Trey English – Total Carpet Care - Lancaster, SC

**Tell me about your background?**

I went to School at UNC Charlotte and majored in History. Then I started graduate school at University of South Carolina and soon dropped out. Before I started my own business I worked various jobs including Sam’s Club, a manager at Harris Teeter, and I took a job working for a carpet cleaning service.

**What motivated you to start your own business?**

Well several things motivated me. I was being micromanaged at the company that I worked for and I also realized that we were ignoring industry best practices in some cases. I also realized how much money I could make if I started my own business.

**How many employees do you have?**

Just me and one other person.

**What do you look for in employees?**

We look for people who are trainable and reliable. My current employee has been with me for about 5 years. He has been very dependable and rarely misses work.

**How do you balance your personal life with running a business?**

The fall and winters months are the slower times of the year in my business so that allows me to spend more time with my family.

**Is there anything about the business or industry that worries you?**

No a lot. We have a great relationship with most of our customers and they have been with us for a long time. If I had to say one fear that I had would be to lose multiple customers at once. Fortunately that hasn’t happened. If it did happen I would just go knocking on doors for new business.

**What is your target market and how do you reach them?**

We target upscale commercial properties, primarily apartment complexes and some residential homes. We also subcontract carpet installation and do some tile cleaning. I don’t advertise. All of my customers come from referrals. I don’t want to get too big to manage. At one point I had 7 employees and it was very difficult trying to keep track of where everyone was and what they were doing. I tried expanding to maid services, carpet cleaning and installation, tile installation and we would’ve been a turnkey solution for any apartment complex, but it’s just too much to manage. I decided to scale back and streamline what we were doing.

**How long did it take you to breakeven?**

My start-up costs were around $25000. I paid back loans from family members within 9 months. I’ll tell you the story about my financing. I purchased some business proposal software and came up with this business plan. I decided to approach BB&T for a loan because at the time their ad campaign targeted small businesses. I submitted my proposal and didn’t hear back for 3 months. By then I already had the money. In fact I was so busy in the business that I forgot about it. My contact at the bank called back offering to give me a $50000 loan. I told him that I had been in business for almost 3 months and didn’t need the money anymore.

**What is your strategic advantage?**

Our strategic advantage is quality work and great customer service. We are very responsive to our customer in a way that our larger competitors aren’t. We tried to compete on price in the past, but it doesn’t work. When customers look to our competitors because of lower prices we encourage them to try it out and come back if they are not happy. They usually come back. If our prices change it’s usually upward and we give a full explanation why we had to raise our prices. We actually lost one property because it was taken over by a new company and they thought our price was $50 too high for the whole job. I said I can try to pursue this and maybe lower my price or just let it go. In the end I decided to let it go.

**What are you passionate about?**

I’m passionate about my family and fantasy football.

**What advice do you have for up and coming business owners?**

Have money saved up, research your idea, make sure you enjoy what you do and find a good accountant.