

Just Figure It Out

The story of Moving U & Junk U

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Intro

It was a brisk October morning at 4am when we walked into a convenience store for a snack. I looked at Steve and asked, "How did we get here?". Obviously the question was rhetorical, but he knew what I meant. We had just completed 21 hours straight of moving and had a full day ahead of us starting at 7am. A lot had brought us to that point and we had just completed a milestone that we would look back on with pride and happiness. In short, this book is the story of Moving U & Junk U. Co-written by the founders and owners; myself and my business partner Steve.

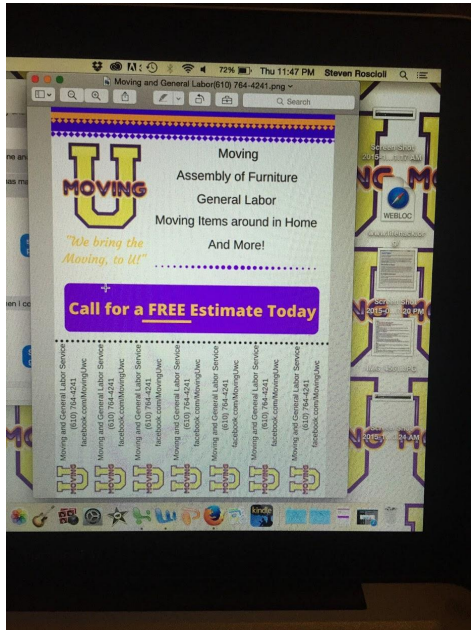
No business is easy to start from scratch and then develop into a self sustaining organization. From inception to current day, Moving U & Junk U proved that to the nth degree. Over the past 5 years, Steve and I have faced a number of unique challenges to test our grit and drive. And that it did. Though we both individually know we were entrepreneurial at heart, during the course of this we truly realized our innate passion for business development. We outlined some of the major events of our journey and hope that it stands as a testament to not only our ability, but also to our dedication to our company and future franchisees.

Grassroots

In the later part of 2015, Steve and I had been in college at West Chester University and worked at a junk removal company, hauling junk. We loved the job! We were able to get a ton of hours, great tip money, and the autonomy of being out in the truck with your buddy all day was cool; we got paid to essentially hang out with each other while also putting in a full day's work.

Steve and I were entrepreneurial in nature and frequently talked about future goals in eventually starting and building businesses. Like the majority of 'entrepreneurial' youths, these conversations happened frequently about a variety of ideas, with no actionable items. These were all future goals and business ideas. During one of these 'biz dev' conversations we took a look at what we were already doing. We thought since we were essentially doing all the work of the company ourselves (which we later learned was entirely wrong), 'why not do this on our own and make all the money?!'. There were also some glaring deficiencies in the operation we were currently a part of. We felt with our experience as actual workers, we could improve on and create an overall better product to customers. Looking back, it made a ton of sense. We were getting in before the owner did, we were contacting customers, doing the estimating and actually physically completing the job, took all payments, shuffled around jobs to maximize the efficiency of our day, got tons of raving reviews, etc. Simply, we took pride in our work. Riding a wave of enthusiasm we started planning our exit plan from our current job and the start of our new venture. Our only problem was that we were broke college students with no credit so there was seemingly no way we could buy a truck and get to work doing junk removal.

No problem though, this was our first obstacle that we needed to get creative with and overcome. With no truck or money to get one, we figured out what we could do to start. Even though we didn't have a truck we still could physically complete jobs. We decided we would market ourselves as hired moving labor for people who rented their own truck. If they provided the truck, we'd do all the heavy lifting. Great! We had our first business model we could actually do. We knew we needed a catchy name that we felt would align with what we sought to do as a more professional [labor only] moving company. It had to encapsulate what we did, highlight our attention to professionalism, and was fun. After bouncing ideas back and forth we said it; Moving U. As soon as it came out of our mouths we felt it was perfect! We got to work immediately. The next few days were full of making logos, designing flyers, and mocking up what our company shirts will look like.



Our first flyer design



First company shirt design

Within 2 weeks of starting printing our full color flyers, Steve was approached by his boss at his other part time job, where he worked as a weekend leasing assistant at an apartment complex. She asked, "Steve, have you been using the printer lately?". Shocked at how she could have ever caught on, he replied, "I may have printed once or twice". Apparently, Steve had used the entire supply of ink that was supposed to last the office for three more months. Whoops! A swift apology later, everything was all good.

