

# Small Business Spotlight:

## Lawrence Lewis | CEO & Founder

### One Feather, Est. 2014

#### **Life Story**

Lawrence Lewis is a member of the We Wai Kai Nation on Vancouver Island. For years he worked to grow Indigenous communities, help them protect their rights and title, and enhance cultural and social values and priorities. He worked for multiple nations, the federal government and the provincial government. During this time, Lawrence gained a deep understanding of the bureaucratic processes related to Indigenous nations.

#### **How did your business come to be and what motivated you to start it?**

Through years of work with First Nations, I was attuned to the absence of software developed specifically for First Nations to advance their interests. I had a vision to create technology solutions for First Nations to use. I surrounded myself with people that could build that technology and help bring that vision to life. We are now able to provide technology solutions for elections, membership, and engagement, to reduce costs and administrative strain for nations.

#### **How has COVID-19 impacted or shaped your business model?**

Initially, our clients and partners just shut down, and there was a three-month period when we didn't do any business with First Nations. When we emerged from that period, what we saw was that the current COVID-19 experience had accelerated First Nations desire to embrace technology to serve their members.

In early 2020, nations weren't sure if their people were ready or would embrace the technology. By mid-2020 they couldn't get the technology fast enough. COVID-19 helped people pivot and adopt new technologies. As a company we originally laid people off, but quickly called them back and actually grew our company to meet the growing demand.

#### **What has been the greatest reward to date as a small business in your industry?**

The greatest joy and reward is when I hear of a member who has gone online to renew their status card. We have removed barriers of cost, time and resources. The member no longer needs to get a passport photo or even leave their home to stay engaged with their community. Doing electronic voting and allowing members to feel more engaged is amazing, it brings real joy.

#### **What are some of the challenges of operating your business and how did you overcome them?**

Our challenges always have to do with our partners' interests and ability to adapt to new technology. We are working to transition from paper forms and snail mail to secure electronic systems. Governments that we work with, from the federal government to the nations' governments, are at least a decade behind on technological advances. A lot of what we do is act as thought leaders about digital sovereignty and how that supports Indigenous sovereignty.

#### **What advice would you give to aspiring Indigenous entrepreneurs or entrepreneurs?**

Never give up. The thing about being an entrepreneur is that it is a lot of work, it is a state of mind, and requires a lot of passion. If I stopped every time somebody said something couldn't, or shouldn't, be done, I would have stopped a long time ago.

You don't have to be beaten up and broken because somebody says your idea won't work. It gives you an opportunity to find a different way to solve the problem. Some things seem impossible as a

whole concept, but if you break it down into individual, manageable pieces you can accomplish your vision.

Also, the rewards aren't always about money. The real joy and reward comes from making a difference, a change – creating something that lifts our people up, leaves more on the table than when we arrived, and which has a positive and sustained environmental impact.

**The Bottom Line:**

- One Feather has 18 employees.
- One Feather aspires to increase their clients from 200 nations to 300 in the next five years.
- One Feather is aiming to increase its userspace from 300,000 to 500,000 members.