**CSUSB and The Coachella Valley Mean Business**

*Two OLLI luminaries, well versed in business success, share ideas with a pair of Cal State students on entrepreneurship and why it is so popular these days with people of all ages.*

**A POLAND:** We at OLLI share our splendid Palm Desert campus with more than three thousand younger Cal State San Bernardino students. Well, at first blush, we seem to move in two separate academic and social worlds, but let us take a better look or better listen to two OLLI luminaries well-versed in business and success and exchange ideas with two ambitious Cal State students from the university's school of entrepreneurship. It’s a lively conversation about aspiration and why Cal State and our Coachella Valley mean business for all ages.

(SOUNDBITE OF MUSIC)

**A POLAND:** Welcome to *In Conversation: The Voices of OLLI*. OLLI, O-L-L-I is an acronym for the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute located and networked with the Palm Desert Campus of California State University San Bernardino.

(SOUNDBITE OF MUSIC ENDS)

**A POLAND:** Brandon Weimer started a business with a friend when they were students at La Quinta High School. Since then Brandon’s eponymous Brandini toffee has enjoyed sweet sweet success. His innovative range of toffee-themed goodies are savored by candy connoisseurs around the world. The delicious company is based right here in our Coachella Valley.

**B WEIMER:** We have four stores that are our own stores. Then we have the e-commerce business that is continuing to build momentum and become more relevant. We do decent wholesale business and business with Costco and some other retailers. We are trying to claim our stake in the toffee world and try to make toffee more known to those who might not be familiar with the indulgent category of not just toffee but anything toffee-based. We do a lot of popcorn, almond toffee which is the classic, and we also do toffee ice cream products at our stores that are fantastic and are a fun spin-off of our court recipes. So anything toffee.

**M LIST:** I can probably tell your story, Brandon.

(LIGHT CHUCKLE)

**B WEIMER:** Thank you.

**A POLAND:** That's Matt List. A graduate student from Cal State and the owner of his own insurance agency in our valley. At his family’s urging, Matt is working on a Masters's degree at the school of entrepreneurship on the CSUSB Palm Desert campus.

**M LIST:** We had to come up with an app overnight or an innovative idea. I’m like, “I’m an insurance guy.” So one day, I woke up at four in the morning and I served on the board for the Coachella Valley Rescue Mission. I wondered if there was an app for the homeless to book a room like Airbnb. So I came up with OneKnock and OneKnock is an app that would allow a homeless person to reserve a bed for their family and reserve that bed, very similar to an Airbnb. The question that is always asked is, do people have cell phones when they’re in a vulnerable situation? And the answer is that they do. That is how they communicate with the world. They have phones.

**A POLAND:** Laura James takes pitches like Matt’s OneKnock app every day in her role as vice president of the Coachella Valley’s economic partners.

**L JAMES:** We have a lot of people come to us with ideas for apps and some of them are solving a real problem and other people have a nifty idea that nobody will ever buy. So, part of our job is to make sure people don’t spend their life savings to make something happen that is probably never going to make them a dollar. If they have something that is a really marketable idea then we can help them get connected with resources to move them forward and turn it into something. The whole reason we do all of this in the Coachella Valley is because we have a whole lot of agriculture and tourism and hospitality businesses and there are not a ton of year around jobs in those industries. So we are trying to get just a broader, more diverse cross-section of industries here, jobs here, and career paths here for the people who live here.

**A POLAND:** Misty Lopez is an undergraduate in the school of entrepreneurship right here on our Palm Desert campus. Why did she enroll a few years after high school? Well, the reason lies somewhere between serendipity and fate.

**M LOPEZ:** I never intended to go to school. What’s the point? The only reason I’m in the entrepreneurship class is because I got a scholarship and free money talks, you know. So,

(LAUGHS)

**M LOPEZ:** It ended up being a really great experience for me. I am not even going to lie, I had no idea this was going to happen to me for the first year of being in school.  Yeah right on.

(CHUCKLES)

**B WEIMER:** Congratulations.

**M LOPEZ:** Thank you. I designed a device called shimmy and it is for women who go through extreme pain during their monthly.

**L JAMES:** That is a real problem and I am not ashamed to attest to being a victim of that problem.

**M LOPEZ:** And I currently have two investors, at the moment. I am just trying to get some legal documents typed up and—

**M LIST:** Wow, that's great. Congratulations.

**M LOPEZ:** Thank you.

(CHUCKLES)

**A POLAND:** The conversation turned to this question, why is entrepreneurship such a hot field? Especially among the young.

