

THE GROUNDS GUYS

A fresh start

When Brad and Rachel Bell stopped at a trade show booth to snag a free bag at the GIE+EXPO in 2010, they never could have imagined that in less than a year they'd be franchise owners. But one thing led to another, and their chance introduction to The Grounds Guys landscape maintenance franchise system got the wheels turning for the Bells, who at the time owned Brad's Lawn Service in Owensboro, Ky.

The couple describes their previous business as challenging and overwhelming at times. Their greatest roadblock to growing their business, which was doing about \$200,000 in annual revenue, was hiring and retaining employees. In fact, Brad Bell's headaches were such that he was considering reverting to a one-truck operation and working in the field again.

Not long after wandering into The Grounds Guys trade show booth, the Bells made a day-and-a-half trip to Waco, Texas, to visit the corporate headquarters of The Dwyer Group, The Grounds Guys' parent company.

"We learned about the systems and what they were bringing to the table to take our business to the next level," Rachel Bell says. By spring of 2011, the Bells were officially The Grounds Guys of Owensboro, Ky.

Before encountering The Grounds Guys, the couple had never considered buying a franchise.

"I looked at a few after we started speaking with The Grounds Guys, but what really sold me on them was the culture," Brad Bell says. "The Grounds Guys has really developed our culture to what we want it to be. We want to have a positive impact on our community and the entire country, really."

Today, The Grounds Guys of Owensboro, Ky., has grown 30 percent in two years, and is looking at hitting \$350,000 in revenue in 2013.

"I really feel like we started over," Brad Bell says.

Systems are the secret

For Brad Bell, the prospect of being a company with \$1 million or \$2 million in annual revenue is now within reach. Could he have gotten there before joining The Grounds Guys system?

"Never," he says, and then he rethinks his answer. "Maybe, but if I did make it to \$1 million, I would never be making a profit."

Now, Brad Bell "knows his numbers," such as how much he needs to make per man hour to be profitable. And he has monthly sales goals he's accountable for.

"If you implement the systems, there's unlimited growth potential," he

SOCIAL SUPPORT

"One thing that really turned us on was all the support," says Rachel Bell, co-owner of The Grounds Guys of Owensboro, Ky. "The Grounds Guys has more than 100 franchisees. There are 100 people we can ask for help with the blink of an eye if we're doing a big quote or if we're unsure about anything."

The Grounds Guys franchisees nationwide communicate with each other and the home office daily via Chatter, a social network within Salesforce, the customer relationship management software service the franchise uses.

Not only do the Bells get ahead by asking their peers questions, they gain by sharing their knowledge, too.

"It's fun to help other people," Rachel Bell says. "We have strengths where the others have weaknesses, and it's great to share that knowledge and pay it forward."

Brad Bell likes the friendly competition drummed up on Chatter. He's motivated by the project pictures other franchisees post and when they share their successes, like landing a big job.

says. "I could see myself running a \$1 million company."

Brad Bell says he didn't have a system for hiring before becoming a The Grounds Guys franchisee, and now he has an effective six-step hiring process.

"Now, I've gotten myself out of the field, and I'm training my employees," he says. "I'm able to find someone who truly wants a career and not just a paycheck."

Though the Bells still put in long hours, they're happier with their quality of life.

"Brad's hired a great group of guys this year, and they're one of the reasons we're so successful," Rachel Bell says. "His attitude at the end of the day is so much better because it's much easier to deal with the guys on the crew—they're better employees."

It's allowed them more freedom, too. "If we want to go for a day trip or to The Dwyer Group's national conference for three or four days, we have that freedom because of the systems in place and the crews in place," Rachel Bell says.

Brad Bell adds, "We would never have been able to do that with Brad's Lawn Service. It would have fallen apart."



Brad and Rachel Bell, pictured here with their twin daughters, still work hard since converting their business to a The Grounds Guys franchise, but they say their quality of life has improved thanks to the company's systems.

PHOTO: THE GROUNDS GUYS