

Jim started his stone shop 4 years ago with a skill saw and a pick-up truck and most of what he's learned since has been learned the hard way. There have been a lot of mistakes; some just frustrating, some very expensive. And last year while considering the purchase of an edge machine, he secretly wondered if he had learned enough to *know* that he was making the right decision.

Since he was the guy holding it all together, everyone was always coming to *him* for answers. But where could *he* go for answers? Where could he go and admit he was not only nervous, but even a little panicked over the enormity of the edge machine decision? Who could he be completely honest with? He couldn't admit his concerns to his employees and neither his wife nor closest friends had ever been in his shoes.

He'd read somewhere about the value of having a mentor and he knew he needed some advice, but he had bristled at the thought of someone telling him what to do again. "Wasn't that the reason I started this company in the first place? And besides, *I'm* in charge here," he'd muttered to himself.

Then he remembered reading about how, in 1776, General George Washington found himself in a similar situation. As the commander of the Continental Army fighting the Revolutionary War, he was responsible for making the decisions that would determine whether or not there ever was to be a United States of America. And despite being the most respected leader in the country, he had the character and foresight to assemble a council of war to advise *him* on military matters.

On several occasions that spring, Washington had insisted they attack the British, who were defending Boston. On as many occasions, his council of war had advised him not to. Thank God he listened to them. It turned out that the British had made the city nearly impenetrable. Had Washington ignored their advice, or worse, never consulted them, he would have attacked Boston and his army would have been crushed. And had he lost that battle, it is almost certain that America would have lost the war.

Jim's resistance to having a mentor began to fade as he realized even history's greatest leaders had needed and wanted advice.

Jim had to find a mentor, his own one man council of war.

Once Jim admitted he really needed some sound advice on running his stone shop, he was finally ready to take the advice from someone who was qualified to give it.

And this someone didn't need to be well versed in the fabrication trade, but experienced in the basics of running and growing a successful business: Operations Development, Sales, Finance, and Leadership. Business basics Jim would readily admit he didn't understand.

Jim met Ed, who would eventually become his mentor, at a most unexpected place...at the local chamber of commerce. About all Jim knew about him was that he ran a big company and actually held the title of C.E.O. It began informally, with the two of them meeting for coffee. Ed had heard that Jim had his own business and was struggling, so he was happy to oblige when Jim asked him if he could buy him a cup of coffee so they could talk.

Jim had been swimming in Operations Development *and* trying to run the business *and* was trying to make a key decision that would affect the future of his company. Buying an edge machine for Jim, might be like Washington attacking Boston. If it turned out to be the wrong decision or the wrong timing, it could ruin his company.

So Jim finally mustered the courage to ask Ed if he'd be willing to look over his numbers to see what he thought of the decision.

As time went on, the meetings became a little more frequent. Ed began to notice that Jim was different than many of the other business owners he'd met with and even consulted. Jim actually took his advice and implemented it! This was in stark contrast to the people he'd mentored who only wanted to hear what they wanted to hear to make them feel good.

Jim wasn't interested in compliments on his fabrication skills, he was interested in building his business and making it successful, even at the expense of his pride. It was refreshing for Ed to see someone really benefiting from the hard won expertise and experience that he was sharing.

Eventually, Ed was calling Jim to get updates on what was going on and to see how he was doing. *He* was even suggesting they get together to look at the numbers and would sometimes even buy the coffee.

But Ed wasn't the only one getting satisfaction out of the relationship. Jim was beginning to see radical changes in his company and in himself. Ed was teaching him how to manage. "Manage the company, don't let it manage you!" Ed would tell him. Actually he'd pounded it in to him. Ed was teaching him how to lead! And Jim's leadership skills were growing as Ed shared experiences on how to firmly yet caringly get the results from his staff. "Don't confuse efforts with results!" was another one of his famous lines. And getting those results were crucial to building a successful company, a company that would eventually operate in Jim's absence.

Since Ed had taught him to set a sales forecast and to move heaven and earth to meet it, the wild fluctuation in his sales from month to month were gone. When too much came in, he delayed it or turned it down. And when it looked like not enough was coming in, he jumped to make sure it did. This brought consistency and regularity to his production schedule too, reducing overtime and mistakes.

With the budget Ed helped him implement, Jim began watching his costs more carefully. While he had always made pretty good financial decisions, sometimes they were poorly timed. Some of the purchasing decisions he'd made could have been delayed or spaced out to coincide with his revenues and cash flow. Up until then, he had no way of evaluating or systematically spending money and because he was so busy, many of his decisions were made in haste.

As such, he was always shocked at the end of the month because what money he thought he should have made never lined up with what his financial statements said he made. So when he established his budget, *which was based on his sales forecasts*, he became much more aware of how, when, and why he was spending money. This had a major impact on the bottom line and for the first time he realized his company was capable of really making money.

Jim was getting immediate results from the experience that had taken Ed decades to accumulate!

Today, when Jim looks back, he realizes that had he not mustered the courage to seek out a mentor and then listen to him, the likelihood of

building and managing a successful business that could operate in his absence would have been very slim. He is thankful he did.

Jim did buy the edge machine. Even though he was nervous at the time, he had made the decision with confidence, knowing that Ed, his mentor had not only reviewed it, but agreed it was the right one to make.

What a disadvantage the British military were at because of Washington's council of war. Jim's competitors are equally disadvantaged as Jim takes the advice his CEO mentor and implements it. He is now doing something that many of his competitors aren't doing...*managing* a business. The days of his business managing him and his life are becoming a thing of the past. Jim is managing his sales, managing his costs and managing his people to achieve the results he dreamed of when he first started his company four years ago... a better income and more free time.

Now that Jim, like his mentor Ed, has a business that allows him to do so, he can meet you for coffee and not only tell you how he did it, he can help you do it too!