job.”
- Deneen F., Altamonte Springs, FL

“Reinventing my business every time the real estate market collapsed to adjust to the new way of doing business. After being in commercial real estate for 33 years, this has happened 3 times.”
- Marie-Jose G., Largo, FL

“Financing! Banks and lenders do not want to loan money to small businesses for fear they will not make it...My advice to you would be to make sure you are prepared to float your business for three years.”
- Kristina S., North Palm Beach, FL

“Working for organizations or managers that do not have strong...or defined ethics.”
- Renate S., Miami, FL
What are some of the major roadblocks you have faced along the way?

“There are too many to count. I have found that in an unusual way, I don’t want obstacles or roadblocks, but I’ve also found that they do a few things for you. One, if you are on the wrong path and something isn’t right, it is the flag to tell you that perhaps you made the wrong decision. But, it also helps you get on the right path. Secondly, I’ve learned about myself over the years that I rise to the occasion. We are really good at problem solving.”

What’s the worst career mistake you’ve ever made and how have you learned from it?

“Worst career mistake is that I should have started earlier in the business. At age 26 I jumped in with a passion, commitment and desire for the food industry – but that love began when I was a young teen. I tried other things but in my heart I knew where I was really supposed to be. My brother Chris and I have made a lot of mistakes over the years – it’s human nature, especially with what our experience level was when we opened our first Firehouse Subs® on October 10, 1994. We wouldn’t change a single thing because what we have done well is that we are quick learners and have learned from every obstacle. How we reacted to those mistakes has molded our company and set us on the path that we are on.”

What was the hardest part about starting your business?

“The hardest part is starting. For more than 10 years, Chris and I thought about our business, talked about it and dreamed about it. It’s just difficult to start because there are so many things that can drag you down – the unknown, not having all the answers or not having all the money. There were more reasons not to do it than there were to do it.”

ROBIN SORENSEN
Co-Founder, Firehouse Subs
If you could share one piece of advice to someone aspiring to start their own business, what would it be and why?

“Surround yourself not only with smart people, but with those who are as passionate as you are in accomplishing the company’s vision. Building a sustaining and growing business is hard work and can only be accomplished with a committed team working together toward the same goal. Having everyone “believe” in what you are doing is a key component to future success.”

What are the most important decisions you make as a leader of your organization?

“The most important decisions the leader of any technology company makes have to do with creating a culture within the organization that is responsive to their customers and clearly conveying that corporate commitment to the marketplace. Developing an innovative product line that is not complex and meets customers desires, will chart the path to success.”

What are you doing to ensure you continue to grow and develop as a business?

“Innovate and create by focusing on your customer while providing the best service possible. Remember--it is always about the customer! Capture and analyze as much data as you can in regard to your business so you are prepared to address not only market trends but the obstacles you will surely face. Analyze and be aware of your competition.”

KAY STEPHENSON
President and CEO, Datamaxx Group, Inc.
LEADERSHIP & DECISION-MAKING

When you take on the role of business owner, you are presented with important and challenging choices. Strong leadership can empower your staff, customers and community to succeed. The next few pages will give you an overview of the leadership skills and decisions made by owners of a business.
LEADERSHIP & DECISION-MAKING

Here’s what DBPR licensees are saying about the different decisions they’ve made as business leaders:

• Generating a target market
• Finding ways to keep employees motivated and working toward business goal
• Establishing the direction of the company
• Creating a safe job site
• Providing employees with the essential tools to be successful

In Their Own Words

“Decide what jobs to take, who to decline, which purchases to make or not make and keep the cash flow moving and profitable.” - David P., Palm Beach Gardens, FL

“How we will market to continue to get clients is perhaps the most important decision for our organization.” - Rob W., Tampa, FL

“The decision to delegate jobs to others and free my time up to focus on my strengths and running the business.” - Ben S., Orlando, FL

“The welfare and happiness of my employees, subcontractors and clients is key. All decisions are related to making sure everyone is taken care of.” - Susan H., Tampa, FL

“Trying to make every customer satisfied and confident when they leave.” - Yolanda E., Naples, FL

“Some decisions I make as a leader are organizing my department and providing additional seminars for the students to be competitive with new trends.” - Cristina M., Homestead, FL

“Making the decision to expand the organization to the next level.” - Barbara K., Seminole, FL

