

Robert Sausedo: "Community Build CEO's Bold Vision for the Future"

Robert Sausedo is always looking ahead. He refers to his leadership style as having the "Issachar factor"-- a reference to the one of the twelve tribes of Israelites from the Old Testament who were described as men who "had understanding of the times and knew what Israel ought to do."

After building a successful career in the private sector in the energy and technology fields, Sausedo was gearing up to make act two of his career about creating public policy that could positively affect the South L.A. community that has been his home his entire life-- when his plans took a turn. Divine intervention struck in the form of an opportunity to lead one of the area's bedrock non-profit organizations, Community Build Inc.

Though he didn't see it at first, coupling his ability to create opportunistic visions of the future with his passion for building strong communities through empowering individuals made him the perfect person for the job.

"When the opportunity to take over as President of Community Build came before me, I initially didn't want it, but I saw that God's divine providence was involved in my coming here," Sausedo tells L.A. Focus.

"One of the things that He has conditioned me to do is bring out the greatness in the people that work here, that we serve, and in the community. I believe we're doing that, and we'll grow the organization in a way that makes it sustainable for long term service to the community."

Community Build Inc. was founded in 1992 by Brenda Shockley and Congresswoman Maxine Waters in response to the civil unrest which rocked the community after the Rodney King verdict. It's goal: to revitalize South L.A. through human investment and commercial and economic development.

What started with a pilot program to provide education, training, employment placement and support services to former gang members and other at-risk young people, turned into a staple resource in the community for decades to come. In 2016, Shockley was tapped by Mayor Eric Garcetti to become

Deputy Mayor of

E c o n o m i c

Opportunity,

and Sausedo

stepped in in

2019-- poised

to take over

an organiza-

tion he saw

as founda-

tionally strong

and brimming

with potential.

"My role is to

c r e a t e

Community Build version 2.0 and set the groundwork for the next 25 years," says Sausedo. "What I saw coming into this opportunity is that this organization has really good bones and a solid structure. When you combine that with someone like me, who is really a private sector thinker in a non-profit seat, we have the potential to expand the reach of our organization exponentially."

And that is exactly what he's done. In two short years, Sausedo has doubled Community Build's funding, in turn allowing him to implement programs such as the Community Intervention, Census Canvassing and Community Patrol, resulting in over 2,700 jobs for unemployed or underemployed individuals in 2020 alone.

"I'm truly an economic development guy," says Sausedo. "And of the three components of our mission statement: human capital development, economic development, and commercial economic development, the latter two we've barely scratched the surface of."

Sausedo's plan is to diversify the organization's income streams, expanding both their impact and the span of their outreach.

"The way we're going to grow as an organization is by beginning to start social enterprises-- and that can be in the form of new business startups or taking over legacy businesses in the community and growing them, making them employee owned. But we'll be using the revenue from that to offset government contracts," says Sausedo.

"You have to diversify. The old model and way of doing things is rapidly going away. Clearly, we've done very well with various government contracts we've managed over the years, but we need to diversify around philanthropy, and invest into businesses that have an opportunity to provide career and/or business opportunities for the people that we serve."

To accomplish that Sausedo understands that it starts by empowering the people within Community Build and making sure his staff stays focused.

"One of the things that I did immediately is require staff members to read the book "Start With Why" by Simon Sinek," says Sausedo. "We have to know why we're doing what we're doing because part of my objective is to be innovative and not just an organization that says, 'we do that too'. Instead, to be a force of thought leadership."

"The problem with non-profits is that they often don't take care of their employees," says Sausedo. "People get over-worked and reach burn-out. So, for me establishing a culture of care and an open door policy with the employees is important."

Sausedo recalls his first several months at Community Build when it would often take him up to two hours to get from the front door to his office because he would stop at every single desk along the way to check in with everyone and see where they needed support.

Sausedo's knack for innovation in bringing people together and organizing were on full display last year when the pandemic hit. Inspired by seeing people in long lines outside of grocery stores, desperately stocking up on supplies, Sausedo knew South L.A. had a problem on its hands. That it was woefully ill prepared for an emergency. Sausedo got all the community leaders he knew on a conference call, and out of that the Community

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Response System of South Los Angeles (CRSSLA), was born.

"Within South L.A. there's a number of nonprofits both at the micro level and some larger scale, but for the first time we were able to get people to collaborate in such a way that it drove efficiency-- so if someone needed help or volunteers the other agencies could step in and provide services," says Sausedo.

CRSSLA's early work involved finding real estate assets that they could leverage into distribution centers for food and PPE, as well as medical triage facilities if the hospitals reach overcapacity and need to convert space into a temporary ICU.

"That turned into us doing far more than we ever thought," says Sausedo.

CRSSLA now has an education committee, a health-care committee, and is engaged in the vaccine distribution-- even partnering with the rideshare company Lyft to get people to and from vaccine sights.

In just their first year as an origination CRSSLA was recognized by the L.A. Business Journal by being nominated for a Nonprofit and Corporate Citizen Award.

"When you look at who we were nominated with, the fact that we've only been around a year is very telling of the success we've had," says Sausedo who was nominated for an award respectively along with Community Build Inc.

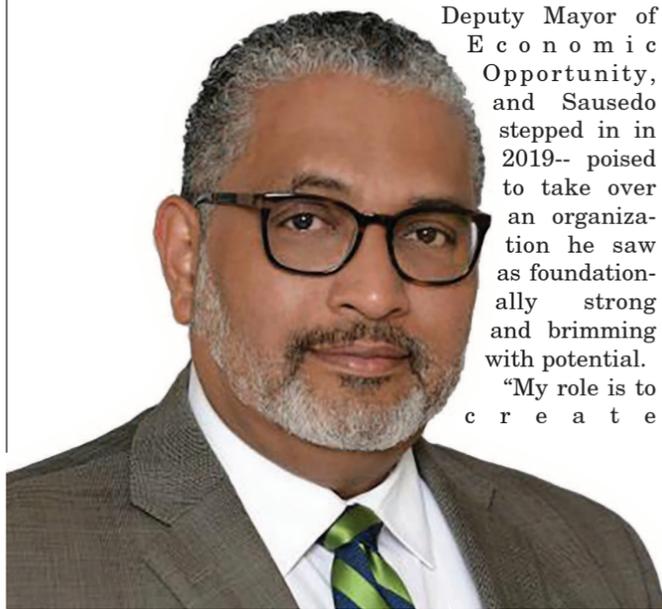
Sausedo is an assistant Pastor at Los Angeles Community Church and has felt called to do community building as his way of living the Word of God.

"To me this is God's work", says Sausedo. "It's one thing to go to church and clap your hands and pray, but the church is not just the four walls. Church is actually being out here in the marketplace changing lives. We have to build the economy around our belief system as Christians. So how I conduct myself at church should be no different than how I conduct myself in the marketplace.

"I'm not as available to do ministerial work as I used to be, but my work is my ministry. My beliefs govern me."

And Sausedo would like to remind everyone to answer when they hear God's call-- but with action.

"It's one thing to hear God," Sausedo says. "And it's another thing to know there's a calling on your life. But it's most important to be obedient and answer that call for the thousands of people you can actually impact on God's behalf."



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