NDI

AUGUST 16, 2023

WEBINAR: STARTING SMALL WITH MY BIG GOALS

2:00 PM EST

Ciara: Welcome to the webinar titled Starting Small with My Big Goals.

Before we get started, I do want to run through some quick housekeeping slides.

The audio for today’s meeting can be accessed using Computer Audio or by calling in by phone. If you select Computer Audio, please make sure your speakers are turned on or your headphones are plugged in.

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Please note: This webinar is being recorded and the materials will be available at [www.DisabilitySmallBusiness.org](http://www.disabilitysmallbusiness.org/) on the Past Events page within 1-2 weeks.

Hello, everyone. Welcome to today’s session titled Starting Small with My Goals

Today’s presentation has been pre-recorded and prepared for you to ensure that the expertise, knowledge, and advice from the featured entrepreneurs are accurately passed on to the audience.

ASL interpretation and captioning will be available throughout the entirety of this webinar.

We will also be holding a live Q&A portion at the end of the presentation.

So, let’s get things started

My name is Ciara Ladroma with Griffin-Hammis Associates. I am joined by my wonderful colleague, Molly Sullivan.

Griffin-Hammis Associates or GHA has over 30 years of experience providing training and technical assistance to support individuals across the spectrum of disabilities to become self-employed and small business owners.

Now, if you haven’t already pulled the chat box up, you can do so by clicking on the icon at the bottom of your zoom screen that reads “chat,” Please use the chat box to join the conversation by asking questions, sharing ideas, and leaving comments.

The featured entrepreneurs from today’s webinar are available during the playing of the recording.

This means you can ask Daman, Victor, or the general audience questions or leave comments throughout the presentation.

And just a reminder, we will be hosting a live Q&A portion at the end of today’s presentation with the entrepreneurs on today’s webinar.

Lastly, we want to thank the U.S. Small Business Administration and the National Disability Institute in leading the Community Navigator Pilot Program that creates the space for this webinar. While the webinar is funded by the U.S. Small Business Administration, all the opinions, conclusions, and recommendations expressed here are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the SBA.

Before saying our goodbyes at the end of today’s webinar - we’ll share upcoming events that you can look forward to -- and the National Disability Institute team will share some exciting information about the Small Business Hub and resources available to you.

I am very excited to introduce today’s guest speakers.

Please meet Daman Wandke the Founder and CEO of Wandke Consulting. Daman has Cerebral Palsy and a master's in business.

With the combination of both his life and professional experiences, Daman is uniquely positioned to understand the business’s needs and the disability community to offer low-cost, high-impact solutions for our clients.

Daman understands that accessibility is not “one-size-fits-all”, yet his disability has made him innovative, and he can find the best ways for your organization to make the biggest impact when investing in the area of accessibility.

Daman Wandke has over ten years of experience testing Web Accessibility in the public and private sectors. Ranging from small local businesses to multinational corporations.

Before launching Wandke Consulting, Daman founded and developed AbiliTrek, a search and review platform that provides people with disabilities critical accessibility information to successfully navigate the world.

Daman is also an educator as he is an instructor at Western Washington University where he teaches Disability Studies courses as *Disability in the Media* and *Disability in Leadership*.

In addition to his duties at Wandke Consulting, Daman is greatly involved in the disability community. Daman serves on multiple advisory boards, has been inducted into the Susan M. Daniels Disability Mentoring Hall of Fame, and is incredibly passionate about hiring and mentoring people with disabilities.

I’d also love to introduce Victor Ocando Finol the Founder & CEO of Adapt the Game – a startup focusing on improving the game day experience for fans with disabilities.

Before founding Adapt the Game, Victor as a Venezuelan attorney practiced international sports law specializing in football (soccer) law, representing different stakeholders including clubs, players, leagues and agencies in South America and Europe.

He has over eight years of experience working in the sports industry.

Victor is a frequent lecturer in congresses, conferences and seminars about sports management and sports law. He is an adaptive athlete and adaptive sports advocate – as well as a - Motivational speaker for sports and inclusion organizations.  
  
Victor is committed to transforming the sports industry through inclusion and accessibility for all.

Thank you, Daman and Victor, for being here today to share your knowledge and experience in starting and growing your businesses. Today’s conversation is great for anyone who is thinking about starting a business but not sure where or how to start --- it’s also great for those who have started businesses and want guidance in how to continue growing their business.

Lastly, I hope that today's conversation serves to inspire and guide those thinking about entrepreneurship.

I’m going to go ahead and stop sharing my screen so we can get into conversation.