“Strategic direction of the company. How to utilize company resources to maximize return on investments.” - Virginia Y., Pensacola, FL

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LEADERSHIP & DECISION-MAKING

“Choosing which computer software and hardware to use.”
- Judith C., Oakland Park, FL

“When and how to terminate an employee or a business relationship.”
- Edmund M., Coral Gables, FL

“All decisions you make in a business are important and could mean a change for the best or worst throughout your business endeavor.”
- Ramon A., Miami, FL

“Being decisive - good enough is good enough. The willingness to change is key.”
- Bryan D., Naples, FL

“How to schedule everyone’s time. Knowing when to stop doing everything myself and allow others to make mistakes.”
- Bruce M., Williston, FL

“Ensuring that the sales team abides by the rules and regulations of the Real Estate Industry and maintains the integrity of our profession.”
- Daksha V., Winter Springs, FL

“Decisions that become the solutions to client problems.”
- Frank A., Tampa, FL

“Establishing and managing budgets in a way that is attainable while moving the company forward in terms of revenue and potential structural issues. Properly coordinating projects with the staff so everyone is on board and on task.”
- Marie-Jose G., Largo, FL

“The most important decisions you make are your image and how well you want other people to see you. Stick with it, be consistent and don’t let anyone try and change it.”
- Channon J., Panama City, FL

“Picking the right people who fit in with the team. Personality is just as important as experience. This is a relationship business between both clients and co-workers.”
- John Paul E., Naples, FL
What’s the worst career mistake you’ve ever made and how have you learned from it?

“My worst career mistake was not doing enough research on another company prior to building a partnership with them. I now complete a thorough research on any company I will have my firm affiliated with.”

If you could share one piece of advice to someone aspiring to start their own business, what would it be and why?

“Don’t be afraid to take risks. The individuals who continuously prosper, are those that are not afraid of taking risks.”

What are the most important decisions you make as a leader of your organization?

“Everything! Every part of my day-to-day decisions are for the good of the company.”

What are a few resources you would recommend to someone looking to gain insight into becoming a leader?

“Find a mentor in your field of interest. They can show you the way and prevent you from making unnecessary mistakes.”
FEATURED FLORIDIAN

What are the most important decisions you make as a leader of your organization?

“One of my clients, about 20 years ago, recommended that I keep my business small. I have followed that advice and to this day have done all of the work myself instead of sub-contracting out work to be performed by others for my clients. The benefits are that my clients know that all work will be done by me, with my level of experience and expertise instead of by someone with less experience or knowledge, and I reap the benefits of not having to share my income with subcontractors. It benefits me from both a quality control and income standpoint.”

If you could share one piece of advice to someone aspiring to start their own business, what would it be and why?

“Do a careful analysis of expenses and expected income and have a plan to supplement your income while your business grows.”

What are a few resources you would recommend to someone looking to gain insight into becoming a leader?

“Find someone in the field you would like to enter and ask them to mentor you; read everything you can about the philosophy of leaders whose principles you respect and feel have been successful for them; volunteer your services at first to gain experience and references and seek opportunities for leadership training to build your leadership abilities; join a professional organization in your field and learn leadership skills by being an active member of that organization.”

What are you doing to ensure you continue to grow and develop as a business?

“In the past 15 years, major changes have taken place which have dramatically changed the way public relations professionals work. A few of these changes include the advent of e-mail, news websites, “citizen journalism,” the shrinking of daily newspapers, a 24-hour news cycle, cable news networks and social media, where “news” is often shared through unofficial channels. It has been imperative as a public relations professional to keep abreast of these developments and changes in order to stay in the forefront and still be effective in finding ways to get the news related to my clients to the audiences they seek to inform and influence. I maintain close relationships with the media, do whatever is needed (as always) to meet my clients’ needs, and have learned how to effectively incorporate social media and other internet-based communication methods into my overall public relations efforts.”
PERSONAL & PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

Whether it's taking continuing education courses or improving your time management skills, there are a number of opportunities to continue growing as the leader of a business. See what licensees have done to continue to learn and advance in their career field.
PERSONAL & PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

DBPR professionals grow both personally and professionally by:

• Taking seminars and classes
• Being open to different opinions and suggestions
• Staying current with new technology trends
• Networking constantly
• Continuing to educate oneself

