

Manning Sumner

Miami, Florida



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Learn about Florida Entrepreneur Manning Sumner:

In 2001, when Manning Sumner, Owner and Founder of Legacy Fit, left Birmingham, AL, bound for Miami Beach, he had visions and aspirations of breaking into Hollywood. He was encouraged by a friend, working in Miami as a model, to apply for a body double position for Bad Boys 2. After shaving his head, taking a quick selfie, texting it to his friend and connecting with the talent manager, he was hired for the role. With all of his belongings and \$2,000 cash, he packed his car, said goodbye to a steady well-paid job and headed south.

Sumner shared the incredible story behind his entrepreneurial journey.

His path was neither direct nor easy. He faced many hurdles and uncertainties, but remained committed and focused on his goals. Sumner's story showcases the often harsh realities of entrepreneurship,

but also proves that with hard work, a solid vision, grit and determination, anything is possible.

“Before I moved to Miami, I was working as a personal trainer and also an Assistant Strength and Conditioning Coach for Samford University,” Sumner said. “When I got the call from my friend about the role with Bad Boys 2, I didn’t hesitate to jump on the opportunity. It’s funny to look back on now, but I really thought it would lead to a career in acting. Even though it didn’t play out like that, it did bring me to Miami. I still remember driving over the bridge, seeing the water and thinking that I just moved to paradise.”

From 2001 through November 2008, Sumner went back to doing what he does best – one-on-one personal training. He quickly gained an excellent reputation and picked up several athletes and celebrities as clients. Starting in 2005, he began traveling with certain high-end clients. He’d help them maintain their exercise regimens while traveling and also served as a quasi-personal assistant. For Sumner, it was an opportunity to see the country while sharpening his training skills, but also gave him a chance to visit and observe the operations of dozens of gyms.

“I noticed that every gym was exactly the same and it really bothered me,” Sumner said. “They all had the front desk, the cardio area, free weights, and the machines area. I even noticed that the customers and their routines were often similar from gym to gym. Some people seemed complacent and others didn’t know what they were doing. I came to the conclusion that most gyms were not set up for success. They lacked the ability to deliver results. That’s really where the idea to start my own gym started to brew.”

Around the middle of 2007, while back in Miami, Sumner had an experience with a client that served, not only as a wakeup call, but also as a catalyst that helped to launch Legacy Fit.

“I had this client, who was a great client, but also very demanding,” Sumner said. “One morning, I showed up one minute late for our session and he wasn’t there. I called him and got no response. The next day, I showed up early and he was there warming up. We went through the session and he didn’t say a word about the day before. Afterwards, he sent me a text and told me to never be late again. That was a huge learning experience for me.”

Sumner continued, “This client also had a lot of money. At the time, I was considering starting a clothing line, but he suggested instead that I open a gym. He said, ‘You’re the number one trainer in Miami, you need to do this’. Considering a possible partnership, he asked me to put together a business plan. I made a dream board, cut out pictures of equipment and, using my experience from years of travel and seeing gyms throughout the country, I came up with a layout. I wanted it to feel different than anything I’d ever experienced before.”

Sumner described the concept, his client liked what he saw and agreed to become an equity partner. Sumner maintained a majority share and the two went looking for a location to bring their vision to life.

“We hired three or four Realtors to help us find the right location,” Sumner said. “However, it wasn’t until I rode my bike around that I found what I was looking for. I discovered a warehouse space in Wynwood,

long before the Wynwood we know today. From the start, my partner was against it. The neighborhood was pretty rough back then. There were homeless people and prostitutes everywhere. It wasn't the type of place you'd want to visit, but I knew it had potential. It was also affordable and in the dead center of Miami. It was close to everything. I remember standing on the train tracks and having a vision of what it could become."

Sumner's partner finally agreed to move forward and, in the spring of 2008, they negotiated the deal and began the build out. By November 2008, they were open for business. Fortunately for Sumner, he was able to carry over some of his personal training clients. Nevertheless, his first year in business was a doozy.

