

'I think Miami has been undergoing this amazing transformation'

■ **Philippe Houdard, the co-founder of Pipeline WorkSpaces, talks about his company, the city's transformation, and what makes Miami the ideal place for businesses.**

BY TASHA CUNNINGHAM
Special to the Miami Herald

When Philippe Houdard came to Miami in 1997, he saw something that made a lasting impression on him. As he drove over the I-395 bridge one day, he encountered massive gridlock on the bridge. People were getting out of their cars and running up and down the bridge. Houdard, having grown up in a village of 300 people in rural France, had never seen anything like it before. Eventually, he saw what everyone else was looking at — a group of Cuban refugees on the water near the bridge coming into Miami on a raft.

"To see that people would risk their lives to come to Miami was very impactful to me," Houdard said. "It's an experience that has stuck with me."

After graduating from the University of Florida with a degree in business

administration in 1992, he went to work as a legislative aide to U.S. Rep. Joseph P. Kennedy II in Washington and went on to work for U.S. Sen. Ted Kennedy's re-election campaign.

Houdard graduated from Harvard University in 1997 with a master's degree in public policy from the John F. Kennedy School of Government. He spent his childhood in Villeselve, a small village in northern France. After graduation, he went to work for Lucent Technologies in Miami, where he led the Lucent Brazil Privatization Task Force. The mission of the task force was to develop the company's plan to capitalize on the privatization of Brazil's state-owned telecom. Houdard has been in Miami since.

Houdard is the co-founder of Pipeline WorkSpaces. Pipeline offers co-working spaces, primarily in Florida. Pipeline's members range from small startups to major corporations like Microsoft, Uber, Spotify, HBO, Kayak and Google. Houdard is also co-chair of the Mia-

mi Downtown Development Authority's Innovation Advisory Group, which focuses on ways to attract, retain and expand businesses in Miami.

Houdard sat down with the Miami Herald to discuss Pipeline, the city's transformation over the years, and what makes Miami the ideal place for large corporations, startups and small businesses.

Q. You created Pipeline co-working spaces. When was that, and why did you do it? I don't think there were any other coworking spaces in town at that point, so what made you take that leap

of faith?

A. We created Pipeline in 2012. It started out frustration. We were with trying to find a dynamic workspace where people could come together, collaborate,



Philippe Houdard

Position: Co-founder, Pipeline WorkSpaces.

Career: In his current job since 2012. Before 2012, spent in various executive positions for large technology firms, including Lucent Technologies, now Nokia. Was the founder and CEO of SkyBank Financial, a payments company that grew to over \$15 million in volume before he exited the business in 2017.

Education: Bachelor's in business administration from the University of Florida (1992); Harvard University, master's degree in public policy (1997) from Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government.

Personal: Age 49; in a relationship; originally from Villeselve, France but now based in Miami.

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share ideas and build businesses. There weren't any workspaces that we found at the time that offered an experience like that. We really believe that ideas don't happen in a vacuum. When you have business owners from different backgrounds and experiences who come together to exchange ideas, it can be eye-opening. You get to see things from another person's perspective and that often inspires creativity and new ideas.

Q. How many Pipelines are there now, and where? Are there any that you've closed or are less busy than others?

A. We have seven locations now, including Brickell, Doral, Coral Gables, Fort Lauderdale, Orlando and Tampa. We opened a location in Philadelphia in 2018 and plan to expand to more locations across the

United States over time. We're at near-full occupancy in each of our current locations, so we're pretty busy. We haven't had to close any of our locations.

Q. Miami is ranked America's No. 1 city for co-working, with the most co-working spaces in a metro area. Why do you think that is?

A. I think Miami has been undergoing this amazing transformation. It's no longer just looked at as a place for sun and fun. Over the years, it's become known as a center of innovation and business growth. I think co-working spaces have contributed to that. They offer the flexibility that businesses need to develop and grow.

Q. How does Pipeline compete with larger national operations like WeWork? And can Mia-

mi support all of these co-working spaces?

A. The larger national operations like WeWork are more like big-box retailers. They are focused on scale. For Pipeline, we want to remain a boutique operation, where we know every member by name and can offer white glove service. The larger operations are more anonymous. Where they focus on automation, we are focused on personalization.

Q. You now co-chair an effort with the Miami Downtown Development Authority. Tell me more about that. Who locally is working with the committee?

A. The intent of the group is to pull people together and find ways to attract new, tech-focused companies to Miami. We have people on the committee like Michel Descha-

pelles from Magic Leap, Javier Correoso and Gauthier Derrien from Uber, Ana Paula Gonzalez from 500 Start Ups, and Lila de la Chesnaye from Chewy.com on the committee. We meet quarterly, and our intent is to pull people together and find creative ways to attract new tech companies to Miami.

Q. What is the strategy for attracting tech/innovation firms to Miami? What are you hearing from them about the pros and cons of coming here?

A. We've met with a number of tech firms about this question, and I'd say one of the pros is the recognition of Miami's diversity. Companies want diversity. Diversity produces the best ideas. One of the cons is a lack of recognition about what the new

Miami is all about. People still associate Miami as a place known for clubs, partying and fun. But we need tell a new story about Miami. It's a place where tech innovation and collaboration are happening, businesses are being built and new ideas are developed every day.

Q. You also run a nonprofit called the Developing Minds Foundation. Tell us more about that. What's your mission?

A. I founded Developing Minds Foundation 2006. We focus on building schools and supporting education programs in communities affected by armed violence and poverty. We dedicate our efforts to initiatives such as rehabilitating former child soldiers in Colombia, building schools in Rio de Janeiro's favelas and cre-

ating literacy projects focus on inner city communities in the U.S. In Miami, we provide software and technology to support an after-school program at St. John Bosco Catholic Church on Flagler Street. Kids come there after school and do things like use software programs such as KidzLit to improve their reading skills. The church has deep roots in the community. It was a place unaccompanied minors fleeing Cuba in Operation Pedro Pan came to when they landed in Miami in the early '60s. Through Developing Minds Foundation, we're able provide technology support for 300 kids in the after-school program.

Follow Tasha Cunningham on Instagram: @TheBrandAdvocates