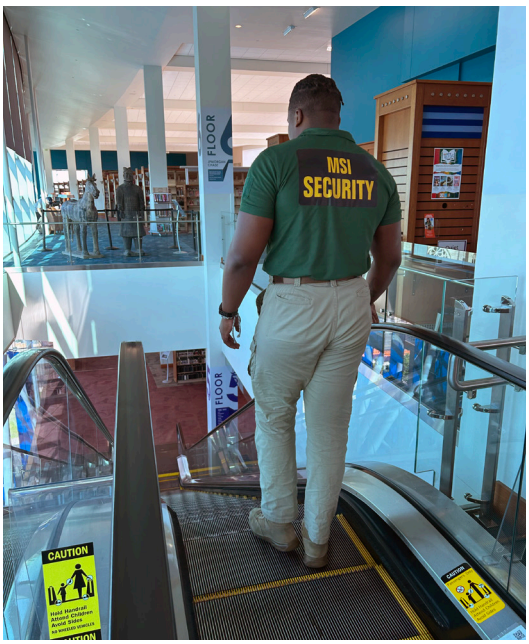
Securing a future, thanks in part to Enterprise Corps



With lots of life experience in and out of the military, but no formal business education, Jeff Nesbitt launched a security company that has grown and matured

Jeff Nesbitt grew up in Grand Junction, Colorado. He thought one day he would be taking over the family's construction business, but he did not stick around long enough to learn what it took to run it. Instead, he joined the U.S. Coast Guard, and while he was graduating boot camp, his father sold the company.

That could have crushed Nesbitt's entrepreneurial spirit, but it appears to have done just the opposite. That closed door set him on a career path that would lead to owning his own security company. Nesbitt runs MSI Security, and he does not run it alone. He hired a young CEO and graduate of Indiana University, Megan Bentley. Together, they oversee a workforce of 75 employees. In one year, they saw revenue increase 350%. Bentley credits Enterprise Corps for helping them keep their feet on the accelerator.

"The program is fantastic," Bentley said. "The program cares about us. The level of care. It is insane it does not cost us anything. We do not have the budget to hire a consultant or get outside education. Indiana seems to be trying to take care of the business owners, IU, too."

Enterprise Corps is a business acceleration program formed in collaboration between the IU Kelley School of Business and several community partners. It came together during the pandemic to help address the challenges facing small businesses like MSI Security.

Nesbitt started MSI Security in 2016 doing everything himself. That is common among the small business owners who have participated in Enterprise Corps. Their passions get them going, but they get stuck for lack of a business strategy.

"When I first started out, I was taking the calls, sometimes working until 3 a.m., so I'd sleep during the day when I should have been reporting back to clients," Nesbitt recalled.

Before going out on his own, Nesbitt held numerous jobs, from safety officer to human resources manager. He even graduated from police academy in Colorado, always driven to help others, striving to solve problems.

Nesbitt moved to Indiana with his wife in 2008. Her father offered him a job repairing military weapons for the Naval Surface Warfare Center, Crane Division.

“I’ve had a lot of jobs,” Nesbitt said. “I struggled understanding the people in charge.”

Even in the military, though he learned to respect his supervisors, he thought about ways he would do their jobs differently.

Nesbitt solicited his first security clients by going door to door. They were sororities and fraternities at IU. His experience with them led to student housing work. He joined the Bloomington Chamber of Commerce.

“I wish I had done this sooner,” he said. “The Chamber has connected us with quite a few business leads to generate growth.”

Nesbitt recognizes his strengths and where he falls short.

“I’m good at security, but I could not tell you about logistics,” said Nesbitt.

That is one of Bentley’s strengths, and she was able to fine-tune that skillset by attending courses offered through Enterprise Corps. She received certificates in Business Strategy, Financial Strategy, Marketing & Sales and Organizational Leadership, through the IU Kelley School of Business’s Executive Education Program.

Bentley does not have a security background. She majored in psychology and minored in business and marketing. However, she is fascinated with this line of work. She looks at every detail of the business to make it more efficient, from miles driven in the company cars to implementation of new technology that improves communication. Involvement in Enterprise Corps has given her much to consider.

“I hired Bentley and built a team,” Nesbitt said. “We are looking at whom we target. The construction industry, hospitals?”

That line of thinking was part of Kelley instruction. Business owners are encouraged to come up with a profile of prospective customers.

Nesbitt says before hiring Bentley, he felt his company had plateaued. He lacked any formal business training to get MSI Security to the next level.

“I was just throwing darts,” he admitted.

He hired Bentley part time while she was still in school. He was impressed with her writing.

“She was born with a briefcase,” he noted.

Bentley admits it is difficult becoming a CEO at such a young age, but what she does not know, she is quick to ascertain.

“My knowledge grew as the business grew,” she said.

She discovered Enterprise Corps while checking the email of a sales rep who had left MSI Security. She jumped on the offer to participate.

To the Finance class, Bentley brought with her the company’s uniform dilemma. Nesbitt had been making his own uniforms for his security staff because he could not wait to order them elsewhere. Sometimes, there is a need for protection without much notice. So, Nesbitt bought an embroidery machine. He says he was losing on that decision, but had not realized it. With the help of Enterprise Corps, they figured out it would take 15 years to recoup the money invested in the equipment. They now use a more cost-effective alternative.

In addition to the classes, Bentley and Nesbitt benefited from coaching sessions with Professor Phil Powell from Kelley. These coaching sessions led to Nesbitt and Bentley hiring two key people, a director of operations and a director of marketing and research.

"We bring Phil our problems and he validates or redirects," said Bentley. "I felt paralyzed by the number of choices we had, and Phil sharing his experience, made me feel more confident."

Powell is not the only significant connection they made through Enterprise Corps. Another is Marcela Montero from the Indy Chamber, who has helped MSI Security compete for state contracts and secure business at Indianapolis International Airport.

If Nesbitt has to pick one takeaway from Enterprise Corps, it is what Powell told them.

"He stresses that business owners should aim to work ON the business and not IN the business," he recalled.

In other words, an owner's goal should be to spend most of their time moving the company forward as opposed to maintaining it. All indications are MSI Security is moving forward. ■

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