Articles

Small Business Institute® (SBI) Projects and Awards: Career Viewpoints of Two Entrepreneurs Now in Academia

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Keywords: Careers, Impact, Conferences, Awards, Academia

<https://doi.org/10.53703/001c.32462>

Small Business Institute Journal

Vol. 18, Issue 1, 2022

The impact of professional organizations is well known, and in this paper, we focus on the Small Business Institute® (SBI), initially formed out of a federal Small Business Administration (SBA) grant program. Through its evolution, the SBI has remained a steady resource for faculty and administrators to learn and be rewarded for efforts involving hands-on student projects. The organization rewards research and practice revolving around the importance of community engagement and assistance to entrepreneurs and the small business community. We look at two careers that the Small Business Institute has impacted through the eyes of a professor and SBI Director, former SBI Project student contributor, now entrepreneur and part-time faculty member. They used her experience to start a successful business. Implications for careers are discussed.

Introduction

Academics soon learn during their Ph.D. programs that conferences are an essential part of their development. Conferences provide learning opportunities, networking, future collaboration possibilities and increase an academic's name recognition and reputation. There is an ever-increasing number of conferences in every discipline and specialization. However, as Kumar & Krueger (2012) point out, academic conferences are not without their flaws. For example, while there are excellent networking opportunities in entrepreneurship, the conferences do not include practicing entrepreneurs. Therefore, learning is limited. Likewise, academics are not present at practitioner conferences. There are four main reasons for this disconnect: lack of outreach by practitioner organizations to academics, practitioner organizations focus on short-term issues rather than long-term issues that require research, higher education institutions (HEIs) do not give credit for non-academic conferences towards tenure and promotion, and HEIs do not reimburse academics to attend practitioner conferences (Kumar, 2011). While there need to be interactions between the academic and practitioner worlds and changes in the HEI reward systems, conferences still play a role.

Conference formats vary widely. The internet has catapulted the number of conferences that are being held online. With COVID-19, almost all conferences worldwide transitioned to an online format. While some meetings promise a face-to-face format in the future, some consider remaining online permanently, and others are going to a hybrid model. While the efficacy of each form has not been compared from a career standpoint, conferences will remain an integral part of career development.

The Impact of Conferences

The impact of conferences as a pathway to career development and the positive effects have been examined across disciplines. Academic career development "is the process by which employers, as well as scholars working in research, teaching, or administrative roles in academic and higher education contexts, manage various tasks, behaviors, and experiences within and across jobs and organizations over time, with implications for scholars' work-related identity" (Zacher et al., 2019, p. 357). A review article on academic career development categorized research articles into themes: individual characteristics, contextual career factors, active opportunities, stages of career, and roles divided into nonwork and work (Zacher et al., 2019). The article is based on categorization using social cognitive career theory and life-span theory as a framework. The authors found that important topics included women's experiences, mentoring, other interventions in the career development area, and specifically career development in the medical field (Zacher et al., 2019).

In career development, authors evaluated the impact of participating in a career development conference for academics in their early- to mid-career. The authors found that participating in the conference led to increased outputs such as publications, research projects, grants, improved collaborations, and presentations (DeRosier et al., 2013). This finding was particularly factual for women. Women perceive less sexism at conferences when there is a greater representation of women than men (Biggs et al., 2018). In a study of over 300 participants across three U.S. national conferences, women who perceived a conference as sexist and felt silenced also were more apt to have increased intentions to leave academia. While men perceived sexism at a conference, they had higher intentions of not returning

to a conference but not from their academic careers (Biggs et al., 2018). Thus, the conference climate is integral to the participation and, therefore, the career advancement of women scholars. Suggestions on making conferences more inclusive are outlined, including having women in leadership positions at all conference levels and how an organization explicitly sends signals of inclusiveness.