In Their Own Words

“Study from those who are where I want to be in life.” - Stefan B., Sarasota, FL

“Continue to put myself in challenging situations that require responsible decision-making and remember my humble beginnings.” - Philip H., St. Petersburg, FL

“Take educational courses and certifications, read trade articles, keep up with economic trends, participate in team/individual sports and observe successful people in other industries.” - Marie-Josee G., Largo, FL

“Provide staff the freedom to make mistakes. Allow staff to progressively advance to ever-more challenging tasks.” - Jim W., Cape Coral, FL

“Stay current on all laws and regulations.” - Michael M., Boynton Beach, FL

“Concentration on being of service, being honest and improving effective communications.”
- Adrian S., Tampa, FL

“Invest in myself - personally and professionally.”
- Bryan D., Naples, FL

“Try to be involved in life outside of work. Be involved in family, community and employee’s lives as much as you can.” - Chris F., Clearwater, FL

“Constantly changing and improving my work methods, marketing and communications skills.”
- Brian B., Orange Park, FL
"I am constantly talking to others in my field to find out how they handle certain situations. I research skills and how to implement those skills to be an effective leader. I have read several books on leadership and management." - **Brandie S., Palm Bay, FL**

"I spend time with many professional, charitable and civic organizations to keep building friendships and relationships both in a professional and personal capacity." - **Sebastian N., Bonita Springs, FL**

**“Sharing enthusiasm in development of skills sets, effective listening, clearly establish attainable objectives and constantly seeking out the wisdom of others.”**

- **Steven C., Boca Raton, FL**

"Providing complete satisfaction to the owners we represent and the tenants, contractors and vendors we work with. Good relationships are paramount." - **Edmund M., Coral Gables, FL**

"Listen to clients and employees. Their input will help." - **Jeff C., Merritt Island, FL**

"I listen to multiple podcasts on leadership and personal development because it is with these skills that I am able to grow and develop as a leader. You also need to work on yourself, meaning, making sure you have a balance of work and fun time and keeping up with your health." - **Ben S., Orlando, FL**

"Be consistent and professional.” - **Marjorie R., Clearwater, FL**

"In order to continue to grow and develop as a leader I must understand the needs of my customers and associates. I must listen, learn and communicate.” - **Renate S., Miami, FL**

"I am continually reading on developments in the industry and whenever possible, attending industry functions, networking and listening to peers and colleagues.” - **John Paul E., Naples, FL**

"I have been in a mentoring group and continue to read business books and blogs written by thought leaders.” - **Duane B., Tampa, FL**
What are the most important decisions you make as a leader of your organization?

“We take every decision very personally. When you are insuring such a large number of families every decision that affects our continuity and the security of the people that have entrusted their families’ protection with our company, every decision that insures this continuity is important.”

If you could share one piece of advice to someone aspiring to start their own business, what would it be and why?

“Well it’s a “cliché”, but persistence really pays off. All businesses will have ups and downs, particularly at the beginning. As long as you believe in what you are doing and “weather the storms” you will have a great opportunity to be successful.”

What are some of the major roadblocks you have faced along the way?

“Our major road blocks have been educating the markets where we offer our products. Helping to create a conscious need for the right insurance product for your business or your family.”

What are a few resources you would recommend to someone looking to gain insight into becoming a leader?

“Personally I believe you either are a leader or you are not. I will say a good leader “listens” first, always, and asks the opinions of trusted individuals before he makes any decisions.”

What are you doing to ensure you continue to grow and develop as a business?

“We are constantly looking to be innovative both in product offerings as well as customer service. We feel that personalized service is what sets us apart from our competitors.”

ANTHONY SIERRA

President and CEO, BMI Companies
What are you doing to ensure you continue to grow and develop as a business?

“More than 25 years after opening our doors, I am still constantly listening to motivational and educational information. It is very easy to drift away from your plans, lose focus or get complacent. So, you have to always be growing and dreaming and looking for ways to improve. We have built a workplace focused on lifelong learning and motivation, which has been vital to the company’s growth despite market fluctuations and economic uncertainties. The business world is constantly changing, so we always try to learn, adjust and grow with it.”

What are a few resources you would recommend to someone looking to gain insight into starting a business?

