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Cole's Collision Center

John Cole - Owner

Success Magazine: John how did you get started in the auto collision industry?

John Cole: I was introduced to the business through my father. He got me a job with a friend of his who owned a body shop. I started at age fifteen, back in 1975. I have been in the business for twenty-seven years.

SM: What business was your dad in?

JC: My dad was in the trucking industry. He contracted for the collision aspect of truck repairs. In fact, he got me my first job in a body shop. He was in repair and had work done in body shops, so he saw how they ran. We thought of ways to improve the body shop experience for clients and insurance companies.

SM: Why did you start your own business?

JC: I started my own business because I knew that I could do a better job than the dealers. I had worked with dealers for eighteen years and I wanted to provide better and more personalized service to my customers. My father motivated me to start my own business.

SM: When did you open?

JC: In 2007, I started my own business with my dad in Colonia.

SM: The first year in business is the most difficult. How was your first year of business?

JC: The first year is the learning curve. To any new business owner the learning curve is very long, but I was faced with an even greater challenge. Within two weeks of opening, my father, who helped me get my start in business, was diagnosed with stage four lung cancer. Within eight months he passed on.

SM: How did you get through this?

JC: Prayer. Lots of prayer. And, the amazing support of my wife, Regina. I couldn't have gotten through that very challenging first year without her. She has





always stood behind me 150% and during those few months of my father falling ill and passing on, she held me up.

SM: How did you come to be at peace with it?

JC: I had no regrets saying goodbye to my father. He passed his desire to succeed onto me. His mantra was "Never give up."

SM: At what point did you decide to expand?

JC: The deal was brought to us three years to the day of opening our Colonie location. We had grown from \$1 million to \$3 million per year in three years. That initial success set

us up to purchase the Spa franchise. It was a good strategic buy for us to become multiple shop owners, for the insurance companies. I was aligning my company with my clients' and our insurance companies' needs. We acquired Ballston Spa and Wilton which gave us a wider market share.

SM: As an owner of three locations you had to move from hands-on management to pure operations and sales management. How did you achieve that?

JC: I needed to take a step back, and I could because I was surrounded by very good people. Josh Jewett started Albany with me and then after the acquisition was promoted to Wilton as the store manager. That store needed hands-on management. Savannah Hinkley started as a counter manger and was promoted to CFO. She has been instrumental in establishing standard operating procedures in all of my stores.

SM: Was it difficult for you to delegate responsibilities?

JC: I don't micro-manage. I hire the player, not the position. I would rather train a person with a great attitude and no skills and have them grow and own the position.

SM: You can train employees, but you certainly had your core employees that you could rely on. Was it difficult to deal with existing employees in your new location?

JC: Of course I had to evaluate all of the existing and new personnel. I kept and maintained the best employees from both locations. I used loyal employees to build on new ones. I handed off many of the tasks to Josh and Savannah.

SM: What did you learn most from your dad?

JC: I learned to always do the right thing. Do not ruin your name for anyone. It is always better to protect your honor and name, even if it means losing money at times.

SM: What are your future plans?

JC: We plan to continue perfecting the locations that we are in, while looking at other market shares. Moving to other areas of the collision industry—towing, mechanical, etc.—is a definite possibility.

SM: In all your locations you have become very successful in a short time period. What does success mean to you?

JC: Success to me is surrounding yourself with the best people you can and enjoying life.



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