Alright, I have a couple of questions prepared for you two, but Daman and Victor do you want to do a quick hello and then we can get into questions?

Victor: Hi Ciara. It’s nice to meet you all. Welcome, everyone. It’s a pleasure to be here.

Daman: Hi everyone. I’m excited to share my experiences and answer your questions.

**Ciara: The first question I have for both of you is simple. Just tell us about your business, why you started it and what needs you’ve filled in the community.**

Victor:

Of course. Thank you, Ciara, for this question. According to our statistics, 8 out of each 10 people interviewed by Adapt the Game who are impacted by limited mobility, low vision and other accessibility challenges experience significant barriers during the ticketing purchase process as well as with the on-location experience at different sports venues.

Because of these overwhelming challenges, many people with disabilities often feel discouraged from attending and ultimately precluded from enjoying sporting events.

So, the solution, Adapt the Game, is a mobile app enabling fans with disabilities to easily obtain reliable information about accessible seating and ticketing.

Ciara: I was so impressed Victor that something like this exists because I never really thought about it, and I wondered after you explained it to me why doesn’t it exist already. So, thank you so much for creating Adapt the Game because it’s necessary and it's such an easy access spot because it’s mobile. It’s just another app that we can use to make our lives easier.

Ciara: Daman, can you please tell us about your business, why you started it, and what needs you fill in the community.

Daman: My current business is Wandke Consulting, where we provide web accessibility testing and disability inclusion training to businesses and non-profit organizations. When I started my business, it was an accessibility travel startup company called AbiliTrek. The goal was to create a hotel booking website to meet the needs of people with disabilities. After a few pivots, we rebranded to Wandke Consulting to provide consulting services to make the world more accessible by helping businesses become more accessible.

Ciara: Thank you so much. I love that Wandke consulting started with maybe the hotel booking and ensuring there was accessible travel but then you said No we need to make an accessible world here. So, I love that pivot into an even bigger reach.

**Ciara: Alright, so the second question I have for the two of you When you decided to start a business, can you share with us what it was like to decide what to do first or what small step or action did you need to do towards your big goal or goals**

Ciara: Victor, would you mind going first?

Victor:

Of course, thank you so much. I wanted to say the journey and business of Daman is so awesome. I feel so proud to be in the same partner with him.

I started questioning my own beliefs about why I wanted to start Adapt the game.

Is this a real a problem that people with disabilities are facing or is it just my experience as a wheelchair user. After that step, I realized that it was a problem to many people that I asked. I started doing research and then more research and then more research. Until I validated that it is an actual need and then I started building the business from that point.

Ciara: Victor, when you were doing your research and asking people if this was a need what did they say?

Victor: They said. I asked them run me through the last time you went to a game. Then they started sharing their own story and I did follow up questions about the ticketing purchase, the transportation, what is the first they look for when they are planning on going to the event. That way I transfer these stories that allow me to build the idea and persona the idea for my app and that helped me out to navigate the market fit.

Ciara: Thank you so much for sharing that I think research is a great way to start right. Could be a great first step to figure out who else needs this exactly what you shared and sometimes research can start with talking to the people in our lives and then community members. Thank you so much for sharing.

Ciara: Daman, what about you. When you first decided to start a business, can you share with us what it was like to decide what to do first towards the big goal

Daman:

Yah, When I started my business, the first thing I needed to do was to find a hotel booking provider because the goal was to create a hotel booking website for people with disabilities. I knew the provider I needed to work with and through networking in my local community, I found a businessperson that knew who I needed to talk to. I successfully got the partnership that I needed but unfortunately, in the end, the business idea did not work out. When I changed it to consulting, I was lucky to find that one of the non-profit organizations where I served on their board of directors needed the services that I offered. I resigned from their board of directors and became a consultant. This contract kept my business afloat until we were able to find more clients to build a successful business.

So, I would say it’s a lot about who you know, and networking is key and you can build connections that you know to get to where you need to go. It’s very helpful when you’re starting out and along the journey.

Ciara: I was going to add a question for you Daman but you hit it right there I was going to say how important is community and you both know just how important just through these first two questions it’s all about connections, it’s all about saying hello this is what my goal is how can you help. I love that. But Daman, I do have a question for you – how would you or what advice would you give someone who is a little bit nervous about networking or getting out into their community?

Daman: There are a lot of different ways you can network. You can network at conferences, online at LinkedIn, or social media. Usually when talking to people about networking. I recommend they think about who and what and why. Who you are, what you do, and why you want to talk to that individual. When you introduce yourself, I find that using the who what why is really helpful to break the ice which in this case is a conversation.