Research productivity is directly related to reputation and future promotions for academics. Li et al. (2013) suggest that conferences increase research impact and productivity by expanding their interactions with prolific scholars. By participating in conferences, academics network and meet other authors and gain connections, and connection formation is more likely than interactions with regular colleagues (Moody, 2004). In a study looking at the role of conferences on academic impact, the finding showed that after presenting a paper at an academic conference, its changes being cited increased by five percent. The study concluded that in-person interactions, even in the short term, are effective in knowledge dissemination (de Leon & McQuillin, 2020).

The case study used the American Political Science Association Annual Meeting cancellation because of Hurricane Isaac in 2012 as a natural experiment to compare over 29,000 papers. Results showed that a conference increases visibility, even in the short run, indicated by the number of working paper downloads. After two years, paper citations increased three percentage points and, after four years, by five percentage points (de Leon & McQuillin, 2020). The authors found the most impact of conferences for those with low to intermediate experience and a lower profile. The benefit of conference attendance and presentations appears to come from a maturing effect. For high experience, high profile authors, the impact is more of an “advertisement” to further citations (de Leon & McQuillin, 2020). In either case, the social interactions generated from conferences have an enduring impact on careers. The findings indicate that face-to-face conferences still have a significant role in knowledge dissemination and understanding despite the accessibility of papers on the internet (Agrawal & Goldfarb, 2008; Ding et al., 2010).

In this article, we explore the impact of the Small Business Institute, the Small Business Institute Annual Conference, and the two publications of the Small Business Institute: *The Journal of Small Business Strategy* and the *SBI Journal* on the careers of two women on different paths. In addition, we make recommendations for the future of the organization.

Personal Views

Entrepreneur and Professor

I attended my first Small Business Institute Directors' Association (SBIDA) Conference in 1989 due to the generosity of Dr. Leo Simpson. He founded and directed the SBIDA Program at Eastern Washington University. Through a Congressional appropriation, the Small Business Administration (SBA), the Small Business Innovation Development Act, established programs at universities and colleges across the United States to assist small business startups and early-stage businesses (See Cook, 1999; Matthews,

1998). The student and professor have a luncheon and then \$200.00 per project in the pilot program. For each project, a student team helped the small business. The university program would initially receive in the pilot phase \$200.00; over time, it went up to \$500.00 per project (Leo Simpson, personal communication, May 10, 2021). The SBA Regional office administered the program and allocated real small business projects that needed assistance to the universities and colleges. Over time, these programs proliferated and trained thousands of students with first-hand experience in small business development and, at the same time, effectively assisted thousands of small businesses to succeed from 1982-1993 (<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2002-09-24/html/02-24026.htm>). Dollar for dollar, it was one of the most successful small business development programs in the United States history. It also promoted experiential learning (Cook, 1999; Matthews, 1998).

The SBI focus on experiential learning is a natural fit for my background as an entrepreneur myself and an entrepreneur's child. Holden Edward Welsh created the first soft-sided luggage that we all use today from a sporting goods line, Boyt Luggage. Boyt Division of Welsh Sporting Goods was born out of the bankruptcy of the Boyt Company, started by two brothers from England in 1901. I worked from the time I was seven years old. I began by sweeping factory floors on Saturdays and later worked in sales, the shipping department, and upstairs production, cutting threads from the finished product. My family was smart enough never to put me on a sewing machine! I paid my way partially through college by visiting luggage and sporting goods stores around the University of Iowa in Iowa City and selling on commission, which included using a company car-1972 Buick Skylark, V-8, bright orange with black racing stripes and black bucket seats!

I launched the Ice Cream Castle in Emporia, Kansas, during my master's degree. After graduation with my Ph.D., I partially owned a hotel on the Oregon coast and two consulting businesses, which one remains. I work with universities and colleges to start and maintain successful cross-disciplinary programs on campus, deliver workshops, and work with family businesses and franchises worldwide. Over the years, I have published articles from the data gathered through these hands-on projects. The SBI program is a natural fit for my experiential background as an academic entrepreneur. Table 1 summarizes the 15 project awards won by our student teams with the leadership of the Project Director and the SBI Director. I have served as the SBI Director for the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) since 2009 and started the program. I have been the SBI Director at two previous institutions where I held endowed chairs, John Carroll University and The University of Tampa. The students are the real winners, with the plethora of experience gained from the projects. The AACSB now has category nine, experiential learning and community engagement, and these projects fit perfectly into this category as a demonstration for the business school of this activity.

