Entrepreneurs Reflect on Success and Share Advice

A month shy of his 25th birthday, Krish Patel ('08), was already the owner and director of operations for 14 Verizon Wireless retail outlets across the Upstate and South Carolina. While a business administration major in the Johnson College of Business and Economics, this entrepreneur was formulating his business plan for the company he went on to form in 2008 called Wireless Communications which now has 75 employees. Patel came back to the classroom to share his remarkable entrepreneurial story to Instructor Jeff Smith's 300-level business class called Topics in Metropolitan Studies: Entrepreneurism.

Patel was one of 19 entrepreneurs, drawn from the restaurant, microbrewery, non-profit, advertising, coal brokerage, community banking, investment advising, venture capital, textile, data analysis, storage, and medical fields, to share their stories. Patty Bock and Amanda Mathis, with the City of Spartanburg Economic Development Department, also joined the class to discuss opportunities for public/private partnerships, available sources of public funding, and tax incentives for job creation.

"Our goal is to prepare students for entrepreneurial endeavors if they chose that path in life. The willingness of these successful individuals from our Upstate community to join us in the classroom to expose our students to examples of real success is invaluable to us in completing this goal," says Smith. He adds that it was beneficial for students to see that entrepreneurs go into business for a variety of reasons, at different times in their lives and with different expectations, goals and measures of success.

In addition to sharing the particulars of growing a business within their specific industry, many speakers discussed how legislation, regulations, politics and current events affected their business, including opportunities that can be found during a recession. Speakers stressed the importance of goal setting, relationship building, reputation, credibility and differentiation from the competition. Several shared how their faith influenced their business and their perspective on success. Additionally, selected high school students from Dorman, Spartanburg Day School, Spartanburg Christian Academy and Spartanburg High were invited to attend several of the presentations.

Courses in entrepreneurship are now offered by more than 1,200 American universities, according to a recent analysis by the New York Times. The Johnson College course is a 300 level course for junior and senior business majors. Smith says that even if his students do not continue on to start their own businesses, the knowledge they gain from an entrepreneur can be applicable in any corporate business setting.

Visit uscupstate.edu/johnsoncollege to see more photos and details of each speaker's presentation.

Speaker’s Roster

John Bauknight and Nick Wildrick
Co-owners, Shred First, RJ Rockers and Longleaf Development

Dr. Mary Joan Black
Partner, Orthopedic Associates, PA

Hal Blackwell
Investment Advisor, HE Blackwell Advisors

Steve Caldwell
Founder of Data Ventures, Inc., Associate Professor of Management

Justin Converse
President, Converse and Company

Jimmy Gibbs
President and CEO, Gibbs International, Inc.

Steve Harvey ('80)
Owner, Roebuck Advertising

Hamp Lindsey
Owner, Wade's Restaurant

Amanda Mathis and Patty Bock
City of Spartanburg Economic Development

Jayne McQueen
President and CEO, Mobile Meals

David Miller ('90)
Former President and Founder of Community South Bank, Consultant with Unique Financial Solutions

Krish Patel ('08)
Owner, Wireless Communications

Carter Ridgeway ('08)
Owner, II Samuels Restaurant

Benjamin Wall and Mark Blackman
Principals, WJ Partners, LLC

Billy Webster
Co-founder, Advance America, Cash Advance Centers, Inc.

Joe Wells and David Zabriskie,
Developers, Rome Nightclub

Mike Wood ('77)
President and CEO, American Storage

Can you hear me now? Students listened intently to 2008 graduate Krish Patel (right), 25, who in just a few short years went from customer service representative, to top-earning sales representative, to corporate manager, and now to owner and director of operations for 14 Verizon Wireless retail outlets across the Upstate and South Carolina. His company, Wireless Communications, employs 75 people. He is pictured here with instructor Jeff Smith.
Students were very curious and excited about the new nightclub taking shape on Morgan Square in downtown Spartanburg called Rome. In their pre-opening tour, they met the principals of the club, President Joe Wells and Events Planner David Zabriskie, who shared their plans for the venue as they toured the extensively renovated building. Among the first to preview the club, the students were interested to learn about and observe a new business venture before its launch.

“You must understand the politics of the industry you’re getting into,” says Billy Webster, co-founder of Advance America. Webster detailed how lobbyists and the political conditions of the past few years (credit crisis, debt, housing bubble) have affected the financial services industry. Referring to the 1,500 page Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act of 2009 which affected hedge funds and mortgage backed securities, he said that it “was the single most important piece of legislation passed since the Great Depression, and nobody read it in its entirety.”

Orthopedic surgeon Dr. Mary Joan Black owns her practice together with seven partners. Dr. Black discussed the business side of a health care practice, including how insurance reimbursements work, Medicare and Medicaid, rising costs of health care, and fraud within the system. She also discussed how the recently-passed health care bill will affect the business of health care delivery.

David Miller (’90) explained how the economic crisis has affected local and community banks differently than Wall Street banks. He is the founder and former president of Community South Bank. He is now a consultant with Unique Financial Solutions.

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