An innovative legal outsourcing solution

Previously a lawyer in the City, Dana Denis-Smith founded Obelisk Support in 2010 to provide high-quality, efficient and flexible legal work by tapping into unutilised talent such as ex-City lawyers who did not want to work 9–5. Obelisk Support makes those lawyers available individually or as teams to large corporates and law firms. In 2014, Dana participated in the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses programme (10KSB), delivered in London by UCL, so that she could take Obelisk to the next level.

A “legal” loophole

With deep sector experience under her belt, Dana’s first company was a consultancy firm that specialised in emerging markets. It was on a business trip to India that she had her lightbulb moment. She saw there was a real need for high-quality legal work to be provided at a more affordable price, but in alignment with local firms’ needs. Based on this model of flexibility matched with quality of service, Obelisk Support started trading in Spring 2011. A contract with Goldman Sachs proved that Dana had sensed a real need in this area.

Developing her entrepreneurial spirit

Dana found out about 10KSB from the WEConnect website, which connects women in enterprise with market opportunities. She says the course, which she was on for ten months, was instrumental in helping her grow as an entrepreneur and business leader. “It’s very hard to run a business,” she says. “You need to be able to deliver – otherwise you just have a cool idea. 10KSB asks you to look at how you are as a businessperson, who you want to be, and how you’re going to get there. This makes you much more comfortable in your own skin.”

Changing company foundations

Before 10KSB, Obelisk Support grew 400% every year. While this is amazing growth, on 10KSB Dana was able to understand the need for firm foundations. “I wanted to see how far I could take the business,” she says, “and thanks to 10KSB I now understand just how important strong foundations are.” Connecting with peers on similar journeys was also transformative. “My 10KSB peers provided me with support, resources and a stronger sense of where I was in my business journey.”

Bringing flexibility into working culture

Thanks to 10KSB, Obelisk Support is now a streamlined success; and Dana has an even more ambitious vision. Niall Daly, 10KSB tutor, says, “Dana applied the learning from the programme from day one, focusing on the right parts of the business to build growth.”

In September 2014, Obelisk Support announced it was teaming up with Thomson Reuters in a strategic collaboration that gives its lawyers access to market-leading legal tools and resources. This access is particularly critical for lawyers who have been out of the profession due to a career break, who wish to return and refresh their skills.
About UCL
UCL (University College London) was established in 1826 and is ranked as one of the world’s top ten universities. The university is a modern, outward-looking institution, with more than 4,000 academic and research staff committed to engaging with the major issues of our times. It has a global reach, with 34% of its students coming from outside the UK, from almost 140 countries.

www.ucl.ac.uk

About UCL Advances
UCL Advances, UCL’s centre for entrepreneurship, helps anyone who wants to learn about, start or grow a business. Its primary role is to promote a culture of entrepreneurship on campus and engagement with entrepreneurs and small businesses beyond UCL’s boundaries. It works to support start-ups and small businesses across London by helping them to access the technical and business expertise of UCL’s staff and students through a series of programmes to help support ambitious young companies.

UCL Advances is affiliated with UCL Enterprise, which provides UCL’s structures for engaging with business for commercial and societal benefit.

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About Business Support
UCL provides direct business support for internal and external organisations through a variety of programmes, such as grants, space provision, training, advice and problem solving. The Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses is one of these programmes.

The Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses programme is designed to unlock the economic and job creation potential of small businesses and social enterprises operating in the United Kingdom. The programme is based on the broadly held view of leading experts that greater access to a combination of education and business support services best addresses barriers to growth. 10,000 Small Businesses is targeted at small businesses and social enterprises with clear ambitions to expand. The goal of the programme is to provide participants with tools and resources to help them lay the foundations for long-term sustainable growth and job creation in their communities. It is funded by Goldman Sachs and the Goldman Sachs Foundation and delivered by UCL Advances.

www.ucl.ac.uk/10ksb
www.ucl.ac.uk/advances/business/support