In addition to the project awards that have been shared with the students and project directors, I have been honored with numerous other awards that have positively impacted my career and reflect the learning experiences I have gained through SBI. These include the Homer Sanders Men-

Table 1. Dianne H. B. Welsh Small Business Institute Awards and Positions

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- A. CERTIFICATIONS
 - Certified Small Business Counselor, Small Business Institute (SBI), 2002-2006
 - B. EXPERIENCE
 - Small Business Institute Director, 2000-present
 - C. AWARDS AND HONORS
 - Homer Saunders Mentor Award, Small Business Institute, January 2005
 - Distinguished Mentor Award, Small Business Institute, January 2007
 - Third Place, Small Business Institute Case Competition, Graduate Business Plan, February 2008
 - Showcase Award, Small Business Institute Case Competition, February 2008
 - Best of the Best New Program Award, Real Estate Program, Small Business Institute, February 2008
 - 2nd Place and Honorable Mention, Small Business Institute, Business Plan and Specialized Plan, Shelly Balbirer Project Director, Dianne Welsh, Small Business Institute Director, 2009
 - Best Practices Award, Creative Cross-Disciplinary Entrepreneurship, Small Business Institute, 2011
 - 2nd and 3rd Place, Graduate Comprehensive and Specialized Projects, Shelly Balbirer, Project Director, Dianne Welsh, Small Business Institute Director, 2010
 - 2nd Place, Comprehensive Graduate Project, Jason Bohrer, Project Director, Dianne Welsh, Small Business Institute Director, 2011
 - 2nd Place, Comprehensive Graduate Project, Jason Bohrer, Project Director, Dianne Welsh, Small Business Institute Director, 2012
 - Best Pedagogy Paper Award, Small Business Institute Conference, 2013
 - 1st Place, Business Plan Graduate Project, Richard Browne, Project Director, Dianne Welsh, Small Business Institute Director, 2013
 - 2nd Place, Feasibility/Business Plan Undergraduate Project, Dianne Welsh, Project Director & Small Business Institute Director, 2013
 - Recipient, Distinguished Teaching Paper Award, Small Business Institute Conference, 2015
 - Recipient, Distinguished Empirical Paper Award, Small Business Institute Conference, 2015
 - Honorable Mention, Business Plan Graduate Project, James Boles, Project Director, Dianne Welsh, Small Business Institute Director, 2015
 - Honorable Mention, Undergraduate Specialized Project, James Boles, Project Director, Dianne Welsh, Small Business Institute Director, 2016
 - 1st Place Winner, Feasibility/Business Plan Undergraduate Project, Dianne Welsh, Project Director & Small Business Institute Director, 2016
 - Fellow, Small Business Institute, 2017
 - Best Conceptual Paper, Small Business Institute, 2018
 - 1st Place Winner, Comprehensive Graduate Project, Joe Erba, Project Director, Dianne Welsh, Small Business Institute Director, 2018
 - 2nd Place Winner, Feasibility/Business Plan, Noah Reynolds, Project Director, Dianne Welsh, Small Business Institute Director, 2020
 - Best Paper Award, Small Business Institute Conference, 2021
 - 1st Place Winner, Feasibility/Business Plan, Noah Reynolds, Project Director, Dianne Welsh, Small Business Institute Director, 2021
 - D. ADDITIONAL PUBLICATIONS
 - Welsh, D.H.B., & Johnson, D. (1997). SBIDA fundraising guide. Denton, TX: Small Business Institute Directors' Assn.
 - E. GRANTS
 - UNCG Scholars' Travel Fund, \$500, for Best Practices - Campus Entrepreneurs: Dual Opportunities for Certified Students with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities and Traditional Students, Small Business Institute, February 2015.
 - F. SERVICE CONTRIBUTIONS: ORGANIZATIONS
 - Small Business Institute, 1990--1991, 1994--
 - G. EDITORIAL REVIEW BOARD
 - Editorial Review Board, Journal of Small Business Strategy, 1998-present Small Business Institute® Journal, 2011-present
 - Special Issue Co-Editor*, Journal of Small Business Strategy*, 2014
 - Senior Editor, Journal of Small Business Strategy, 2015-present
 - Special Issue Co-Editor, *Journal of Small Business Strategy*, International Strategies of Family Firms: Challenges and Perspectives, 2018
 - H. CONFERENCES AND WORKSHOPS
 - Family Business Track Chair, Small Business Institute, Albuquerque, NM, February 2010
 - Attendee, Mid-year meeting of the Small Business Institute, Bonita Springs, FL, July 2010
 - Attendee, Mid-year meeting of the Small Business Institute, San Antonio, TX, July 2011
 - Chair, Fund Raising Committee, Small Business Institute Directors' Association, (SBIDA), 1996 -- 1997
 - I. PROFESSIONAL SERVICE
 - Vice President Programs-Elect, Small Business Institute®, 2010-2011, Vice President Programs, 2011-2012
 - Reviewer, Small Business Institute, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021
 - President-Elect, Small Business Institute, 2012-2013
 - President, Small Business Institute, 2013-2014
 - Past President, Small Business Institute, 2014-2015
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- Session Chair, Small Business Institute, February 2018
- Judge, Small Business Institute (SBI) Project of the Year, three submissions, November 2019 and November 2020

