



MANUFACTURING: Coach tries to transform 'vulnerable yet viable' companies



Dennis Sonney, who works for California Manufacturing Technology Consulting as the Inland Empire coach, at Western Hydrostatic in Riverside, one of the many clients for whom he has helped solve problems, provide training programs and grow their companies.
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Published: Sept. 23, 2014 Updated: 10:57 p.m.

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Dennis Sonney likes to say that's he got \$10 million in his back pocket.

He's not joking, either. Sonney (pronounced "Sonny"), 44, of Jurupa Valley, works for a private, nonprofit corporation funded largely by the U.S. Department of Commerce to help strengthen manufacturing in the Inland Empire.

Based in Torrance, California Manufacturing Technology Consulting is supported by federal, state and county money to help cover clients' fees. Sonney and his team come on board to help businesses implement marketing strategies, increase revenues and provide job-training programs. Both Riverside County's and San Bernardino County's Workforce Investment Boards each kick in \$100,000.

Called a manufacturing coach, Sonney works his magic transforming "vulnerable yet viable" companies, he said. "We want them to grow, hire people, pay taxes and stay here."

Since he arrived nine years ago, Sonney has worked with hundreds of companies that make everything from aerospace and aviation components to cosmetics, paint coating, robots, bats, skateboards and tiny circuit boards. In 2013, Sonney helped create 2,580 jobs at Inland manufacturing businesses, and he takes on 12 new clients a month, from startups to multimillion-dollar giants, he said. Last quarter alone, he worked with 19 manufacturers.

"We want to make sure the owners are inspired and motivated, so we're very selective," Sonney said. Once the county approves, Sonney and his team come in to address challenges that include flagging or flatlined sales, out-of-control inventory, inefficient auditing, poor long-term planning, layoffs and a nonexistent or weak digital footprint.

For online assistance at rebooting and rebranding, Sonney calls in one of the nonprofit's certified contractors, Paul Aguirre, who owns DyeDigital.com.

For the past five years, Sonney has worked closely with a Riverside company, Western Hydrostatic, which sells and repairs hydraulic components on large construction machinery.

Founder and CEO Starke Scott praises the customer service training program that Sonney helped set up with state subsidies as invaluable and affordable. In addition, Scott said his company benefited from Sonney's plans to help them diversify, reduce waste on the shop floor and avail themselves of stronger digital marketing tools. This year, annual sales are expected to exceed \$8 million, almost double those in 2009.

"I'm passionate about what I do," said Sonney. "It's rewarding to know how I've impacted businesses."