“Owning a business in Northeast Florida allows access to plenty of resources provided through the Jacksonville Chamber of Commerce. The JaxChamber is a good place to learn the ins and outs of starting and growing a business on the First Coast. Programs like GrowJAX and the Small Business Center are ideal for entrepreneurs looking for guidance. Also, the Jacksonville Women’s Business Center is a great place for female business owners to find information, support and resources on anything from capital funding to networking.”

If you could share one piece of advice to someone aspiring to start a new business, what would it be and why?

“As a business owner, no matter what industry or field you’re in, you must be in sales. You may not think so, but your business will depend on you promoting it all the time. This makes it essential that you believe in what you are doing and tell everyone who will listen. Top executives and successful entrepreneurs all over the world share this vision. They believe strongly in what they do and they are constantly selling.”

SHERRY DAVIDSON

President, Davidson Realty, Inc.
GENERAL GUIDANCE

Owning a business will present you with a number of general challenges. In the following chapter, you will find recommendations from Florida licensees that they believe are most important when starting a business.
GENERAL GUIDANCE

Some general advice from DBPR licensees:

• Having some basic business knowledge prior to starting a business
• Treating your staff and clients with respect
• Maintaining adequate records
• Not sacrificing your ethics
• Having capital to last the first two years

In Their Own Words

“Pick something that excites you everyday where you can provide a service or product that brings value to other people.” - Karen B., Indian River Shores, FL

“Be sure your business plan allows you to grow at your own pace. Do not model your plan after successful businesses that have been in business for years. You must grow one step at a time. Make sure your current stage is solid and doing well before you add the next stage.” - Renate S., Miami, FL

“Be prepared to fail and embrace the opportunities failure provides. Always seek out goals that are beyond reach and recognize failure is part of the learning process.” - Steven C., Boca Raton, FL

“Treat your staff and clients like gold. Remember it’s never about you, it’s about the team!” - Gina H., Lake Mary, FL

“Stay true to yourself and do not let the desires of others take away from who you really are or what you want your business to be.” - James S., Lakewood Ranch, FL

“Evaluate the area where you are looking to start a business and evaluate the need for your services. This will only make you more successful if you aren’t putting yourself in a position to have to fight the competition.” - Ashley K., Bradenton, FL
“Whatever you do, do it with the utmost integrity. You may not make as much money as others who take short cuts, but you will always sleep better at night. At the end of the day your reputation is the single most important asset you have.”
- John Paul E., Naples, FL

“Don’t be afraid. If you have the knowledge and ability you will do well. I have found that if I do a good job for my clients and treat subcontractors with respect, then they will refer you to new and wonderful clients.”
- Wanda R., Tequesta, FL

“Don’t wait until you think you are ready. Once you’ve done your homework and the pieces fit, it is easy to let doubt creep in. Be willing to do whatever it takes to make your dream become a reality. If it is your passion, it will happen.”
- Karen S., Jacksonville, FL

“Seek advice of those successful in the industry for they will freely share their experiences, strengths and hopes.”
- Adrian S., Tampa, FL

“Since I’ve just started my own business and am still learning, my advice would be to make sure it is what you really want to do and understand the pros and cons of being self-employed.”
- Brandie S., Palm Bay, FL

“Open a new bank account for your new business and run all of your financial transactions through it. This will help you separate personal finances from business finances and will allow you to measure your business’ financial results clearly.”
- George T., North Lauderdale, FL
If you could share one piece of advice to someone aspiring to start their own business, what would it be and why?

“Be willing to venture outside of your comfort zone. Failure is never fatal, but giving up is. I do not know anyone who succeeded in business who did not get pushed back or knocked down somewhere along the way. The secret to success is the ability to get back up and learn from your failures, this is what distinguishes the success stories in business. You learn more from failure than you ever do from success.”

What’s the worst career mistake you’ve ever made and how have you learned from it?

“Early in my legal career, I thought that being a great technical lawyer was what clients wanted, so that was the skill set I focused on developing. I could spot any potential issue with a transaction, but I did not have the answers to solve these potential issues. Clients did not appreciate that I could find all the potential problems, but then had no idea how to solve them. This issue caused many potential clients to not want to use me as their lawyer. I realized quickly that my legal career would be short lived if this continued. I decided that clients liked practical lawyers, who understood their businesses; lawyers who would find practical and effective solutions to their problems. I sought out lawyers who knew how to offer practical solutions and learned their techniques for solving problems. In short, I became the technical and practical lawyer that clients needed and wanted on their side when they had legal and business problems.”

