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Businessman has SCORE to thank

February 6, 2008

from submitted reports

For many years, Tony Lewis, an expert at cable assembly and engineering, had intended to start his own business. But as he says, "life has a way of dragging you in the opposite direction of where you intend to be."

In 2005, when the company that Tony worked for laid him off after 15 years, he decided to look at it as the opportunity to live his dream.

Lewis started American Data Cable, a custom wire and cable assembly business, because that was what 25 years of experience had best qualified him to do. The niche also made sense because he had kept in contact with many past vendors and customers.

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Tony Lewis stands next to some of his cable assembly equipment. Lewis started his business, American Data Cable, in 2005 with the help of SCORE Chicago.
Submitted photo

Tony's biggest hurdle was figuring out how to get started. That's when his accountant recommended he contact SCORE Chicago.

"Contacting them and taking the courses they offer was probably one of the most important steps I took to getting this thing off the ground," Lewis said.

SCORE is a national not-for-profit association of successful business executives. From offices located all over the Chicago area, these multi-discipline business professionals provide free one-on-one counseling, teach low-cost

business workshops and supply other resources to entrepreneurs and small businesses.

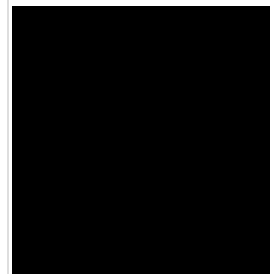
When Lewis first started out, he said, "I was overwhelmed with this huge picture in my head of renting building space and hiring assemblers and buying equipment. My head was spinning. How was I going to get a loan to finance all of this? I had some money of my own to invest, but this was beyond what I could finance."

Then he met counselors Peg Corwin and Mitch Morris from SCORE. They helped him think things through. After a couple meetings, Lewis realized that, "while it's great to have the big picture in mind, it doesn't mean that you necessarily need to start from there."

The counselors suggested that he start small. They asked if it would be possible to start this as a home-based business so that he could finance it himself. "I thought about the great big basement I have and said, 'Well ... yes!'" Lewis said. "That idea brought my feet back to earth, and suddenly it all seemed possible."

Within a couple of months, Tony had set up a work area in his basement, and he was open for business.

That was two and a half years ago, and American Data Cable still is going strong. Morris and Corwin have kept in touch and brought in counselor Bob Paul to coach Tony on credit policies. The firm has been growing steadily, but not so quickly that Lewis and his staff can't

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"I'm thankful that I didn't look for outside financing and start out with a big debt hanging over our heads. I still have that vision of the building full of assemblers and I'm confident that it will happen when the time is right," Lewis said.

Those seeking custom wire and cable can reach Tony through www.americandata.cable.com.

For help making your business a success, sign up for free counseling at www.score.chicago.org.

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