

This Entrepreneur Was So Broke He Hid His Car From Repo Men – Now His Sound Therapy Pods Are in Luxury Hotels Worldwide

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Ray Kelly remembers the days when he and his wife were so broke they had to hide from debt collectors and repo men.

“There was nothing in the bank. We couldn’t park our car outside our house because they knew where we lived,” he recalls.

Fast-forward to today. Kelly is the founder and CEO of the pioneering wellness company TERSA, whose crown jewel is the SAVA—an immersive sound therapy pod used in luxury hotels and wellness facilities globally.



But this dramatic turnaround in Kelly's fortunes didn't happen overnight. It took an unwavering vision, resilience, and a strategic approach to entrepreneurship.

Kelly is this week's guest on the One Day with Jon Bier podcast. You can listen to the entire interview below, which details his 20-year career as a renowned injury rehab expert turned successful entrepreneur.

Here are some of the hard lessons he learned along the way.

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Stay true to your vision

In the early stages of TERSA, Kelly had a clear vision of developing a unique and dynamic healing methodology that disrupted the status quo with a more holistic approach to wellness.

But not everyone around him saw it the same way. They offered mounds of tips and guidance that almost threw Kelly off course.

Almost.

"If there's anything I've learned in the last eight years on this entrepreneurial journey, it's that advice can be dangerous," Kelly says. "All the advice I was given at the earliest stages when I was building my product lines, I wouldn't be anywhere near what it looks like today if I didn't hold the line. Everyone wants to share their bit of information with you, but they don't see what's in your head."

What was in his head was a human-sized sound cocoon that surrounded its inhabitants with vibrational therapy, sound

frequencies, music, and artificial intelligence to enhance physical, psychological, and emotional well-being.

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Rely on in-house expertise

Kelly stresses the importance of building a strong in-house design team rather than relying too heavily on external design houses. “Avoid going to a design product house like the plague,” he warns.

Why? Many design houses operate on a “times and materials” basis, which can lead to a lack of caution and potential financial strain for startups,” he explains. “There’s zero accountability if they fail,” Kelly says. “And that can kill you as a company. It can absolutely kill you.”

Instead, Kelly advocates for building slowly and recruiting individual team members on short contracts. This approach allows founders to maintain control over the development process and ensure they hold their own team responsible.

Navigate funding with eyes wide open

Many startups think they can control the type of investors they want to work with. Kelly disagrees, saying that founders are often at the mercy of where they are at that moment of their raise and who’s willing to be on the other side of the table.

“Sometimes you have to take these deals, or you have to accept kind of the state you’re in and just live to fight another day and then work on busting your butt to get to the next

milestone and keep fighting,” he says.

He warns entrepreneurs about the realities of working with investors: “They’re not your friends,” he states bluntly. Investors are in the business of making money, and entrepreneurs need to be prepared for tough decisions and added stress when things don’t go as planned.

“Investors aren’t the ones that are struggling to pay the bills every month,” Kelly points out. “It’s easy for them to give advice and give you advice on what you need to do. But at the end of the day, you are the one that’s eating it.”

Related: This Fitness CEO Ignored Advice to Alter His Brand. What Happened Next Is a Crash Course in Business Focus.

Position yourself strategically

Perhaps one of the most nuanced aspects of Kelly’s strategy is how he positions TERSA in the market. While the product has wide appeal to those seeking psychedelic, out-of-body experiences, Kelly is careful not to over-emphasize this aspect.

“If you kind of narrow in too much on the psychedelic sector, you start to isolate yourself from the bigger conversations that are happening,” he explains. Instead, Kelly positions TERSA as a serious player in the broader wellness and potential medical applications space.

This strategic positioning allowed TERSA to “have a seat at the table and be taken very seriously” in conversations about mental health. Kelly explains, “We had to visually look really buttoned up and ready for a serious conversation because if we came in branded with chakras and crystal ball—and not nothing against all that, it’s incredible—but just visually we had to move away from the stereotypes.”

The strategy has paid off. The company has a contract with the

U.S. military to research PTSD and trauma. Recently, Kelly and his wife drove past a street in LA where they'd once run out of gas because they couldn't afford to fill their tank. They just laughed at the memory, realizing how far they'd come.

"We were just pinching ourselves," he says.

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