It was January of 2016 when we officially left our jobs. We were committed to being successful fast, going all in with no distractions. Next we knew we had to get to it with our marketing and get Moving U's name out there. After that last shift we went back to our apartment and started mapping out our plan of attack. We thought to ourselves, 'who knows people that are going to be moving?'. Too easy; realtors, apartment complexes, furniture stores, and property management companies. We spent hours making excel spreadsheets of every one of those businesses and categorized them by location to make our marketing routes as efficient as we could. We got up early every morning before classes, and honestly skipped a lot of classes, to go hand out flyers and pitch our business. In our opinion we were killing it! We went to hundreds of businesses in the surrounding area and of course made a yelp listing. That's all you need to do to be successful in business, right?

During the time between January and March of that year, a few people called and used us for labor help but not many. We didn't think that was a problem though, we were just getting started. Spring break was coming up and Steve and I were a part of a group trip to Cancun so we knew we would not be doing any jobs that week. To compensate, the weeks prior we went extra hard and doubled our normal marketing volume in terms of business visits and flyer hand outs. We also had been consistently marketing for about three months. We knew business wasn't going

to come right away. But with three whole months of marketing we predicted we were going to be flooded when we got back. As our Cancun trip came to an end, Steve and I were thinking 'we cant wait to reach out to all the voicemails from the past week!'. We got back, settled in, and opened the Google Voice mailbox.



Steve door hanging



Example of our door hangers

Nothing. No voicemails, no texts, no missed calls, not even a new view on our Yelp page. To say we weren't expecting this was an understatement. This was the first time we felt the downside of business ownership; work is not easy to find as a brand new company with no marketing money.

At the same time, we started to have personal financial issues as well. We naively went all in right away and had no other source of income with no back up plan. It got to the point where my off campus apartment rent was so late I got a notice for eviction and we knew we had to pivot and change course. Words can't describe the emotional turmoil of seemingly 'failing' our first business venture. By summer we had to face facts. Moving U was not paying the bills. We had to put our dream on the back burner for a little. The pile of delinquent bills had really stacked up. That's when we started working at a PF Changs as busboys.

As summer moved on and we started to get back on our feet, we couldn't just let Moving U go. After getting dealt a sobering dose of reality we now knew that if we were going to do this, it was going to take a lot more than handing some papers out and constantly telling our friends and family we were 'business owners'. The 'fun' had worn off and it was time to strategically plan how we were going to grow. We decided we were going to embrace working full time at our jobs and part time at our business, even though we didn't want that to be the case. As the summer moved on, we had a discussion as to how committed we were to riding out this endeavor. Both of us agreed we were still 100% in.

That is when I dropped out of college as a sophomore and Steve, who had graduated the Spring prior, decided he was going to pass on medical school to pursue this venture. It was an incredibly tough sell to our families. Simply put, they thought we were absolutely nuts. Steve especially had a tough time with this. At graduation parties, when his family members would excitedly ask, 'are you ready to be a doctor?!', he would tell them how he changed paths and filled them in on his new desire of starting a moving company with hopes of franchising the concept. With a disapproving 'good luck with that' response time over time, it was disheartening to say the least. Regardless, we both knew we were genuinely going against the grain with this life choice and were confident that these responses were to be expected.

We officially burned the boats.

From our first 'failure', we had a better understanding of what we had to do strategically for the business; we had to have jobs to support ourselves personally. With that, we made sure that every dollar we made in the business would stay in the business. This would serve to be an important fundamental shift in our business ideology.



Steve and Dylan after a job back in the day



The first uniforms

It Got Real

Over the next year we had established a pretty solid part-time balance. The regular jobs were paying the bills, and Moving U was finally starting to make some money for itself. We were actually gaining traction as a local labor-only moving company too. We were finally in a financial position to consider the first big purchase in addition to a lifestyle change; buying a truck and truly going full time (the right way this time). Considering how we prepared ourselves financially it was an easy decision as we had already quit jobs to go full time before. This time was different. We were ready to actually do so.

On the truck side, we started casually looking around on used truck websites and local listing sites. We found a few, but one really stood out to us. Yeah it had 200,000+ miles on it, but it was a diesel and they run forever! It did have a couple small gouges to the side panel of the box, but they were just cosmetic. And was a perfect size truck! Okay, yes when we first test drove it the check engine light was on, but it rode fine so how bad could it be! If you couldn't tell here we were a tad bit excited, and were sold on the truck before even making an offer. Joking aside, it was cheap, it was local, and it just felt right. So we called and made the offer, and a day or two of negotiating later, it was ours. We made the appointment at the local auto tag place for a week later.

