



COVER STORY

By Jenna Caputo Photo by Niki Rossi Photography

For Dave Stumpf of Paintworx Collision The Sky's the Limit

“Put yourself out there and listen to your heart.”

This is a lesson that Dave Stumpf, owner of Paintworx Collision Center, has learned by experience. Growing up in Coxsackie, Dave’s family had little money, and by the time he was 18, Dave knew that he didn’t want to live the way he already had. So he decided to do something about it. He always wanted to be an entrepreneur and he loved cars, so he combined the two together to start his own detailing business. He plastered flyers everywhere and pretty soon the phone started ringing. It was a “we come to you” business and in between jobs, Dave drove door to door to try to drum up new clients.

He found himself occasionally passing one body shop in Delmar along his route. He kept thinking that a body shop would need detailing and he should drop off flyers, but he would push the thought aside and continue on his way. One day he decided to listen to that voice and finally made the turn into the body shop. “Anybody who is successful will tell you to always go with those voices in your head. Don’t ever push those away because there is a reason why they’re doing it. Different turns you make can totally change the whole direction of your life,” he says.

This body shop was one of those turns for Dave. He ended up doing some detailing work for the shop before the owner offered him a regular position to train in bodywork. Dave agreed, not knowing that the new skill would eventually turn into a whole new life for him. While at the shop, Dave became friendly with Jack, another technician. Dave was instantly drawn to his laid back manner and looked up to him as a father figure. Jack left the shop to open his own place, but his place in Dave’s story wasn’t quite over.

Dave was learning quickly, but one day made a mistake by unknowingly putting on the wrong color pinstripe.



The owner, who was an aggressive, no excuse kind of guy, flipped out, and among a few other choice words, told Dave that, "Some people have it. Some people don't. And you just don't have it."

"It messed with me," says Dave. "But I'm stubborn."

He decided to go back to detailing and found himself in the usual whirlwind of a new business owner – rocking it on some days but still making mistakes along the way. He never let anything derail him, taking each setback as a challenge, stubbornly pushing forward and finding a way through to the other side.

When things got extra tough, he drove around to find his old friend Jack for some advice, and the two men ended up joining forces to work together. Jack convinced Dave to try again at bodywork. Things were different with his new teacher, and Dave quickly learned the trade all the way through this time. He became the face of Jack's shop until he broke his wrist in an accident and had to leave. Dave moved around, working at a few smaller shops before entering the world of the dealers. With their high demand workload, Dave learned how to do good work fast and he became one of the most sought after technicians in the area.

He always continued his Paintworx business on the side and when he

saw an ad for his current location behind Dott's Garage on Central Avenue in Albany, he decided to take a look. It was perfect, but he knew he couldn't afford it and continued working as

a contractor for the dealers. Things were tough and he began to doubt himself and question if he was making the right decisions. His wife Carolee was his greatest supporter and she encouraged him to follow his heart.

He remembers the day he was ready to call it quits. Literally standing out in the rain, he called his wife. "She said, 'Honey, just pack it up and come home if you want. I'm behind you 110%. I just want to tell you one thing, though – I don't know many people like you. When you say you're going to do something, you do it. Any time you say something, I believe you – you're going to do it. If anybody can do this, you can do this.' She believes in me more than I believe in myself sometimes. It's like what they say at the awards shows – without that person on your side, always being there, always having your back when no one else would have your back, not using your vulnerabilities against you, I don't know how you make it. We are a team. Without her help, I don't think Paintworx would even exist."

He decided to give things one more shot and went back to the shop behind Dotts. He told the owners straight up that he wanted the place but couldn't afford the rent they were asking. Dave offered them a deal – agree on a dollar amount he could afford for rent, then they could get an additional percentage of every car he brought in.

It worked. It was another lesson for Dave. "If you don't put yourself out there, if you don't go after something you don't think you can do – you just never friggin' know."

Dave started as a one-man operation with only \$3000 left in his bank account and over \$100,000 in debt. After the first year of business, he was debt free. Six and a half years later, he has almost 10 employees, is expanding from a 5,000 square foot facility to 10,000 and is in negotiation with Dotts to buy out their business and combine everything into one.

Dave is a very straightforward, tell-it-like-it-is man and is a firm believer in old-fashioned values and hard work. Now he has the resources to run his business the way he always wanted – combining values with new age thinking to create an experience that makes customers for life. His diligence in this ambition is apparent in every aspect of his impeccable shop and easy process for his customers.

"Business is awesome because I love it. I get to do something I love every day. I like making people happy. They trust me. My employees trust me. It's not just my family I have to feed, but theirs too. It feels good knowing that people trust in my abilities."

The lessons he has learned to get to this point in his life are ones he wants to share with anyone that has a dream or is trying to figure out a way to make it in their own lives. "Don't ever take what someone else says. Believe in yourself. Anything is possible. Put yourself out there and just listen to your heart and no one else. Pick yourself up and do it again. Surround yourself with good people and follow your heart. The sky's the limit!" ■

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