Table 2. Dianne H.B. Welsh Refereed Small Business Institute Journal Articles

Year	Title	Journal	Vol. Issue, Pages
1989-2000			
1997	The ethical orientation of U.S. small business decision-makers: A preliminary study	JSBS	8(2), 41-51
2000-2010			
2010	The effect of early internationalization on survival, consistency, and growth of export sales	JSBS	21(1), 39-64
2010-2021			
2011	Bootstrapping franchise startups	SBIJ	7(2), 63-70
2012	A resource-based view of three forms of businesses in the startup phase: Implications for franchising	JSBS	22(1), 47-65
2012	Family firms' professionalization: A resource-based view and institutional theory perspective	SBIJ	8(2), 12-34
2012	What can drive entrepreneurial firms? An analysis of the Inc 500 companies	JSBS	22(2), 27-49
2013	The new generation of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and entrepreneurship education	SBIJ	9(1), 51-65
2014	The impact of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) on women's entrepreneurship	JSBS	24(1), 45-59
2015	What pedagogical methods impact students' entrepreneurial propensity?	JSBS	25(2), 11-42
2018	Sustainability reporting and its implications for family firms	JSBS	28(1), 39-44

Key: J Small Business Institute (SBIJ); J Small Business Strategy (JSBS)

tor Award and Best Mentor Award, and numerous best paper awards (See [Table 1](#)). While these have been important from a personal career standpoint, these awards also catapult the university and the business school's reputation and standings. These are essential milestones for the dean's career and placement in the national rankings. Our department chair includes them in our annual report of accomplishments to the university. The students have the project awards on their resumes, and these are important for them to show competency and project completion.

From a research perspective, I have had ten journal articles published in SBI journals (seven in the *Journal of Small Business Strategy* and three in the *SBI Journal*) out of 112 published in my career so far (See [Table 2](#)). Unfortunately, neither of these journals are listed in the ABS or other journal rankings. However, the *Journal of Small Business Strategy* has made significant gains in its Scopus rating. In 2016, the Scopus rating was .25 and currently is 4.0. It is also indexed with OAI-PMH harvesters, search engines, and databases such as World CAT, Google Scholar, and DOAJ. Both journals are open access, a definite advantage for researchers with citation numbers. I have had 31 papers, including five best paper awards, published in the proceedings, and made 19 presentations for 50 (See [Table 3](#)) out of a career total of 327 proceedings and presentations.