Then we realized something- we had nowhere to park the damn thing! Of course in the town we were living in, commercial vehicles were prohibited to be left on virtually any public road so out went the cheap and easy route. It was all good though, we had a week. So we got to work driving around and figuring out where this truck could call home. We thought about it and wanted to leverage the truck as a moving billboard. We needed a high traffic area to post this bad boy up! Perpetual high volume advertising! For a couple days we scoped out potential lots. There were many cold walk-ins telling front desk workers we had an odd question to ask their managers. We got more odd looks than you can imagine. I mean, I don't blame them. It's not everyday you get a couple young kids asking if they can use a portion of their parking lot as their moving headquarters.

One place we visited was a local economy hotel, right on an intersection of two major highways. We walked in and spoke with the manager at the front desk and explained to her our odd request. She told us the owner was actually on site and went to see if he had a minute to talk with us. Out walked a tall, bald man with an intimidating scowl. With a heavy Russian accent he said, 'gentlemen, I was informed you would like to rent a parking spot on my property'. With a somewhat timid response we answered, 'yessir we are'. He replied, 'I think we can make a deal. What is your offer?'. Long story short not only did we secure the parking spot, he also asked if we would be interested to rent a small office space as well. We walked down the hall to a door that looked like a coat closet. On the door there were remnants of a recently removed label that read, 'kitchen manager'. He opened the door and inside was a room with a desk that took up the majority of the floor space. Not much, but for us it was like looking at the pot of gold at the end

of a rainbow. We were going to have our first office! To say we were ecstatic would be an understatement.



Our first office



Moving U & Junk U's first truck

The truck was old and weathered and the office was small and had a particular smell one would expect from an ex-kitchen manager. But that first truck and office space were truly legitimizing steps for us. We had a tangible asset that the business owned and a space to work out of that wasn't our living room. Not only could we actually provide the truck for our moves, we could also do junk! From our first go around, we obviously had underestimated the start up phase. But now with a teensy ounce of business foresight, we saw that we had an operational pitfall coming up as we grew. Yes now we owned a truck, but neither of us had ever done a true full service move before let alone knew how to hire, train, and manage mover employees.

****Quick side story- somewhere during this time we started to find a trend in regards to people not knowing that we also did junk removal. There were a number of moves that we did where at some point, a junk removal company would arrive. It was a nauseating feeling to be doing a move, and have another company come and do the removal. Just to have the customer say 'oh! I didn't even realize you guys did junk removal'. Because of this we agreed that the name needed to be amended to make it more obvious that we did junk removal as well. This is when the company's name changed from Moving U to Moving U & Junk U.****

We figured we needed to add another pillar of infrastructure to our leadership team. We had discussed this idea in passing before, but knew exactly who we wanted. Just to circle back quick- we had become great friends with our old operations manager from the junk removal company we had worked for prior. Coincidentally right after we left, that company started doing full service moving too. So we reached out to him and he was sold right away. At the time, he

felt that he was being overworked and needed a change anyway. The good news was that he said he gained a ton of both moving technique and also moving management over the past year and a half. He promised that he would be able to handle the entire operation as long as Steve and I could figure out the sales end and book jobs. Bring him meat and he would cook it. Perfect right?

The only issue was we didn't have enough revenue to hire him with a full salary. With all the growth potential we saw with him, in lieu of a straight salary we presented him with an equal equity position in the company. He accepted. Now we were ready for full throttle.

When It Rains It Pours

Up until this point we had acquired every job through hustle muscle and sweat equity (no pun intended). We continued to go from apartment complex to apartment complex and put homemade door hangers on hundreds if not thousands, of residential homes. Scoring Jobs started to become more regular, but since we were still fairly new to the marketplace and didn't have a true online presence, all of our jobs were small. We needed to start investing in paid ads. Our first true paid marketing was through Yelp and by January of 2018. It proved to be exactly the right choice as we started to acquire larger jobs with higher price points.

Around mid January while looking at the job calendar for the next few weeks, we realized that the first week of February was going to be our first 'big one'. We had three pretty big jobs booked back to back to back that week and we were chomping at the bit to execute. The first one was actually a move booked by the hotel manager that we had rented the office/parking space from. Another local hotel in the area was renovating and updating their furniture so he had been offered to have it. We hadn't been to the location, but he described it as 'a few rooms worth of furniture'. We had a good relationship with him and just took his word for it. The next two were both large residential homes we had gone out and estimated, so we felt comfortable with the work ahead. At this point in our moving careers, we did not take down itemized lists, or asked too many more questions than we needed to book those jobs. You'll see why this matters in a minute.