What are some of the major roadblocks you have faced along the way?

“Discrimination, self-doubt and not setting large enough goals for success. Most of these are all related to my background as a Cuban immigrant who could not speak a word of English when I first arrived in the United States at age 13. Even in my earliest days as a successful lawyer, I did not quite feel like I belonged. It is why throughout my career I have been a champion for diversity and vowed that no one I worked with would ever encounter the kind of blatant discrimination that I faced at times early in my career.”
What are the most important decisions you make as a leader of your organization?

“To drive a top performing organization, you must operate with a balcony view. Leaders focus on people. Hire and retain great talent. Human capital is our most critical resource. Have the courage to identify rising stars and grow them within the organization. Provide talent development that is consistent with their career aspirations and never accept an environment of mediocrity. At ISC, I have been fortunate to surround myself with good people and that approach trickles down.”

If you could share one piece of advice to someone aspiring to start their own business, what would it be and why?

“You may have the most incredible idea for a product or service, but without knowing the market, evaluating its potential, and having a roadmap for execution, success will be hard to attain. One word that spells it out – plan. You must document and articulate a realistic business plan, keeping in mind relative conservatism. Know your demographic and customer targets. Seek independent advice – learn what you don’t know. Be well-resourced. And don’t focus on overnight success.”

What are you doing to ensure you continue to grow and develop as a business?

“Everything we do within our organization is rooted from our strategic plan. We project into the future. Motorsports is fast and furious and you have to remain ahead of the curve. We align our organization accordingly. The key is to reinvest in your core business, and for us, that is the fan experience.”
ABOUT THE BUSINESSES FEATURED

The information contained here would not have been possible without the help of some truly great Florida businesses owners and DBPR licensees. Although some of the businesses may operate nationwide or globally, each has a special impact on the state of Florida.
Wordsmith Communications
Wordsmith Communications is a public relations consulting firm with Margie Yansura operating it as a sole proprietorship since 1990 in West Palm Beach, FL. During the past 25 years, she has provided highly effective public relation services to a broad array of clients including large and small businesses, governmental entities, and non-profit businesses. She can be reached at 561-313-5028 or at mywordsmith@bellsouth.net.

Firehouse Subs
Firehouse Subs® is a fast casual restaurant chain with a passion for Hearty and Flavorful Food, Heartfelt Service and Public Safety. Founded by brothers and former firefighters Chris Sorensen and Robin Sorensen, Firehouse Subs is a brand built on decades of fire and police service, steaming hot subs piled higher with the highest quality meats and cheeses, and its commitment to saving lives through the creation of Firehouse Subs Public Safety Foundation®. The founders are the real deal, the food is their creation, and the company is built upon a family of franchise operators who share their same passion for serving others. In 2014, Firehouse Subs debuted nationwide a new low-calorie menu, Under 500 Calories. Firehouse Subs consistently ranks No. 1 among fast casual brands in the categories of food quality, friendly service, and taste and flavor. In 2015, Firehouse Subs was ranked No. 1 consumer choice for welcoming and comfortable atmosphere by Technomic’s 2015 Chain Restaurant Consumers’ Choice Awards, and the brand produced the second-fastest growth in U.S. franchise units as ranked by Nation's Restaurant News.

Davidson Realty, Inc.
For more than 25 years, Davidson Realty, Inc. has been a leader in Northeast Florida real estate, marketing and selling residential and commercial properties in Jacksonville, St. Augustine and surrounding areas. The firm has been recognized as one of the area's 50 Fastest Growing Companies and Best Places to Work by Jacksonville Business Journal, and one of Florida's Best Companies to Work For by Florida Trend magazine. Davidson Realty boasts more than 50 Realtors with a variety of client-focused specialties from Certified Distressed Property Experts to multi-lingual agents. The firm's sister companies include Davidson Property Management, Davidson Development, Davidson Referral Network and non-profit foundation Davidson Cares.