I have learned an inordinate amount from my colleagues

at the Small Business Institute. They are a caring, sharing group of individuals who freely pass along teaching and research best practices, syllabi, strategies with fundraising, and how best to work with the administration to improve their programs. I wrote a fundraising guide for SBI in 1997. I am proud to be a Fellow and nominated by Lynn Hoffman. Lynn is a perfect example of the dedication and belief in SBI as an organization. After serving in the leadership for five years that culminated in Past President, Lynn served as SBI treasurer then agreed 20 years later to serve as treasurer again for five years. Such dedication is rarely seen in professional organizations. Retired faculty still come to the meetings and join us on occasion!

Student Contributor/Entrepreneur/Teacher

I was an undergraduate student at California State University, Northridge, in 1994 when I was introduced to the SBIDA through Dr. Mary Curren. I had met Dr. Curren previously in 1993 when I took her marketing capstone class and was immediately drawn to her experiential teaching style. When Dr. Curren approached me to ask if I would be interested in taking the SBI consulting class, I immediately accepted even though I did not require the units to graduate.

At that moment, I had no idea that the SBI project would change my career trajectory forever. Our SBI client was running a failing wedding video production firm and was hav-

Table 3. Dianne H.B. Welsh Small Business Institute Proceedings and Presentations

Year	Title	Type	Event	Awards
1989-2000				
1991	Applying computer technology for the 1990s and beyond	Proceeding	Proceedings of the Annual SBI Directors' Association	
1997	Starbucks enters Kuwait	Proceeding	Proceedings of the SBI Directors' Association (SBIDA)	
1999	Café Americana	Proceeding	Proceedings of the SBI Directors' Assn., Region X Conference	
2000-2010				
2001	Experiential learning options for entrepreneurship educators	Proceeding (Symposium)	USASBE/SBIDA Conference	Best Workshop Award
2004	Teaching social entrepreneurship in university business schools	Presentation	USASBE/SBI Conference	
2005	Building effective USASBE leaders: Training for those interested in becoming future officers	Presentation (Workshop)	USASBE/SBI Conference	
2005	Social entrepreneurship, where do we go from here?	Presentation (Workshop)	USASBE/SBI Conference	
2005	Entrepreneurship and international support: Multiple perspectives	Presentation (Workshop)	USASBE/SBI Conference	
2006	Interest in and opportunities for USASBE members in franchise education	Presentation (Workshop)	USASBE/SBI Conference	
2006	Dream deans: What deans can do (and not do) to help entrepreneurship education	Presentation (Workshop)	USASBE/SBI Conference	
2007	Education and research opportunities for USASBE and SBI members through certified franchise executive program	Presentation (Workshop)	USASBE/SBI Conference	
2007	Recovering from victory: How to start a winning SIFE team and keep it going	Presentation (Workshop)	USASBE/SBI Conference	
2007	Validation of the social entrepreneurship framework: The ninth ward musicians' village	Presentation (Workshop)	USASBE/SBI Conference	
2007	Gen Con: Engineering a solution for turnover	Proceeding	USASBE/SBI Conference	
2008	Al-Bahar & Jacorossi Engineering & Contracting	Proceeding	SBI Conference	
2008	Real estate venturing program-Florida Entrepreneur & Family Business Center at The University of Tampa-outstanding specialty entrepreneurship program	Proceeding; Presentation	SBI Conference	Proceedings of the SBI Conference and Presentation at the Best Practices/ Promising Practices Track
2009	Small business professional service firms: How do they affect government policy?	Proceeding	SBI Conference	
2009	International entrepreneurship program development and research: Emerging market, educational, and health care entrepreneurship	Presentation (Panel presentation)	SBI Conference	
2010-2021				
2010	An examination of Chinese entrepreneurs and intrapreneurs: High tech or high	Proceeding	SBI Conference	