We knew this week was full of bigger job, so we picked up a few rental trucks at 6am that Monday morning to be used for the next few days. By 7am we arrived at the hotel, rode the elevator to the top floor with all supplies in hand, and walked off to see what we were working with. Well, let's just say there was a tad more than what was originally described. There were 30 rooms on that floor, every room was actually a full suite with additional furniture, and it was also then apparent that they had scheduled the move in the midst of the complete renovation of the floor. With positive heads held high, we picked a few of the rooms that the renovation crew hadn't gotten to yet and figured we'd start there. Yeah the rooms had a good amount more than we thought, but we could do this. We put our noses to the grindstone and got to work. About noon that day we had completed about five rooms and we realized we were in for a long day and needed a more efficient gameplan.

As we walked the floor to get a better gameplan, some more hurdles began to surface. Besides the number of items needed to be moved being completely underestimated, we were starting to get in the way of the renovation workers while also stepping over piles of debris from the bathrooms that were being gutted. We had never been in this position before. After 5 hours of solid work, we had only completed 30% of the load which meant the total progress was cut in half as we still had to take the items to the other location for the unload. With no words spoken, all three of us could feel a concerted overwhelming feeling of, 'can we even do this?' Uncharted

territory for us. If anything, we had an unwavering confidence in always figuring it out. In the two years we had been in business, it had never been tested like this before.

We went back up to the floor, found one room we had already emptied and shut the door to convey. We came to the blatantly obvious conclusion that there was no possible way we could physically complete the job that day. If this situation happened a week prior or a week after we could have just come back the next day. But of course we were booked up with huge jobs the next couple days. We made a plan though. We were going to explain the situation to the customer and let them know we were going to get at least half done that day, and would return later that week to finish. Luckily he was completely understanding and agreed to the new timeline.

This would turn out to be the longest work day any of us had to date. After hours and hours of continuous work, we finally finished the promised 50% around 10pm that night. We rushed home, took a much needed shower, and almost immediately passed out. We knew we had another big job the following day, but we had already done an onsite estimate so we knew what we had to do. Spirits were high as we were dealt a crappy situation, figured it out, and were back on track to having a great week!

The next morning started bright and early, we got to the 2nd customer's house at 7am and were delighted to see that it was exactly what we had expected. We knew this was going to be another longer day, but nothing like the craziness that happened the day before. Our initial thought was that we would be finished by dinner time, giving us plenty of rest for our third big job of the week. The move started smooth as butter. We had been frazzled by the day before, but started to get some swagger back. We knew the job was going to take two trips from the pick up to drop off, but that was already planned in. Around noon that day we finished loading the first two trucks and headed to the 1st unload.

The beginning of the unload was going according to plan but then the customer and his wife began to disagree on where they wanted certain pieces to go and how they wanted their furniture arranged in each room. This is when things started to go sideways. To give you an idea of what was happening, the pattern was as follows:

We would go to the truck and pick a piece of furniture to bring in. Once walked into the house, the husband would show us exactly where he wanted the furniture to go. Naturally we listened to his requests and moved things into the places he wanted. This was followed later by the wife stopping what we were doing to tell us she wanted that same furniture in a different room. This pattern of disorganization and conflicting viewpoints took our progress to a screeching halt. It got to the point where we asked them to both be at the front door so when we brought a piece in they could be on the same page about where they collectively wanted items to go. Well, that turned into one of them always being missing when we got to the front door so we'd be forced to put it down and wait as one tried to find the other so there could be unanimous agreement on where things were going.

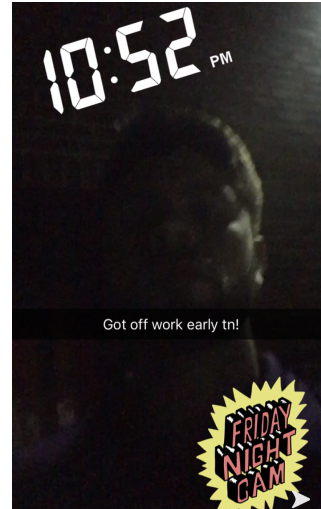
To summarize that unload, it was a disaster in both time and energy. I'm sure you can imagine how the rest of that job went, so I don't need to describe it. This is however, the job we got done about 3am and subsequently found ourselves at that convenient store at 4am wondering in fact, 'how did we get here?'. It was the end of the second day of our week (well, I guess it was the start of the third day) and we still weren't out of the woods. It was now Wednesday morning and not only did we have another huge move starting in a couple hours, we also had to finish the rest of the first job before the week's end. As gross as it is, I don't even think we showered that night. We genuinely didn't have time. We were so tired, we just needed to get a couple hours of sleep before starting the next day.