Ciara: I love that you not only spoke about how important networking is, but you gave step by step advice. I have never actually heard of the who what and why and applying that in introducing yourself in networking. So, if you take anything from today you can go say hello and you can share who you are, what you do, and why you are talking to that person. I love that so much thanks for sharing that Daman.

**Ciara: Ok, there are so many people who are hesitant about starting a business. Maybe it’s because they feel they have to do every part of it on their own. Can you share with us what help you’ve asked for when you’ve started this business or even the help, you’re getting today to grow your business.**

Ciara: Victor, would you mind going first.

Victor:

Yup, as a solo founder, I have had to wear a lot of hats during the process and perform different roles, but gratefully because of networking and my years of experience in the disability community and also sports industry I've been able to surround myself with many mentors that complement the gaps of knowledge that I do have because I have them and they help support my journey throughout this process. It’s not easy but the advice is to find that group of people that are in your inner circle that can be your mentors and really believe in what you are serving and that’s the way you can get to it.

Ciara: I think you spoke so beautifully about the importance of community and a team. As a solo founder, yes you are the name and face behind the business, but we all need help. So, I love that you talked about mentorship and looking in your inner circle to see who has the skills to help you in getting you to your next goal or milestone so thank you for sharing that.

Victor: Thank you

Ciara: Daman, what about you. Same question with so many people being hesitant with starting a business because they feel like they have to every single apart of it. Can you share with us what help you’ve asked for and maybe the help you get today to grow your business.

Daman:

I want to first echo what Victor just said. I have built a team from the beginning. II have hired a lot of students and mentored students into roles at my company to now they help me, and I help them.

I have been lucky to have a lot of mentors and advisors along the way that have provided me with the knowledge of how to successfully build a business. One of my long-term business advisors is now a paid consultant at my company. As we try to take the company to the next level, I also work with the small business development center. And back when I started my business, I participated in a 54-hour startup challenge, where a group of us created the initial business idea within a weekend.

And that was really where I took my idea to OK, I'm ready to start this.

Ciara: The 54-hour challenge startup. I feel like that should at least be a reality show. That should be on tv. I would love to watch that on Netflix. I love that this challenge started an actual business. Thank you for sharing it.

Daman: Oh, I forgot to say that we won the challenge

Ciara: Yah, I agree. I would say you’re still winning!

Ciara: Daman, you shared a perspective about mentorship where you are the mentor for your students whether they are past or current. Can you share a little bit about how that relationship was made? Have people approached you and ask you to be your mentor?

Daman: Yes and no. So, a lot of it is informal. I hire a lot of employees both as my company and personal care takers. I have hired a lot of students over the years, and I teach them how to do the tasks. This builds up, I hire a lot of interns and I tell them this is not the typical internships where you’ll be getting people coffee. Because we are a small business you’re actually going to dive into real work and have real responsibility so I hire them as employees as well as other people with disabilities that come to me for advice. If you want to work for a while or more so on a regular basis. I have been mentored by a lot of people and now I help with the next generation by having the mentoring for the next group of leaders.

Ciara: Thank you so much for sharing that.

**Ciara: Ok, so can you two.... please share about a time where you completed maybe what would be called a “smaller” task or checklist item in starting or growing your business that led to major growth in your business? For example: this could be hiring a contractor to help with your website which then made you become publicly visible.**

Ciara: Victor, why don’t you go first.  
  
Victor:

If I may, I want to separate this answer into two parts.

It was really important to create a brand and logo that was able or is able to tell the story of adapt the game. The very first time I talked about this being a real thing you know it was back in 2021

I participated in a venture challenge. This was the first opportunity I had to speak in public after the pandemic. So, I had to switch from the zoom environment to in-person and I only had 5 minutes to speak to executives from the sports organization of adapt the game. I worked really hard but that led me to winning the third prize of that venture challenge and from then I started building the MVP which is now launched.

Ciara: I really appreciate you sharing that story. I feel like you and Daman are good with time pressure and challenges with the 5 minutes to pitch adapt the game to a room full of executives. So, Congratulations on winning that third prize and being able to start the app.

Ciara: Ok, Daman.

Victor: Thank you very much.

Ciara: Daman, with the question of would you be able to share a time when you completed a checklist item or what you would call a smaller talk that led to major growth in your business.

