

Mentors Help Pest Solutions Work Out Business Bugs

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A decade ago, Eric Ufer was crunching numbers and strategizing with hedge fund managers on what stocks to buy and sell. It was a job that paid high dividends financially, but didn't fulfill many of the other areas he was looking for in a career.

In 2011, Eric made a trade of his own, leaving his finance career to start Pest Solutions LLC, a Beaverton-based company that uses green techniques to help manage nuisance wildlife, ants, rodents and bed bugs. He started the business after trying to deal with a bed bug problem at some rental properties he owned. After a couple years of success in getting the business off the ground, he started to see flaws in his own ability to manage it all. He found help through our [Mentor Protégé Program](#) and graduated in June.

"I thought I could get caught up on the books later but I got so buried, I couldn't find my way out," Eric said. "That's when I started losing some hope."

While many aspects of the pest control business were fun for him – solving people’s pest issues, creating solutions, forming new relationships – others, he learned, weren’t his forté.

“Our books were awful,” Eric said. “Making sure an invoice is correct and is paid, entering gas receipts – I’d rather deal with a skunk that sprays me than deal with that.”

The Mentor Protégé Program helped match him with an experienced mentor in a similar field and brought together other small business owners to talk through issues in a confidential environment. He learned how to tackle computer, billing and human resource shortcomings, while building key relationships with other professionals.

“The program made me aware of so many new resources for my company,” he said.

Being the owner of a growing small business has also allowed Eric to create opportunities for employees. One example: Vic Stone, who was once living in a car Eric agreed to let him use and who helped with oddball projects. Vic is now a full-time employee who manages Pest Solutions’ afterhours animal control calls.

“He got himself an apartment a long time ago and this year, he’s looking to buy himself a home,” Eric said. “Vic is also in much better health than when he joined us. He’s walking so much taller and is so thankful for us, as we are for him.”

Eric’s enthusiasm for his employees and company culture is something he’s now more focused on, especially since he’s learned how to properly tackle the books.

“If you are going to be successful, you are going to put in long hours,” Eric said. “This isn’t something you do because you want to be your own boss. It’s because you have a true passion for it. It’s going to be one of the hardest things you do, but it’s rewarding.”

“I believe that 3-4 year mark is early enough to do it. After the bloom is off the rose. It’s when you start to scale, the books are growing and you may experience HR headaches. It’s far enough down the line. You don’t know what you don’t know.”