When we woke up a couple hours later, we drove to the office, got in the trucks, and made our way to the third big job of the week. If you haven't already, I'm sure you can start to take a guess at the trend for the week. But yes, as we arrived at the third job and started the walkthrough our hearts sank. Not a single thing was packed. Nothing. With dishes still in the sink, it was as if they woke up that morning forgetting it was moving day. The odd thing was there were dozens and dozens of unpacked boxes everywhere. For whatever reason, we'll chalk it up as our fault for not being crystal clear about our services, that third customer was under the impression that we were going to be packing up their entire 5 bedroom house and moving it all in the same day. Just to give you an idea, a pack job of that size would typically be at least a full 8 hours worth of work for us to do. It was yet another catastrophe three jobs in a row, all the same week. A sound minded group of individuals would have simply taken the loss and told the customer there was no way the job could be completed. But they had settlement that Friday and the job needed to be completely done before then. Our reputation for commitment to our customers was all we could think about. Especially at that time we didn't allow another option besides 'just figure it out'. This was way more work than could be completed that day, so we again explained the situation to the customer, promised the job would be completed by the end of the week, and simply got to work.

We didn't work as deeply into the night as we had the days prior, but we clocked another three 12+ hour days to finish out the week and ultimately got the jobs done. It was definitely a heavy and draining week, I never wish to experience again. But there were some foundational lessons that were learned that have sculpted protocols that we use to this day. We have a saying we like to remember, "there's W's and L's; wins and lessons."



The rental trucks for that week

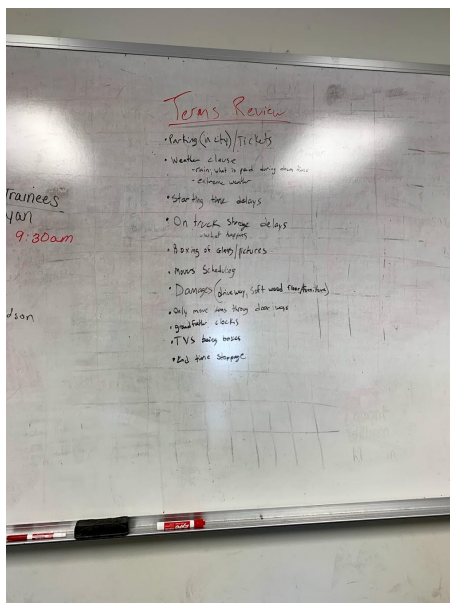


A funny snapchat of the end of that week

Leveling Up

After that Hell Week we went through in February, we overhauled much of our protocols in virtually all areas; estimating, booking, etc. That week was also what sparked the birth of our Customer Expectations and Terms & Conditions. We also would get them signed before starting any job. After that week we really started to build an infrastructure to the actual operation. We knew we were nearing the point where we would start to hire employees and begin the process of being off the trucks and move into more management rolls. We knew, from experience, that unforeseen issues can and will pop up and tremendously affect the job in its entirety. Before we started hiring employees we strived to button up all pitfalls so they wouldn't have to go through the same things we had already dealt with first hand. We also started to 'what if' about future situations we hadn't handled before, but could predict possibly happening at some point in the future.

Around the same time we had outgrown our closet office and were ready to look for an actual warehouse. After some searching we stumbled upon one that looked perfect. It was slightly out of our price range, but in our mind it really was perfect. It was big enough to definitely sustain our operational growth, it had flex space so we could have a full office and warehouse space, it was right near the university we figured we get a lot of workers from, and the slightly expensive price would add another level of motivation to hit revenue projections. We moved into the new warehouse in March of 2018. In the moving industry, summer is the busiest time of the year. In the next few months we began to beef up for our first real summer.



Whiteboard brainstorming for Terms & Conditions



The new warehouse!

We started to hire more employees and were seemingly ready to go. As we entered the summer months, our business started to really gain traction. For the first time in the company's history we began to become inundated with phone calls and emails requesting move dates a month in advance accompanied with a message saying 'ill pay whatever'. Yes, this is no exaggeration. Typically the end of the month is the busiest time of the month (roughly the 25th-1st of the next month). In the summer, these dates may be completely booked up months in advance. With this plethora of work, we booked and booked and booked. About mid summer we had gotten to the point where we were officially off the trucks and we had full employee run crews. We had three incredibly talented individuals who were running each of our three crews for almost all of our jobs. Those three were becoming true pros; we'll call them The Big 3. Everything was running great!

