

# Small Business Development Center at UCF A Common Sense Approach to Business Success



“Always use Common Sense.” That marketing slogan neatly sums up the philosophy Craig Caswell has used to guide his business. Caswell opened Common Sense Office Furniture in 1997 and that guiding principle has helped him to build his firm into one of the largest office furniture dealers in Central Florida. Based in Orlando, Common Sense Office Furniture offers design, sales, delivery and installation of new, used and remanufactured office furniture out of its more than 30,000 sq. ft. showroom and warehouse. Common Sense has become known for the excellent value and service they provide and today’s cost consciousness has made their offerings even more popular. A key element of the firm’s business growth strategy and common sense approach has been to utilize the services of the Small Business Development Center at UCF. According to Caswell, “Nowhere are there valuable services and advice available, at no charge, like at the SBDC and Advisory Board Council. They are a great tool to grow a business and get advice that otherwise you may never have access to...”.

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Craig Caswell,  
Common Sense Office  
Furniture

Caswell has utilized the services of the SBDC’s Procurement Technical Assistance Center and in 2010 he joined CEO XChange, a CEO roundtable group, but the Advisory Board Council (ABC) was the first SBDC program to attract his interest. In fact, his first interaction with the ABC was when he signed up to donate his time and expertise to help other business owners by serving as a volunteer advisor for the program in early 2008. Yet, as Caswell learned more about the ABC and the next level business assistance it provides he thought it would be a useful tool to help propel his own business growth.

Later that same year Common Sense Office Furniture became a client of the Advisory Board Council. Caswell worked with ABC Program Manager, Jill Kaufman, to identify areas of opportunity and challenge facing his business. Kaufman formed a board of advisors for Common Sense to address the firm’s strategic planning, marketing, sales management and training, operations and business development. According to Caswell, “The board members all had backgrounds directly related to the operations and sales parts of my business and they understood each component. I never could have afforded this kind of advice without the SBDC.” The Advisory Board Council worked with Caswell to take a more strategic view of his business, build a stronger business foundation and lay out a roadmap for business growth. “One of the missing components they helped me identify was a lack of consistency and follow through on ideas, projects and marketing as we were caught up in the day to day trials of running a small business,” commented Caswell. “The Advisory Board helped me pull my head out of the sand, take a look around and find a path that would lead to future growth.”

Common Sense Office Furniture’s advisory board has proven so advantageous to the business that Caswell requested and was approved to remain in the program for a second term. Throughout Common Sense’s tenure in the ABC the firm has demonstrated strong growth in revenue and their number of employees has doubled from six to twelve, strengthening the firm’s organizational structure and allowing Caswell to focus on expansion opportunities. The company has refined its marketing strategy and increased its visibility in the community. In fact, the business received significant exposure when Common Sense Office Furniture was named to the 2010 Inc. 5000 list of fastest growing private companies in the U.S. due to its 41% 3-year revenue growth. Upon learning of this honor Caswell recognized the contribution of the SBDC. “The SBDC has been instrumental in helping me grow my business for the past two years. This is evidenced by the inclusion of our company in the Inc. 5000 list of fastest growing small businesses this year.”

*Helping Businesses Start, Grow and Succeed*