

Family First Firm

"Transformative." When an entrepreneur uses that word to describe the assistance he has received from your organization, and then goes on to say participation in one of your programs was "truly a life and business changing experience," you take note. Especially when that entrepreneur is a practicing lawyer leading a highly successful law firm.

Geoff Hoatson, attorney, founder and owner of the Family First Firm, a leading elder law firm, used exactly those words to describe the Florida Small Business Development Center at the University of Central Florida (Florida SBDC at UCF) and its award-winning Advisory Board Council (ABC) program.

The Family First Firm is unique in many ways. First, it prides itself in being "Your Elder Law Expert," specializing in all aspects of legal services for seniors including guardianship, probate, estate planning, Medicaid and more. It also charges flat fees for its work. None of that hourly billing that is the legal community's industry standard. "I don't like giving anyone a blank check," says Hoatson. "Why would I ask that of our clients? We're here to help them."

Hoatson came to the FSBDC after working with a business coach specializing in law firms. "I felt like I'd outgrown what they could do for me," he recalls. "The issues I was running into were more corporate and not typical of a small law firm. I had always wanted to focus on the firm as a business, but I just didn't have the tools necessary to do it. So, I applied to the FSBDC's Advisory Board Council program by contacting its program manager Jill Kaufman."

An Advisory Board Council is a customized, no-cost board of experts providing advice and counsel to help businesses grow. The FSBDC acts as a matchmaker between established local businesses like the Family First Firm and area professionals who volunteer their expertise as members of an advisory board, with the volunteers selected to address the specific needs of the FSBDC client.

"My Advisory Board really helped me identify what I needed to be doing in order to take the next step in my business," says Hoatson. "It was made up of experts from my industry, with experience in operations, marketing and communications, and finance. With their guidance, and help from my FSBDC consultant Pauline Davis, for the first time in the 10 years I've been in business, I've been able to look ahead and strategize about our growth and know how we want to get where we want to go."

"My Advisory Board Council really changed the way I looked at my business. It allowed me to transform what we've been doing into what we're becoming," Hoatson continued. "And our business results tell the tale. Over the 18 months we worked with our ABC board, our revenues increased almost 190%; we more than doubled in size in terms of employees; and we have expanded beyond our original location to a second building and are now looking at a third."

"I can't think of a reason not to participate in the Advisory Board Council program," Hoatson concluded. "It's all upside, no downside."



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Providing the tools, strategies, and expertise to help Florida's business community thrive.

State Designated as Florida's Principal Provider of Business Assistance [288.001, Fla. Stat.]

The FSBDC at UCF is a member of the Florida SBDC Network, a statewide partnership program nationally accredited by the Association of America's SBDCs and funded in part by the U.S. Small Business Administration, Defense Logistics Agency, State of Florida and other private and public partners, with the University of West Florida serving as the network's lead host institution. Florida SBDC services are extended to the public on a nondiscriminatory basis. Language assistance services are available for limited English proficient individuals.

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