One day late June we came in to dispatch the crews, and one of our Big 3 employees came in early to let us know that he had been offered a full time manager position at another company and had to take the offer. We were extremely happy for him as we agreed, it was the best move for him to make. That still left us with a big void to fill. He was responsible for almost $\frac{1}{3}$ of all the jobs we did and we didn't have any prospects in the worker pipeline to fill his shoes. This also meant we were back in rotation on the trucks. Obviously a set back, but we just needed to hire one more quality employee to get back on track. We were still extremely busy in the office handling the back end, and now with one less person it would make it even harder to try and find a good candidate. We'd get one though. We were positive about it. Until we got a call from another one of our Big 3 saying he had broken his foot pretty badly and would be out for the indefinite future. Okay, so now 2 of us are back on the trucks, leaving only one of us in the office to do the work of three. Oh, and also have to hire two crew lead positions on top of that. A big ask, but we were going to make it happen. The strain that the loss of two huge employees had must have been apparent because the last of our Big 3 employees came up to us about a week later to remind us that he was going back to school in two weeks so he wouldn't be able to work any more. He was right, he did tell us about a month prior, but with two of us having to go back on the crews, the memo got lost in the shuffle.

Just like that all three of us were now back on the trucks and all of the office work had to be done after we completed the jobs for the day. At that point we had put all of our eggs in one basket. Our entire operation was hinged on only three individuals, with no back up plan. We were backed up on billing, were getting called left and right from certain vendors we had made commitments to, and most importantly missing answering customer calls to actually book more jobs. We started to see a noticeable dip in workflow to end the summer. We definitely missed out on a lot of revenue at that time. This whole situation was also paired up with the end of the busy season so jobs were also now going to be a little more challenging to book. This time allowed us to test different sales scripts and strategies to systematically book more jobs. We figured out what worked best and it had a noticeable increase in our booking percentage. A few weeks later we had reestablished a stable crew rotation, finally being back off the trucks.

It was about late September 2018 when we felt ready to look for capital to invest in a few new trucks and an additional marketing budget to fill their schedule with jobs. We reached out to a previous customer we had completed a move for a while back who seemed to really like us and mentioned that he was an investor. He said if we ever needed capital to come to him because he appreciated how we conducted business. Well, now was that time! He said to put a proposal together including our financial figures, what we were going to do with the money, and the projections of what this would do for our business. We got right to work studying our books inside and out to make our presentation. We use the year over year information we had to make predictions about future revenue goals, got quotes on some trucks we wanted, and planned the meeting for the following week. The night of the meeting we were excited and anxious. This was a cool moment to pitch your business to an investor for the first time. He liked what he saw, we did a little friendly negotiation on the projection figures, and agreed to a sale of a minority position in our company.

Keep On Truckin'

Soon after we stuck that deal, Steve was driving by a truck dealership and saw two identical good looking moving trucks for sale. Naturally he stopped in to get more information. He returned to the office that day and showed the spec sheets. They looked awesome and they were priced fairly and weren't even officially in the inventory yet because they were just traded in! The salesman told Steve they would come with a significant discount if purchased together. It seemed to be a solid lucky deal we stumbled on. Within a week they were ours. Two more trucks in the fleet and we were still completely off the jobs.

The trucks were great for the first week and a half. Then both trucks had both the check engine and check trans lights come on and break downs happened back to back days. The tow company joked saying they thought it was the same truck when they picked up the day prior. It wasn't the same truck and it wasn't funny. We hoped for the best while waiting for the call from the repair shop. When they finally did, the news was in fact, not good. Apparently a specific filter hadn't been given its routine maintenance for the life of the vehicles, so the repair was going to cost an arm and a leg. We had just spent a lot of money on these trucks and they were both not only out of commission, they were going to cost a lot to fix. We did reach out to the truck dealer and they offered to pay for the repair of the part considering it was both trucks and they both were within two weeks of the purchase. We appreciated that. But as soon as they got out of the repair shop, we knew we needed to go new. Yes new trucks were more expensive, but between our first old truck that we had put an ungodly amount of money into and then these two lemons, we decided we were going to purchase new trucks and avoid the risks that accompany the used market. We traded them in for three 20' Isuzu box trucks, which are the same spec'd trucks that we use today.

Those trucks were delivered in late February of 2019 and we couldn't have asked for more. They were perfect for us and running smooth. With every setback we had faced that far we found a way to overcome it and always wound up better. We finally felt like we had overcome the last piece that was in our way. That was until March 30th, 2019. It was like any other Saturday. Steve was on his way over to play basketball when he called and told me to sit down. He then straight out said that one of our drivers took the roof off one of our new trucks by hitting a bridge. It ripped the top off like a can of tuna. This was terrible news to get. Not only were we going to have to pay a huge increase in insurance premium, we now have to make truck payments on a truck we couldn't use, and we will now have to rent another truck to actually do the jobs. Rentals are not the most economical option. This was a margin killer but we would still probably be okay. Then on April 7th, 2019, almost one week to the day, I received a call from one of the crews that was out. In an obviously frazzled state, he informed me that his truck was currently stuck under a bridge (not the same driver as the other truck, in case you were wondering).