**L JAMES:** Well many of us, every day now we are using products that were built by people who were household names. You know, Elon Musk, we see his Teslas on the road every time we go out. How many of us haven’t shopped on Amazon in the last couple of days and everybody knows the founder’s names now. I think that wasn’t necessarily always the case unless it was someone truly exceptional like Henry Ford in the past. So, I think that technology itself has enabled entrepreneurs to sort of become ingrained in our daily life. The person is almost in some ways inseparable from the product and so you know when I think of toffee, I think of Brandon so that must be true right.

LAUGHTER)

**M LIST:** Entrepreneurship in this valley and I think this is a very community-oriented place where people want to connect with companies. I have been pretty in the trenches of studying authenticity and Brandon and innovation recently. I think when it comes to authenticity I think about a story, having a community and a destination of place then you can easily lose touch with that as the company grows large. Of course, we do have the unicorns of Amazon and Tesla and such where you are very connected to the people that had founded it and had a vision. Locally, I think we have a lot of people that really want to champion something for whatever industry but for me, it happens to be toffee. I think people really have a connection to story and commitment, the location of this valley, and kind of the home team advantage so to speak within that and I think it presents a lot of value from a customer or fan perspective.

**M LOPEZ:** For me personally I hate working for other people, I won’t even lie to you. I have great teammates but I am real bossy. I like things done in a certain way and I’m terrible.

(LAUGHS)

**M LOPEZ:** I’m done. I could go on all day. Next.

(FAINT CHUCKLE)

**L JAMES:** I think that that is part of the story. I have a friend that is almost 80 years old and she still has her own business. She’s in public relations. She’s still working. She’s very successful. She says, “You know I have been fired from every real job I ever had. Every time I have worked for somebody else they’ve fired me. ” but on her own, she has done very well. So I think you are onto something there missy.

(LAUGHTER)

**M LIST/ B WEIMER:** Thank god for entrepreneurship coming in many shapes and sizes. Funny enough I heard a quote about it yesterday where entrepreneurship might be more of a bug than a feature for most people in the sense that you mentioned your friend is unemployable and I don't know if I am either.

(LAUGHTER)

**B WEIMER/ M LIST:** When I started the program at Cal State, ok Master of science in entrepreneurship and innovation. “Hey, Google how do you spell entrepreneurship?” because I'm like, “Oh my god if I am in this program, I need to learn how to spell entrepreneurship.” I am an entrepreneur, owning my own business but I never saw myself that way because just what you said Laura, I thought I had to create this idea and this app and it had to be this really off the chart thing. As I am going through the program with the school I am an entrepreneur. I am doing it. I just thought I had to know how to be creative and learn the word, how to spell it, live it, and breathe it. That is why I love the program because it is helping me see that right where you are at, you are an entrepreneur.

**M LOPEZ:** For years, I had no idea that I was. I was selling candy at eight and I learned how to do hair when Allen Iverson was playing in the NBA and everyone wanted those fresh braids, I learned how to braid. I learned how to do edible arrangements because i liked playing with fruits so I knew how to do peacocks stuff and everything. I learned how to do tattoos, I had bought a tattoo kit and went on Youtube to learn how to do tattoos. The journey has been wild because everything I have done was not planned and I was like i’m going to try this and people liked it. I’m going to try this, and I am like you know what, I am good at marketing.

(LAUGHS)

**M LOPEZ:** So, it has been extremely fun. Like I said I have these businesses. I don’t look at it like “Oh my god I need money,” but I just love the experience of being around people and giving them what they like and just having a good time. I am actually having fun with this and guys I actually used to suffer from major depression. Now you won’t even know. Depressed? Please, I am a happy go-getter. You know businesses fail and so what? I pick up and I go again, no problem. It’s quite an adventure.

(LAUGHS)

**L JAMES:** You know when I was a kid, I thought an entrepreneur had to be an inventor.

**M LIST:** Yeah.

**L JAMES:** To tinker with things in the garage

**M LIST:** Right

**M LOPEZ:** Yeah.

**L JAMES:** to then manufacturer somewhere but now we know that, that is not it. These are just innovators who have things that people will spend their money on whatever they are. And sometimes they are just services.

**B WEIMER/ most likely LIST:** I get it. So, why are you getting a degree? You’re an insurance agent, you have three kids, what is a degree going to do for you? When I am responding I say, I am doing it for myself. It is a personal sense of development and it was a commitment I made to my children but more importantly to myself. And I get that a lot. I think people are sometimes intimidated because i think everyone is used to flowing with the canal right? And when you jump off and get out of the canal, out of the flow, it is something different, and that something different can sometimes make people feel uncomfortable with the choices they have made in their life. I have been at my job for thirty years and I don’t judge anybody. I’m like, “Hey that’s great. Good for you.”

12:20

**A POLAND:**

**L JAMES:**

**M LIST:**

**B WEIMER:**

**A POLAND:**