



ADDING MORE BODY TO A BUSINESS

DJ's Auto Service has been in business since 1993. They offer comprehensive auto repair services that include alignments, brake inspection, car and truck care, electrical services, engine maintenance, and much more. Three years ago its owner, Daniel Origer, also bought a body shop, called Estes Auto Body. Combined, the businesses are a big leap from where Dan first started.

"When I was 24 I was living at home. I was working nights at Schaumburg Honda and during the day, I was doing side work in my parent's garage," Dan recalls. "At the time, I needed a couple of radiators so I went to the Schaumburg radiator shop and talked to this guy named Bill. When I told him what I was working on, he asked if I ever thought of starting my own business. I said no. So he's like, well I'll rent you half my store for \$300."

The rest is history. "I put \$1,000 in a checking account, brought my toolbox in and started fixing cars. That's how I started DJ's Auto Service," Dan recalls.

FINE-TUNING A NEW BUSINESS PLAN

With such a long history in business, Dan felt pretty savvy about his approach to running the shop. But when it came to working with his managers and setting up new protocols, he admitted that he could use a little bit of help. That's when he started considering Next Level Northwest's Business Acceleration program.

First came the pitch process. That gave Dan the opportunity to express his interest in working on his financials. He also wanted to set up more standard practices and get help with operations planning and goal setting. After a successful pitch, he was paired up with Sybil Ege, a professional business coach, and the CEO and Co-Founder at The Business of Food.

Their first step together was gaining a better understanding of the personalities of the managers at both shops, and how they approach work. Sybil issued tests to each of them. "It basically helped me understand what my managers needed to work on, and how I could help them better handle things between customers and employees," Dan said. "That little bit of insight was really helpful, and I wouldn't have taken the time before the program to do it."

PUTTING ALL OF THE WORKING PARTS IN ORDER

Empowered by this new information, Dan and Sybil were able to implement some new procedures that would smooth out any future backfires. "Working from their good points, we started talking about how to get my managers more involved in the whole process, instead of me basically trying to do it all," Dan said.

That included creating a few new processes that would give his managers a bit more flexibility to do their job. "I don't want to get in the middle of confrontations," Dan explained. "I want my managers at both shops to be able to handle the situations. So we implemented some things for the employees, to keep clarity on the goal at hand. This way, we all understand what we're trying to do. And at the end of the day, that's serving the customer in the best way possible."

NEW PROCESS

IMPLEMENTATION TO BETTER COMMUNICATE GOALS

100% EMPLOYEE RETENTION

RECORD MONTH

FOR ESTES AUTO BODY, FOLLOWING A MORE THAN 10 PERCENT DROP IN BUSINESS DURING THE PANDEMIC

If I can't make money and **DO IT THE RIGHT WAY AND PLEASE THE CUSTOMERS**, then I don't really want to do it.

Daniel Orige, Owner of DJ's Auto Service

OILING NEW GEARS

But not everything was perfect. The pandemic hit right in the middle of it all, presenting Dan with new challenges that he wasn't prepared for.

"No one was driving, and no one was getting into collisions. Estes Auto Body was down 30 percent at some point," Dan said. "And DJ's Auto Service was down 10-11%." Dan was relieved that it wasn't more, but he also understood that he would have to do more to stay alive. "We were bleeding," Dan explained.

But he kept a good attitude about it. "With coaching, it's something where you're working on the business, instead of in it. And so anything you can do to help your business is in the right direction, even if it's just planting seeds. It's going to help for the future."

One of the seeds he started planting, with help from his coach and prodding over potential new prospects, was reaching out to insurance companies to see if they would consider referring his company for body work. "We were trying to think outside the box and I told Sybil I was going to find more insurance companies to work with." They set to it. Making calls and writing letters together.

It worked. "January turned out to be one of the best months for Estes Auto Body since I've owned it," Dan said. In part because of his previous hustles that included creating relationships with fleet companies for snow plowing. But he also got news. "An insurance company called Chubb Insurance informed me that they were putting me on their list as a direct repair facility."

FIRING ON ALL CYLINDERS WITH ONE GOAL IN MIND

"If I can't make money and do it the right way and please the customers, then I don't really want to do it," Dan said.

And through his work with NLNW, he's learning how to convey that kind of message to his employees. "I've learned more about how to be a leader and get my message across. To make sure that everybody understands why we're doing our jobs. Yeah, we're trying to make a living. But I also feel like this is our career. I want people to put integrity into their service."

ABOUT NEXT LEVEL NORTHWEST

Next Level Northwest is a not-for-profit business accelerator program that supports existing local businesses. The program was founded by five Northwest Chicagoland municipalities—Elk Grove Village, Hanover Park, Hoffman Estates, Rolling Meadows, and Schaumburg—as

a public-private partnership to support regional and local businesses through collaborative and innovative initiatives to help grow local economies. To learn more about Next Level Northwest or to submit an application for your company to join the next class of companies in the business accelerator program, visit www.nextlevelnorthwest.org.

THE PATH TO SUCCESS STARTS HERE



To get started, visit **NextLevelNorthwest.org** and/or contact your local Economic Development Director for more information.

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