I don't know if I had ever felt shock before, but I can confidently say I now know what it feels like. All I remember is in an ironically calm manner wondering, 'what did we do wrong to get in this situation?'. Steve picked me up and we went to see what the damage was. When we arrived on site, we saw the truck. The box was crushed, stuck between the bottom of the bridge and the ground. The tow company, which of course was the same one from the other two trucks, were working on pulling it out, cracking jokes the whole time. There was nothing we could do. A sense of fear was creeping in. To add this catastrophe on top of everything else going on, was daunting. I genuinely didn't know if we could actually overcome this. It seemed insurmountable.



Truck 20.2 after hitting the bridge



Truck 20.3 after hitting the bridge the same week

Along with a few other issues, it was becoming apparent that we had a deeper rooted problem with our training and overall operational systems. We figured out what change needed to occur. On the ride home, Steve and I had a thorough conversation and came to the unfortunate conclusion that our other partner we had brought in to handle the operations was no longer suited for the position. Some similar conversations had been brought up with him about job performance in the past, but it was becoming more evident that he was unable to adapt to this new demand that the position required. This situation became the hardest to fully digest. We were facing a reality that the business desperately needed a colossal change, and that needed change would more than likely come at the expense of a dear friendship that had been built for years. The next week would be simplified to anxiety ridden days and stress induces sleepless nights. Finally on Monday, April 8th, 2019 Steve, who was also roommates with the other partner at the time, had to break the news in their own home that we would be relieving him of his duties. I can't stress enough how hard of a decision this was to not only make in our minds, but to actually execute on. As one would expect, the decision was not well received. That friendship ended that night, but it was a decision that the business inevitably needed. We were spiraling out of control and Steve and I needed to take the wheel and give it our all to prevent bankruptcy.

Peeling Back the Layers

For the majority of the previous few months, Steve and I had been mostly removed from the operational side. In the back of our minds we thought there were deep seeded training issues that had been festering, but our partner would quickly dismiss those worries saying everything was being taken care of. With the second truck being destroyed by a bridge, the systemic problems had realized our concerns. That week between the second truck hitting the bridge and the actual firing, we devised a plan to immerse ourselves in the actual crews day to day and figure out what needed to be done.

The very next day Steve and I went in to dispatch the crews. Almost 50% of the scheduled crew members were not there on time or called out. Apparently this was common, after speaking with a few of the crew members who were in. Not good. This would explain why the crews were being dispatched extremely late. A couple hours after dispatch we popped in to one of the moves to see what we were working with. What we found was utterly disappointing. Upon arrival two of the four crew members were just casually hanging out, sitting on the back of the truck on their phones. Again, not good. This would explain why we were not hitting our estimates. Then we went into the house. The other crew members who were inside had 'wrapped' the furniture (half way) with blankets which did not guarantee the protection to the piece. That is exclusively what the blankets were supposed to be used for. Again, really not good. This would explain why we had become inundated with damage claims recently.

This first day delving in, we unfortunately had uncovered more than we had anticipated. We had issues in many fundamental areas that needed to be overhauled. This also couldn't have come at a worse time seasonally either. As mentioned before, May starts the busy season. At this point in the year, we should have been finishing up all the hiring and training so we could start the summer off right. Not only did we have to fully complete the hiring and training, we had to 'unlearn' all the bad habits virtually everyone on staff had. On top of this, Steve and I ran through the numbers and calculated that we would have to almost triple the average monthly revenue by June in order to cover the additional expenses that came with the skyrocketing insurance premiums and the additional expenses accompanying the rental trucks. We had our work cut out for us.



Common number of rentals on any given summer day in 2019

To keep focus in our roles, Steve completely took over the operational side of the business while I took over the work on the sales and back end. We had to do a complete overhaul of the operation while also growing by almost 3x. Needless to say that summer was chaotic. My average day consisted of getting in at 7am and working through until almost 8pm every night, handling billing, customer complaints, handling all the financial woes, completing all the estimates and creating the sales process for our new inside sales agents to be able to answer customer questions and get them booked. Steve was consistently trying new strategies on crew attendance, truck prepping, training the movers and drivers, supply inventory, and scheduling all moving crews for the 6 trucks a day we were averaging. He would get in at 5am and his day would end close to 8-9pm every night. We were both working 7 days a week virtually the entire summer from May until September. We probably had less than 5 days off that entire summer. With our daily lives being consumed by the business, our professional stresses began to seep over into our personal lives as well. Relationships were strained, family was seldom seen, and the idea of a 'fun' day would be sleeping and really doing nothing so we could try and recharge the physical, mental, and emotional batteries.