Brightway Insurance
Brightway Insurance is the nation’s seventh largest privately held Personal Lines independent insurance agency and the 117th largest privately held for-profit company with headquarters in Florida. The company began franchising operations in 2008 and operates more than 115 franchise locations in about ten states. In 2015, the company was listed as America’s No. 1 Franchise to buy by Forbes in the under $150k category, and named a Top 500 Franchise by Entrepreneur magazine for the second year in a row.
International Speedway Corporation

International Speedway Corporation is a leading promoter of motorsports activities, currently promoting more than 100 racing events annually as well as numerous other motorsports-related activities. The Company owns and/or operates 13 of the nation’s major motorsports entertainment facilities, including Daytona International Speedway® in Florida (home of the DAYTONA 500®); Talladega Superspeedway® in Alabama; Michigan International Speedway® located outside Detroit; Richmond International Raceway® in Virginia; Auto Club Speedway of Southern CaliforniaSM near Los Angeles; Kansas Speedway® in Kansas City, Kansas; Phoenix International Raceway® in Arizona; Chicagoland Speedway® and Route 66 RacewaySM near Chicago, Illinois; Homestead-Miami SpeedwaySM in Florida; Martinsville Speedway® in Virginia; Darlington Raceway® in South Carolina; and Watkins Glen International® in New York.

The Company also owns and operates Motor Racing NetworkSM, the nation’s largest independent sports radio network, and Americrown Service CorporationSM, a subsidiary that provides catering services, food and beverage concessions. In addition, the Company has a 50 percent interest in the Hollywood Casino at Kansas Speedway. For more information, visit the Company’s website at www.InternationalSpeedwayCorporation.com.

BMI Financial Group

BMI Financial Group is a Hispanic, family-owned group of insurance companies with over 40 years of experience, strong presence and a history of success in the area of financial services in Latin America and the Caribbean. BMI offers a broad portfolio of high-level quality products with worldwide coverage that includes life insurance, health insurance, disability insurance, investment products, travel assistance and reinsurance. It has an A- (Excellent) Rating by the independent global credit rating agency A.M. BEST.

BMI operates with offices in 18 different markets, including Asia, as well as insurance carriers in the United States, Grand Cayman, Ecuador, Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Colombia, Peru and Nicaragua. Today, the Miami-based company is a global leader in its field with over a 1 million clients in Latin America, the Caribbean, Europe and Asia. BMI is currently one of Ward’s 50 Top Performing Life and Health Insurers in the USA and is one of the Top 100 insurance companies in the USA of 2015 according to National Underwriter Life and Health Magazine, and it has a favorable financial condition compared to the 25 largest insurance companies in the US according to the independent analyst company Standard Analytical Services.

Rosie Paulsen Enterprises LLC

Rosie Paulsen is a public speaker, Hispanic leader and expert in insurance. She holds educational seminars on healthcare, the Hispanic market and entrepreneurship. As the owner of Rosie Paulsen Enterprises LLC, Rosie provides consulting services to entrepreneurs ready to take their business to the next level.
AMG, The Gordon Law

The Gordon Law Firm is a personal injury law firm located in central Florida. The firm was founded by Alexandria M. Gordon (AMG) and has a staff comprised with over a century of experience litigating for clients. While the firm is located in Orlando, FL, Gordon takes on cases throughout the entire state. In addition to the people they serve, the Gordon Law Firm is passionate about serving the Florida community. The firm has created a committee of partners, associates, and staff members who are involved in various charitable causes and organizations. This committee is responsible for coordinating charitable activities for the firm to participate in throughout the year.

Alexandria Gordon is an expert in her field. Gordon has handled thousands of injury cases throughout the duration of her career. She is a member of the Florida Bar’s Young Lawyer’s Division and serves as a panelist for the ACLU Central Florida Chapter. In 2016, Gordon was recognized as one of the 10 Black Women Lawyers You Should Know by Black Enterprise.

Interstate Beverage Corporation

In June 1988, Interstate Softdrink Corporation was opened for business by Alvaro and Betty Lozano. They began servicing South Florida with only one product line. Steadily, their hard work and dedication to customer service began to pay off and Interstate started representing other Hispanic brands. As the Hispanic market has grown in the US, so has Interstate Beverage Corporation. In October 1993, The Miami Herald named Interstate Softdrink Corporation the Small Business Pacesetter Winner. In 1999, the Ambassador line of sodas was born to target the Colombian consumer. Since then, the Ambassador line has added new flavors and presentations to cater to a wider audience.