Daman: I would like to build on what I said in the last question. I found out about a 12-week entrepreneurship class in the Seattle area, which is two hours away from where I live. The class was led by a non-profit that helps social ventures succeed. Even though it was a long way to go for a class one evening a week, I dove in and took the class because I felt I needed a refresher on the business basics. At one of the classes, I met a business advisor from Vancouver BC, who has now been my adviser now for six years. He now works under contract at my company and is focused on our growth. Going into that class, I had no idea that I would meet someone that would be a long-time asset to my business. And as I mentioned earlier networking is key. So many times, in my entrepreneurship journey I have been able to reach out to my networks to help me get to the next level.

Ciara: I think that’s pretty great when we meet someone, and we can never predict what role they will play in our lives, but it sounds like this person the business advisor from Vancouver. You all have created a a lifetime relationship there to help each other grow which I think is so beautiful. I have a question for you. How did you find out about that business class?

Daman: I actually don’t recall.

Daman: I don’t know much about it, but I don’t recall exactly how I found out about it. I remember they had a couple of scholarships available so that helped get the costs down, but I don’t recall how I actually learned about it.

Ciara: Ok yah, I know you had mentioned the small business development center previously and I do know that theyhold different webinars just like this or classes even so that could be a great start for someone who is looking into courses or even connecting with you after this to see who hosted that but I think classes or scenarios you can put yourself in a space with other entrepreneurs will really get you to the next level

Daman: Yah the name of the organization is called the spring incubator in Vancouver BC. Spring like the season.

Ciara: Ok perfect I'll have to look it up

Daman: Yah

**Ciara: I would love to really showcase your experience and knowledge about starting a business by starting small towards a big goal or big goals. What advice would you two have to someone who has a business idea that they’re passionate about but they just don’t know how to start. Where would you tell them to start and why?**

Ciara: Victor, what about you first.

Victor:

Yah, I'll go back to your first question and say that start with why you want to do this but also who are you and that will open the doors. Not only talk about your business but tell your own story and your own testimony to the work and who would open doors for you.

If I may I want to recommend a book that is called Start With Why by Simon Sinek. That really helped me on my journey in the early stage of a founder. I also relate to what Daman was saying about BC and that support because I have those in my journey and when you’re ready take a shot. They might listen but if they don’t give you a chance in that moment, they will for sure give you advice and wisdom about how to take your and start your business to the next level.

I really relate to that and in my experience, it has helped with what works.

Ciara: I like that you two without even planning it talked about the importance of who, what, and why. It is so important to know that and to live that and to be able to have conversations with everyone about it. Because it really is the more people you share your goals to the more people can help. So, thank you so much for sharing that Victor

Victor: Of course

Ciara: Daman, same question goes to you. I would love if you can showcase your experience and knowledge of starting a business by starting small towards a goal of yours. So, what advice do you have to someone who has such a good idea, and they have the energy and passion for it, but they just don’t know where to start.

Daman:

My advice would be to design what your passion is and think about who would pay for your expertise or the products that you would like to build. And like what Victor was saying earlier

Once you figure out who might be willing to pay for it, I suggest that you have informational interviews with your potential customers to learn what their pain points are and what they might be looking for. I would be very open at this point in redefining what you might be able to offer once you find a connect of what they need and what you can offer. I suggest you try to get a couple of early customers to prove your idea is successful and to be early adopters

These early customers can then provide you with testimonials to help you with growth.

Ciara: Thank you

Ciara: I love that you shared in somewhat of an indirect way in this question and a previous response how important it is to welcome opportunities that come your way in order to pivot your business to create even better and to fill even more needs in the community and that can start with conversations with friends and community members of would you pay for this, would you need this, and do you know anyone else that I can talk to.

Ciara: Again I almost feel like the theme for today is community and opportunity and looking for the pivot almost to really figure out what works for you.

Daman: I’m always saying I'm open to new opportunities because you never quite know what opportunity will come your way.

Daman: An example, I was asked if I could teach at the local university, but they assumed I was too busy with my company. I said nope I would love to try that out. The university has enough flexibility that I can teach multiple classes and impact students there while growing my company and I would have never thought about doing that if I wasn’t open to opportunities.

Victor: Yah, I would echo that to leave always the door open to opportunities and to different spaces that you can find those early adapters. I play adapted sports and work out with people with different disabilities. So, I second what Daman was saying about taking all the opportunities that you can and not focus not just on you but it’s also about solving a problem for a large group of people and to get paid for that because that's important because if not you won’t have a business if you don’t get paid for what you do.

Victor: I really like something that that the founder of Airbnb said once he said it’s better to have 100 or 1000 users that really like you than a million users that sometimes like you. And don’t fall in love with the solution but fall in love with the problem you know? Many people like the solution too much and as Daman was saying he pivot. He pivot from an early concept so it’s not about the solution, it’s the problem it’s about what you’re serving.