By writing the above excerpt, I don't want it to be portrayed as a heroic description of 'never taking days off' and make it seem like we had a superhuman work ethic that should be glorified. This business had been our hyperbolic child and had become a pillar of our lives. We committed to making it work, and after dropping out of school for this, we were going to ride this out to the last day; whether that meant overcoming yet another monumental obstacle and finding success or going down swinging. We weren't going to simply lay down and succumb to our misfortunes. If we were going to fail, we were going to leave it all on the table and go out with a fight. We were going to figure it out.

The Start of a New Beginning

The entirety of the summer was spent churning at that elevated capacity. We finally picked our heads up towards the end of September once the busy season came to an end. It wasn't pretty, but somehow we did make it through. As fall began to set in, we had finally restored the operation to a consistent 5-star level and staved off bankruptcy. Even though that summer was insane to go through, there were a number of tremendous benefits that we came out of it with. We had processes for virtually all potential situations ironed out and being consistently relied on. We had crews that were properly trained on not only job specific skills, but also in situational issue handling. We also had both weekday and weekend managers hired and managing the crews, allowing for a turn key operation. Then on the sales end, we had constructed the framework for the sales staff which allowed for autonomous call answering, estimating, and booking. Now that order had been restored, it was time to think about the future and where we really wanted the business to go.



In the midst of a training session



Morning dispatch

Franchising had always been a goal for us even back when we started the company. With the tumultuous series of events that unfolded over the previous 4 years, that had definitely become a back burner topic. Even so, we were now in a position where we felt both the operational side and sales/marketing side was developed to a point that proved itself to be both resilient and repeatable. Though right after the craziest summer we had ever experienced, we felt it was time to focus on the future and develop the business into a true franchise concept.

Through a business connection and long term friend of our investor, we were put in contact with a company called SMB Franchise Consultants. We had an intro call with a representative of the company who asked a series of questions. We didn't know this was to get a pulse on whether we were qualified enough to set a meeting with the 'big guy'. Apparently we were, because a few days later Steve Beagleman, founder and CEO of SMB Franchising, reached out to set a meeting at our office with him and some of his staff. Fast forward, the meeting went famously

and we hired him to be our franchise consultant. Steve Beagleman and his staff were incredible with their consulting work and helped us get everything in order to make our concept fully franchisable.

Another Day In the Office

Our day to day life had become very routine, and work had become fun and enjoyable again. We were hitting all projections at the West Chester branch and had been making headway on the franchise end. That is until March of 2020 when 'unprecedented' events occurred and COVID-19 shook the world. I want to say right now, that we do not want to take away from the severity and seriousness of the pandemic. With that, when the shutdown ordinance was put in place just six months after getting our business operating smoothly, all we could do was cynically laugh and say, 'of course this would happen'.

One positive from all the chaos we had been through up to that point is the fact that nothing really surprised us. This was just another obstacle to overcome. At least this one was being experienced by the whole world, so we could all have a little extra empathy for one another. We were also labeled an essential business and were able to operate fully which was a blessing. Though fortunate to stay open, our business took a major hit considering the entire real estate market was closed so no sales were occurring. Needless to say, we made the necessary adjustments that we needed to make and went 100% junk for the first few months. We figured it out, and made it through the entire quarantine while still operating at a profitable level. We were fortunate to make enough to not have to lay anyone off during that time as well.

In writing this in March of 2021, we have almost gotten back to normality and ready to move full speed ahead into summer.

Reflections

And that's the story of Moving U & Junk U from start to present day. The purpose of this book was not to impress you with the valor of what we had overcome, but to show an insight to how Steve and myself operate. Who we are, how we do our business, our work ethic, and ability when presented a hurdle to 'just figure it out'. As you could see when reading this, the majority of our problems we faced were simply due to inexperience. This goes for moving/junk specific as well as general business/management problems. One aspect of our personalities is if we have to face a difficult situation, we solve it as efficiently as we can and then go right to the drawing board to make necessary adjustments in order to prevent something like that from happening again. Many of the procedures and protocols we have in place can be directly tied to specific people or a specific situation that we hadn't been presented with before.

I know it's cliché but moving forward with the business and its evolution into a franchise, we've become progressively grateful for the many pitfalls we hit along the way. They've made us not only better business owners, but the personal growth that has accompanied it may be our most valuable asset. We've developed a keen sense of foresight and intuition that have been proven to be increasingly beneficial to our company's endurance. Though we try to predict problems and navigate them before they even happen, we are not naive to think that we're out of the woods of all obstacles. If you're growing, they're bound to happen and we won't always be able to predict what they will be. What we do know is whatever those issues may be, we're just going to figure it out.



Steve and Dylan with the trucks, 2021



Steve and Dylan in the office, 2021