Turning passion into a six-figure business with Enterprise Corps

Antonio Chapital is taking his hobby and passion to the next level with a confidence he did not have before getting involved with the IU Kelley School of Business

Antonio Chapital was a stay-at-home dad with a camera he had received as a gift. That camera was the foundation of Chapital Photography, the business he started eight years ago, serving only family and friends. Since 2022, revenue has grown 20% each year. In 2024, the year Chapital took classes offered by Enterprise Corps, his gross revenue was $120,000. He now charges four times what he did during the pandemic for one photography session.

Starting out, what to charge was not his focus. He chose to work for free for his first clients to prove himself to the market. He says he had low self-esteem and little equipment. He secured equipment through the kindness of a neighbor who wanted to pay him for shoveling snow off her driveway. He never would accept money, but when the neighbor found out from Chapital's wife that he wanted to buy a lens for his camera, she gave him a good deal on all sorts of camera equipment that her late husband had left behind. Chapital remembers paying about $8,000 for everything from backpacks to lights to tripods. He imagines he would have paid triple that had he bought everything retail.

So, armed with equipment and a passion for photography, Chapital applied to Enterprise Corps. It was the recommendation of Marcela Montero, Director of the Hispanic Business Council of the Indy Chamber. Like most applicants, Chapital had launched a company based on passion without much of a business plan. Chapital attended three of the four courses offered; Business Strategy, Marketing & Sales, and Organizational Leadership. He took away "nuggets of knowledge."

"The information is really just common sense, but when someone else explains it, it becomes an AHA! moment," he explains

Chapital says by attending the classes and meeting one-on-one with Professor Phil Powell, he has learned valuable lessons, including the need to delegate. He is realizing he cannot do everything. At the encouragement of Powell, he decided to hire

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someone part time, someone who could do the paperwork, the tax forms, and the spreadsheet to organize his clients. Having that person frees him up to do the photography. That man works three hours a week. He is a stay-at-home dad who can work out of his home and be available to his children with special needs. The two men agreed Chapital would give him photography lessons as a form of payment.

Chapital wants to pass on the assistance he has received from others. Instruction from Kelley professors gave him the business knowledge that allows him to run a profitable business and have positive social impact.

Apprenticeships are an important part of his operation. His first apprentice was a 25-year-old gentleman from Colombia, Nicolas. Nicolas arrived with no portfolio, but a lot of interest in photography. Chapital offered him a camera and a lens. Nicolas has since paid him back in work hours, and he now owns the equipment once given to him by Chapital.

"It's easy to lose freelancers," Chapital remarks. "We create a sense of community. Then, they're more likely to stick around." Chapital adds, "The equipment is expensive, but if I see someone hungry to learn, that is the key to me."

Chapital's journey has not been picture-perfect, but his creativity and his desire to develop into a role model for other visionaries have kept him focused. He once had a studio, but the pandemic shuttered it. In 2020, he was losing money. He says for two full years he had no business clients. He took photos of high school seniors instead, and many of his subjects learned of his talents by word of mouth or saw his work on Instagram.

Chapital points out, "Instagram is perfect for a picture-taker."

During the pandemic he was charging $200 a session. Now, he charges $800 a session, and that comes with 40 digital images. If you want more, you have to pay extra whether that is for an album or something else. He considers his photography unique. He proudly shared a photo he had shot of a high school senior in a suit, not a swimsuit, wearing goggles half under water. The young man is a competitive swimmer.

Chapital says, "I like to do a wow factor."

Chapital does not have to do it all himself anymore, a lesson Enterprise Corps reinforces. For corporate jobs, Chapital says he has a team of five contract workers. There is no payroll that way. They have their own equipment. He took the team out to celebrate their success and posted a photo on LinkedIn. Why? "Because they'll leave if they don't feel appreciated," answers Chapital.

Chapital says he has gotten involved in the community because he has noticed a lack of Latino representation on boards. "I think it's my pride. I don't see Latinos having a strong image in the community," he says. He's trying to create a better image for Latinos.

Chapital credits Enterprise Corps for giving him some business backbone.

"In the beginning you doubt yourself. I'd go on shoots and be setting up lights, and the client would ask, where's the photographer? They assumed it wasn't me," he explained.

Chapital says the Business Strategy course he took opened his eyes to what could be and how his photography business could grow. He tends to go with the flow, but because of what he learned during strategy sessions, he says he forces himself to do things

step by step which is not comfortable for him. He tends to undersell himself. He wants people to see him as experienced and knowledgeable. He wants to work on his website, knowing that marketing is an important next step for the business.

"I haven't been showing off," he admits with a smile.

Antonio Chapital's story is one of transformation. He is still the dad who enjoys taking pictures of his family and friends, but now he has passion plus a business plan to expand.

"Expansion into video and full-service media will scale Chapital Photography in a major way," says Powell.

This is an insight Chapital gained from Enterprise Corps upon which he is acting. Thanks to Enterprise Corps, he sees ways he can grow his business, still serve the community, and make a living doing what he loves. ■

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