"The original model was to have six other trainers on staff," Sumner said. "Unfortunately, I couldn't get anyone to get up at 5am. We went through 19 trainers that first year and my original partner decided he no longer wanted to be part of the company. Honestly, it was a disaster. I also demanded a lot back then. I was more 'boss' driven than 'leader' driven. Running a business was still new to me. To make matters worse, in December 2009, after being in business for just over a year, the whole gym flooded after a severe rainstorm. I remember sitting there on Christmas Day thinking it was over. Fortunately, those thoughts only lasted for about 30 seconds before I got buckets and mops and got all the water out. At this point, I knew I had to do something drastic."

Sumner got on the phone and started texting and calling former and current clients. He offered discounts to those willing to sign up before the New Year. He knew he'd have to sell a certain amount of

memberships in order to cover the cost of repairs. At the end of the day, he sold \$38,000 worth of training and provided Legacy Fit with a much needed boost.

“To me, the flood was like a cleanse,” he said. “It was like, ‘No, you’re going to get through this and come out on the other side’. Rather than complaining about it, I had to find a solution. That experience definitely provided me with some forward momentum.”

This was also around the time when Sumner landed his first employee that lasted more than a few weeks. The employee, Joe, was best friends with a trainer Sumner recently fired. As Sumner shared, even though Joe didn’t look the part, he turned out to be an incredible addition to the team.

“When Joe first came in he was extremely overweight, he smoked cigarettes and didn’t have any prior personal training experience,” Sumner said. “When he asked if he could work for me, I honestly said ‘To do what?’ He said he wanted to learn from me and that he was willing to do whatever it took. I said, ‘You can work for me, but I can’t pay you’. He was onboard and spent the next 3 months cleaning the gym and, along the way, he lost 75 lbs. He proved his worth and eventually started to teach a morning boot camp class. He went from 4 people in the class to 13 and then 60. I never thought it would be him, but he was the trainer I was looking for.”

As the business juggled along, Sumner wasn’t afraid to make changes and try new things. He pivoted in different directions and remained open to new possibilities. After restructuring the space to resemble more of a circuit, similar to group exercise classes like OrangeTheory Fitness and

F45, he received an overwhelmingly positive response from his customers. Before long, 100 people were showing up for Tuesday and Thursday evening classes. He had NFL athletes training beside overweight individuals and knew group training was the right direction to go in. From 2012 to 2015 he experimented with different ideas and, through trial and error, found the ideal structure needed to deliver an effective and unique workout.

Today, Legacy Fit has five locations with another two opening next year. Sumner still enjoys training and working with athletes, but, as the visionary and leader behind Legacy Fit, he's focused on the bigger picture.

"What I really love now is the design aspect," he said. "I love walking into an empty and raw space and turning it into the next Legacy Fit. A lot of my passion comes from that and also from empowering younger generations to do what I did. I love paving the way and giving them a platform and an opportunity to be successful. I manage people and I build gyms. I'm sort of an architect of people's lives and buildings. I get so much purpose out of it."

Looking ahead, Sumner will continue to open new Legacy Fit locations with an ultimate goal of reaching a \$1 Billion valuation. He wants to surpass well-known brands like OrangeTheory Fitness and Barry's Bootcamp. After testing the waters several years ago with the franchise business model, Sumner is intent on growing internally to ensure quality and control over operations and the brand. With a motto of 'No Days Off' Legacy Fit and Sumner will continue to inspire, motivate and help people achieve their weight loss, body shaping and fitness goals for years to

come.

Sumner also shared that Joe, his first employee, who's never missed a day of work in nine years and has earned equity in the company, will run Legacy Fit's newest location in Kendell starting in the New Year.

What advice does Sumner have for aspiring entrepreneurs? "Just start somewhere," he said. "That's the biggest thing. You have to dive in, whether there's water in the pool or not. Just go for it. Once you decide to do it, you have to commit to that decision no matter what happens. For a lot of people that finally decide to start a business, one thing goes wrong and they're immediately thinking they made a mistake. They start thinking about going back to what they were doing. You can't do that. Even if you fall flat on your face, you need to get up, wipe the blood off and keep going."

Sumner added, "Also, your business is not going to improve unless you improve as a human. Every day I try to become a better version of myself from the previous day. Fill up your 'cup' on a daily basis. Read books, listen to podcasts, learn and educate yourself. Don't empty your cup and not refill it. That will suck the life out of you. Lastly, be willing to pivot if your vision changes, hire scrappers not scholars and don't just focus on the finish line. It's important to know that every day is a new start and an opportunity to accomplish something to get you closer to your ultimate goal."

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