Presently, Ambassador can be found in countless restaurants and bakeries and in major supermarket chains in South Florida (i.e. Publix, Winn-Dixie, Sedano’s, etc.), as well as North Carolina, Colorado, Texas, California, the Caribbean and Europe. Interstate stocks over 400 different products and handles exclusively Frica nectars from Venezuela, Alqueria products from Colombia, Coco coconut water from Thailand and carries category leaders such as Snapple, Gatorade, Coke and Pepsi, Goya, India Beverages, Malta Hatuey, Jarritos, Arizona, Materva, Jupiña, Crystal Geyser, and many more. Today with a fleet of trucks, a team of dedicated bi-lingual professionals and a 30,000 square foot facility, Interstate Beverage Corporation is ready to service your beverage needs with a full line of brands, excellent customer care and competitive prices.

Greenberg Traurig, LLP

Greenberg Traurig, LLP is an international, multi-practice law firm with approximately 1,900 attorneys serving clients from 38 offices in the United States, Latin America, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. The firm is the 3rd largest law firm in the U.S. with 1,608 attorneys in the U.S. and 1,800 attorneys worldwide. More information can be found on their website at: www.gtlaw.com.

The Greenberg Traurig Miami office was founded in 1967 by attorneys with a business-focused approach and a tradition of community service. Since that time, the Miami office has actively supported
and helped drive South Florida’s growth as an international financial and cultural center, serving as a gateway between the United States, Latin America, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. In the community, the office is well-known for its “Miami Roots, Global Reach.” The attorneys advise local, national, and international companies in numerous industries and sectors, including aviation, entertainment, financial institutions, health care, international trade and customs, labor and employment, manufacturing, real estate, retail, and technology. In Florida, Greenberg Traurig serves clients from across seven offices in Boca Raton, Fort Lauderdale, Miami, Orlando, Tallahassee, Tampa, and West Palm Beach.

Barbaric Barbell
In 2014, Kyle Rojas started Barbaric Barbell in Tallahassee, Florida to create a lifestyle brand for strength athletes, like himself. Kyle served in the U.S. Marines from 2005-2010 where he developed a dedication to strength training that motivated him to create a brand of apparel and goods that represent the strength training population. Barbaric Barbell is proud to be a Florida grown and veteran-owned business.

Datamaxx Group, Inc.
Datamaxx Group, Inc. (Datamaxx), was founded in 1991 and is headquartered in Tallahassee, FL. It is one of the largest providers of advanced communications, data access, information sharing, enterprise intelligence, and access control solutions to the law enforcement, criminal justice, public safety, and security industries. With more than 750,000 end users worldwide, Datamaxx provides technology solutions to more than 70 percent of the criminal justice information market with such distinguished customers as the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the New York City Police Department, and the U.S. Department of State.

Datamaxx formulated industry-first strategic partnerships, including the first company to become a Strategic Partner Organization of Nlets (The International Justice & Public Safety Network). Datamaxx has the unique ability to utilize the Nlets network infrastructure to provide secure critical information access to every local, state, and federal law enforcement, justice and public safety agency. The Datamaxx Secure Cloud™ boasts a number of local, state and federal customers. It became the first CJIS-compliant private cloud in 2003, and is now used nationally by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management and supports a world-wide deployment for the U.S. Department of State, providing every U.S. Embassy access to CJIS data.

The stellar achievements of Datamaxx have been recognized through awards such as the Florida Governor’s Business Ambassador Award, Florida Governor’s Business Leadership Award, New York City Wireless Project of the Year Awards, IACP Excellence in Technology Award, and Entrepreneurial Excellence Award – just to name a few. In addition, Datamaxx has been named one of the Top Women-Led Businesses in the state of Florida every year since 2007.
When it comes to starting a business, it’s important to have all the resources available to use. This chapter is dedicated to helping future business owners seek out the best resources. Read about some of the resources DBPR licensees have used to become successful.
Included in the chart below are resource recommendations and website links to help assist new business owners and potential licensees:

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The Department of Business and Professional Regulation licenses and regulates more than one million Florida businesses and professionals, from real estate agents, veterinarians and accountants to contractors and cosmetologists.

DBPR’s mission is to license efficiently and regulate fairly.

www.myfloridalicense.com