Year	Title	Type	Event	Awards
	touch customer service?			
2010	The state of entrepreneurship in Eastern Europe: Overcoming the challenges of international analysis	Proceeding	SBI Conference	
2010	A look at microentrepreneurs and their enterprises: An assessment and implementation plan for success	Proceeding	SBI Conference	
2011	A review of SBI journals survey results: Comments and feedback	Presentation	SBI Conference	
2011	Franchise opportunity in Elkhart/South Bend area of Indiana	Proceeding	35 th Annual SBI Conference	
2011	The dressing room franchise	Proceeding	35 th Annual SBI Conference	
2011	Creative cross-disciplinary entrepreneurship	Proceeding	35 th Annual SBI Conference	Best Practices Award
2012	Starting a new business: Franchising vs. new venture	Proceeding	SBI Conference	
2012	The entrepreneurial orientation of family microenterprises in Malaysia	Proceeding	SBI Conference	
2012	Microenterprise management practices in China: An examination of the viability of national micro-enterprise zones (MEZO)	Proceeding	SBI Conference	
2013	The new generation of Massively Open Online Courses (MOOC) and their potential impact on higher education worldwide	Proceeding	SBI Conference	Best Pedagogy Paper Award
2013	Spartan Trader Entrepreneurship Retail Learning Lab – Best Practices	Presentation	SBI Conference	
2013	The impact of FDI on women's entrepreneurship	Proceeding	SBI Conference	
2014	Enhancing your SBI program: How to take your SBI to the next level	Presentation	SBI	
2014	The impact of family support on Turkish women entrepreneurs	Proceeding (Abstract)	Proceedings of SBI	
2014	Experiential entrepreneurship and assessment in practice: The Spartan Trader	Proceeding (Abstract)	Proceedings of SBI	Best Practices Nomination
2014	An exploratory investigation of the impact of internet usage on work productivity	Proceeding	Proceedings of SBI	
2015	The impact of family and personal dynamics on Chinese women entrepreneurs' firm performance: An empirical analysis	Proceeding	Proceedings of SBI	Best Empirical Paper Award
2015	What Pedagogical methods impact students' Entrepreneurial Propensity?	Proceeding	Proceedings of SBI	Best Teaching Paper Award
2015	Campus Entrepreneurs: Dual opportunities for certificate students with intellectual/developmental disabilities and traditional students	Proceeding (Abstract)	Proceedings of SBI	Best Practices Submission
2016	Fostering the entrepreneurial university: A practical guide to a campus-wide entrepreneurship program	Presentation	SBI Conference	
2016	Website quality for SME wineries: Measurement insights	Proceeding (Abstract)	SBI Conference	Distinguished Empirical Paper Award
2017	Online tools and assignments	Presentation (Round table presentation)	SBI	

Year	Title	Type	Event	Awards
2017	Channeling entrepreneurs in our classrooms, disciplines, and communities	Presentation (Panel presentation)	SBI	
2017	The relationships between family support, personal problems, and firm performance of Moroccan and Turkish women entrepreneurs: The country context	Proceeding (Abstract)	SBI	
2018	Female entrepreneurship: A model of business-family interface and performance	Proceeding (Abstract)	SBI	
2018	Starting the semester off right – activities and interactions for the first day of class	Presentation (Round table presentation); Proceeding (Abstract)	SBI	*Labeled as Presentation in Sedona*
2020	Roundtable on Fellows Program	Presentation (Panel presentation)	SBI Conference	
2020	Homegrown Middle Eastern Franchises: Prospects for the future	Proceeding (Abstract)	SBI Conference	
2020	Modeling factors affecting students' entrepreneurial intentions: An integrated ISM-MICMAC approach	Proceeding	SBI Conference	Best Paper Award

(SBI) Project of the Year, two submissions, November 2020

ing trouble repaying a large loan debt that they had taken out to purchase digital equipment, which was considered cutting-edge. After a financial analysis, our team realized that the client had to double or triple their wedding video prices from their current price of \$1,000 to break even given their cost structure. However, the wedding video industry had low barriers to entry, intense competition, and price-sensitive customers who did not value our client's digital products. Therefore, our team determined that the client would need to market their existing products to a new customer segment that appreciated their product and service. After identifying several possible industries, we targeted the Southern California hotel industry and conducted primary research to determine the segment's needs, price points, and purchasing habits. Thankfully, the SBA funding covered the costs to produce and mail the surveys to get a large sample size of over 400 responses.

