

Jason Cupp learned he didn't have to do everything as an owner to create a successful company.

BY PETER HILDEBRANDT

KNOW YOUR TEAM

GIC workshop participants heard about the good, the bad and the ugly of Jason Cupp's career. Those who missed it should still pay attention to his story, you can learn a thing or two.

"Probably one of the things about me as a speaker and a consultant now is that I really do adhere to the element of being honest, transparent and vulnerable," Cupp says, a Kolbe-Certified Growth Consultant. "So I do share my entire story. It can amplify and really help business owners and managers in their own business to hear about the good and the bad stuff. I'm not one of those consultants who come in and say 'I was really awesome in business' and then there is a period after that statement. I actually come in and say, 'I was really awesome in business – comma – but here's what our struggles were as a business; here's what we did and here's how we solved our problems.'"

Cupp, who owned his own landscape company for more than 20 years and now runs his own consulting firm, says it took him nearly 24 years, actively in the business every single day – running it, meeting with clients, selling projects, executing projects – to reach the point where he is today with his workshops.

His business focused on the high-end design/build and maintenance side of the industry, though it also did commercial work, interior work and had a lawn care division and an irrigation division. But its primary focus was high-end residential design/build and maintenance. More than six years ago, Cupp found that, because of some growth and then getting smaller, he needed to have some insight into his business that was beyond his own scope of influence.

A consultant was hired to come in and help them understand their people and their team better. What he realized was that one of the biggest assets that they had was a group of really awesome employees. "We made that investment in July of 2005 and were exposed to the Kolbe A Index," Cupp says. "It's not a personality or a skill index.

"What it does is it identifies what the natural instincts of a person are. When you know what they are, you set up their deliverables, job descriptions and what they do every single day to be able to use those natural instincts. Their efficiency and their ability to be able to do their job changes in a fairly exponential way because

they're operating within their instincts, within the way they're naturally wired so they work, but they never feel like they're over-working, so their efficiency skyrockets."

It's like doing your hobby every day and getting paid for it. It's very powerful, according to Cupp. He was the recipient of that knowledge as a business owner, and Cupp was so mesmerized by that knowledge that he wanted to learn it himself.

He went to Phoenix and became a Kolbe Certified Consultant six months later. Cupp slowly used that knowledge in his own organization, but then began to use it in other organizations in the green industry. Little did he know that a consulting firm would be born out of becoming certified. This is now what he does full time; he's left the construction side completely and is now a professional coach, trainer and speaker, traveling nonstop throughout the U.S. and Western Europe.

All of Cupp's work now is related to people equity, developing teams, identifying talent and utilizing Kolbe to identify all of those pieces.

"I never would have guessed that I would be my own case study – that my Kolbe results and who I was wired to be naturally and instinctively would point more toward what I do now than what I did before in the green industry," Cupp says. "However, I'm a much better consultant than I am a green industry business owner. I've been on the phone all day today, not stressed out and don't feel like I'm working. I make my own schedule and rarely do I get stressed out or feel overwhelmed."

Cupp still works with many green industry companies. He has clients with five employees all the way up to companies that are the largest in the industry. Cupp will



go into the companies and evaluate their people equity and the teams within their business, helping them to solve problems and create efficiencies. All of that seems to work well and fit him well.

"An astute business owner knows their numbers and financials and one thing they're always going to look at is their balance sheet," he says. "At the very bottom of the balance sheet is the equity in the business. There is an element in every business that is the people equity and you can't measure it and you can't operate any business without a great team of people. Sometimes a business is defined by their team; they make it or break it. That's what people equity is. You have to invest in the equity of your people as both individuals and as a team."

It looks different in every organization, depending on what product or service that you sell. Cupp loves exposing that in people's lives because it does affect them personally. This is like a light bulb turning on in people's lives just like it did for Cupp back in 2005.

Before that, Cupp was working 80-100 hours per week and life was an extreme struggle for him.

The end results for his clients were phenomenal but it wasn't easy to get there and the reason for that was because of him. He was trying to do things in his life and business that he was absolutely incapable of doing from an instincts and natural ability perspective.

The workshop Cupp presented Wednesday was interactive and

hands-on. Business owners and others who took it were able to walk out the door and execute and implement a variety of different techniques for understanding their employees and their skills better.

"It's not an overnight sensation," Cupp says. "I wish there was that instant change you could execute upon, but they will definitely walk out the door with some 'do differently' they can put into their business immediately, which will make a positive and lasting impact on their business, if they only recognize the value of their teams."

For years of running his busi-

ness, but it's the truth. "What I would most like Expo-goers who will be attending my workshop to know is that it is no secret that the industry has turned very competitive and the economy has changed the industry. One thing I encourage every business owner to do who calls me or emails me when they're wondering about how to increase sales, is to remember more sales and profitability really begin with your people. When you have an all-star team, tell me who your all-stars are.

"If you can't answer that question, you need to work on your team before you can go and grow your business and create more profits, efficiencies and a better customer experience. The team is going to deliver all that and define the company culture. If the focus is not on the team, then they might not be able to deliver that service."

Cupp is the youngest past president of PLANET. He also sits on the board of the directors of the GIE and the Policy Advisory Board for GIE+EXPO.

"This has all been a fun part of giving back and I've really enjoyed it," Cupp says. "The GIE+EXPO is one of the largest trade shows in the country."

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ness, Cupp thought it was more about him and more about his clients than the individuals executing his business.

"Boy, was I ever wrong," he says. "If I didn't have a team that executed, then why even have clients? I did not recognize that for a good portion of my career and I'm embarrassed that that's

Cupp says that one of the exciting things for this year is that Hardscape North America is joining the show again, which will add diversity to the trade show for design/build contractors.

Also, he's excited to see all of the networking opportunities available to attendees and to see old friends, but also meet new friends. +