Daman: I really

Ciara: Go ahead

Daman: I would like to add a positive. When I started a business, it was business to consumer. Meaning that the consumer would pay for my service and that required a lot of people to pay a little bit of money for you to be successful and as I pivoted, I was better suited at the business-to-business route. When I sell to business to impact accessibility from that angle and you can still do a business path that way but you don't need as many clients as you would in a business to consumer approach.

Ciara: Now, I do have an additional question for the both of you because we’ve talked about being open to receiving and welcoming opportunities that allow us to grow but have you all been in a situation that an opportunity has been giving to you but it doesn't align to what your goals are and you have to say no thank you.

Ciara: Victor, do you want to go first

Ciara: Oh, you’re on mute my friend.

Victor: I have a small drop during your question can you repeat that question for me

Ciara: Yes, I was just talking about the importance to receive these opportunities and to welcome them but what happens when something comes your way and it doesn’t align to your goals and you say no thank you. Have you had any experience like that?

Victor: Well, I have a hard time saying no because I see an opportunity in each situation. So, I take the time to think about by the way how can I get something from this but how can I add value to the person who is offering the opportunity to me. I may not be the person to serve what is needed for this person perfect, but I can probably refer this person or organization to the right person who is able to serve the need because of more time or more knowledge than what I can offer. I plan to be humble with that mindset to not take it but not because the opportunity is given to me, I don’t have to say yes or no but I can maybe hear you out and see how I can help without actually taking the role if you know what I mean

Ciara: That’s a great perspective to share of that hey I might not be the best person for this but let me try to help anyway by connecting you to someone who might

Ciara: That goes back to help make a community for someone or at least make it stronger I think that in itself is something that can be so helpful for anyone looking to start a business

Victor: I really agree. I’m happy. I have a venue that I'm working with, and we agree on a free trial. The payment will come eventually but it’s a chance to help and add value and impact many people. When I was doing my website, I have to give advice to developers about compliance. Now they can add that service and knowledge to their business so there are many ways that you can help when you are being helped or while you are being helped.

Ciara: Daman, what about you? What situation or experience do you have with opportunities coming your way and it just doesn’t align to what you have or what your goal is?

Daman: Well, I'm still working on the saying the no thing. I’m not very good at saying no. I’m working on that. One that came to mind though is that a few months ago I got through my network a full-time job opportunity and it was work that I can do but I don’t find interesting, and I wouldn’t want to do day in and day out. So, I asked to do part time or contract and they weren’t open to that so I recommended some software that could help that could achieve most of what they were looking for and said maybe down the road there may be an opportunity to work together.

Ciara: That’s a great example of finding a solution. Thank you for sharing.

Ciara: So, alright I mean it this time this is the last question.

**Ciara: Can you please share how people can help or support you and your business?**

Ciara: Victor, why don’t you go first.

Victor:

First of all, thank you for this awesome conversation. It has been a pleasure to have. Daman it feels like we’re mirroring our answers without telling each other so that’s really awesome. With that being said,

Our app is live on the App Store and Google Play Store so any feedback that people can give on the app is appreciated good or bad it will help us grow. Lastly, Adapt the Game is not only about Victor, it is for all fans that are out there that are sports fans that wish to live their passion for the game equally.

That is the message that I want to leave. The app is for everyone out there. Just give us your feedback, sign up for our mailing list, and we would love to hear from you. So, thank you very much, I appreciate it.

Ciara: Thank you Victor I can’t wait to check out the app.

Ciara: Daman, what about you? How can people help Wandke Consulting and you?

Daman:

Well, while Victor was talking I download the app.

We are always looking to help any business or organization be more accessible. You can check out what we offer on our website at [Wandke.com](https://linkprotect.cudasvc.com/url?a=https%3a%2f%2fWandke.com&c=E,1,L9yCbnpAS91kXmxc1qwP63Q8Siqon_lWaABNxp5mZsWOYxIybAPZKqex9XmGCQJc17FVcLxte-kRdjq_5tU9ySSSKLeiDAilqZhzEDtCyM7d7FBp&typo=1&ancr_add=1) My last name dot com. If you know of any business or nonprofit leaders that are looking to make what they offer more accessible, please send them our way.

I really enjoyed the conversation.

Ciara: Thank you so much.

Ciara: Daman and Victor, thank you so much for your time today. I appreciate the both of you sharing about your businesses, how you got started, and the advice that you have to new or inspiring entrepreneurs.

Ciara: So, We have reached the Q&A portion of our presentation which means we’ll go ahead and switch to the live audience to continue the conversation and answer questions that may have come up in the chat.