The survey results proved that the hotel segment was ideal for our client's products and services. The client was excited when we presented our findings, showing that hotels expected to pay around \$25,000 for high-quality digital production. In our plan, we provided our client with a comprehensive business plan, including a detailed implementation schedule with a clear roadmap to profitability. They followed the program and became profitable within one year! And just like that, we helped to save a business from bankruptcy.

Before taking the consulting class, I'd planned to get a job at a large corporation where I could work my way up the corporate ladder. Now, I saw the business through a different lens – one where I could lead change. The SBI project allowed me to reframe the company's problem as an opportunity to innovate. Because innovation always carries risk, our faculty mentor Dr. Curren helped us define the proper

scope and bounds that the client could tolerate. The SBI experience had a lasting impact on my confidence and abilities.

Post-graduation, I had an interview with the Japanese-based technology giant Hitachi Koki Imaging Solutions (HKIS), and they offered me an entry-level job which I turned down. When the human resources manager asked me why I would turn down their job offer, I explained my passion for innovating change and showed them a copy of my SBI project. I believe that she was impressed, evidenced by that she scheduled additional interviews for me to meet with the senior management at HKIS over the next several days. Within a week, the Senior Vice President offered me a position that they had created for me! And, because the role required significant corporate flexibility and authority, I was given a post on the senior staff. At 24 years young, I was the first female on the senior team at HKIS and the youngest by about 20 years.

My role at HKIS was one of a corporate intrapreneur, and I enjoyed the challenge. During my time at HKIS, I worked cross-functionally to solve issues and launch a re-manufactured toner cartridge division. HKIS was the first Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) to launch a re-manufactured version of its product and later began re-manufacturing other OEM products such as Hewlett Packard, Canon, Lexmark, and Xerox. While undertaking this division, one of the biggest challenges we faced was the reverse distribution of inconsistent raw materials.

To get a consistent supply of raw materials (used cartridges), I spearheaded a business within the business where I purchased used cartridges from big-box retailers such as Staples, industry consolidators, and international partnerships. At first, Staples had no interest in collecting used toner cartridges as a profit center. I convinced them

by conducting and presenting primary research from their customers, who stated they would be overwhelmingly interested in receiving a store credit for their used toner cartridges. The idea to gather primary research and present it to the customer partner came directly from my SBI project.

I launched my company, InkCycle, and achieved first-year revenues above two million dollars selling remanufactured inkjet cartridges six years later. Again, I used the skills that I learned in my SBI class to write a comprehensive business plan for the company. Over the next six years, I built InkCycle into a category-leading company with revenues exceeding \$100 million annually and employed 200 people. I later sold the company and opened a successful consulting practice which I still run today. I also teach SBI small business consulting classes at California State University, Northridge, as part-time faculty to inspire the next generation of student leaders.

I often tell people that my career successes have stemmed from those moments where preparation meets opportunity. The SBI project prepared me for my career opportunities by giving me the hard and soft skills necessary to succeed. SBI projects provide students like me with the skills and the confidence to think outside the box and

reimagine what they can accomplish. I'm incredibly grateful to the SBI program and the faculty mentors who've helped me reach my potential as an entrepreneur and change leader.

Conclusion

This paper summarizes the research conducted on conferences and their effectiveness. However, few articles have focused on conferences' impact on careers over time. We give the experience of two long-time members of the Small Business Institute, one from an early to mature career perspective from an entrepreneur to an endowed professor and entrepreneurship program founder, and the other from a student, entrepreneur, and now a university professor of practice. Join us! We encourage you to reach out to the leadership or me at SBI through the webpage at <https://small-businessinstitute.biz> to see what opportunities are available.

Submitted: November 30, 2021 MST, Accepted: February 01, 2022 MST

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