



RESPECT, INTEGRITY, TRUST

JDog Junk Removal is opening their 200th franchise here in Boston...and they're bringing their military-inspired values of respect, integrity and trust with them. Those values have inspired a pretty stellar business model.

By Kurt Smith

The idea of hiring veterans doesn't need to be sold to business owners as a gesture of gratitude for their sacrifices. But there's another very good reason. It's great for business.

If you have any curiosity why, listen to R.J. Gagnon, co-owner of JDog Junk Removal's new Boston franchise, tell you about Crazy Keith.

"When we interviewed him," Gagnon says, "he needed help. We had a couple of concerns. Obviously he was a little older than most of our guys, doing this very physical job. And he was a Vietnam vet that came with his own set of troubles and conflicts.

"So the first thing we did was make sure that we found him a home. We found him an apartment, and we helped him get established and get into programs to help him."

R.J. and JDog needn't have worried.

"This Vietnam War veteran, he rides his bike from his apartment to the bus stop, gets on the bus, rides into the city the hub is in, has a bike stationed at that bus stop, jumps on that and rides into work, repeats the process home, and repeats the process day after day.

"He is never late, he never calls in sick, and he works harder and faster than any 20-year-old on our crew. He has a nickname, Crazy Keith, because when they get done

with a whole house cleanout, panting in the hot sun, Keith is still doing somersaults and flips and starting to stretch out with his martial arts moves. Those military values of completing your mission? That's what he lives and breathes."

Incidentally, that rubs off on team members.

"He is like a role model to some of the younger civilian guys. 'How is this 62-year-old Vietnam vet out-hustling me? I'm 20 years old and he is out-maneuvering me out there!'"

R.J. Gagnon's father, Ray, is a retired Marine Corps Master Gunnery Sergeant. The two are taking command of JDog's 200th franchise, located in the Framingham/Worcester area. The growth of JDog, which originated in Philadelphia, has been swift and decisive...in no small part because of their hiring and franchising practices.

Jerry "JDog" Flanagan, co-founder and CEO of JDog, was a wire dog in the Army, hence the nickname. He has never needed to be told the value of employing someone who has served in the toughest of environments. He knows the work ethic ingrained in a military uniform.

"You're 100% accountable for your actions," he says. "You learn how to respect people, you learn how to say yes sir, yes ma'am. And your work schedule is out of control. You're going to work more hours than



Photos courtesy of JDog Junk Removal



Army Veteran, Jerry "JDog" Flanagan,
co-founder and CEO of JDog

you'll ever work in a civilian job."

It was great life training for the workplace. "I was able to get to work before everybody else, I stayed later than everybody else, I volunteered for all the crappy shifts. It separated me from the average civilian."

Flanagan learned, as most entrepreneurs do, that his work habits would better benefit his family if he owned the business himself.

With his wife Tracy, he started a kids party center in 2007. It went under in the recession of 2008. Without a college degree, he needed a better way to support his wife

and daughters, so he researched recession-proof businesses. One of them was junk removal.

He started handing out postcards offering junk removal service to neighbors. The ones that hired him were immediately impressed.

"I had been doing it for about two weeks, when someone mentioned that I was doing the job so fast and on time, and I was in a polo shirt and was clean cut. They wanted to know where this came from. I said, well, I was in the military, so I've always been able to outperform anybody because of my work ethic.

"They said, 'You should market that!' So I slapped 'Army Veteran' on my business cards and stuck it on the side of my jeep."

The response immediately showed that he was onto something. "The phone started blowing up and everyone started using me in the area. I lasted probably eight months, and I realized that I needed helpers.

"I went to the VA, and I hired compensated work therapy patients that were struggling with drugs and alcohol. Combat veterans that were coming back and couldn't find work. I was rotating different guys into my trucks, putting them on the other side of couches and carrying items.

"They felt great about it, and we were able to run the business with almost all veterans initially. I realized that we had something big

here, and my wife said we should franchise this thing. We sold five franchises, and I realized other veterans wanted to be part of this."

As Flanagan says, it's a hand up, not a handout.

"It's not just about philanthropy. These are real businesses. They make real money, real equity for families. When you have that and you have fun doing it, and you're putting veterans to work, and the community's getting behind you...it's just a recipe for massive success."

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His customers "just have a lot of respect for military, either side of the aisle, it doesn't make a difference. I had no idea that it was going to be that powerful. I didn't realize that the competitive advantage of being a military

GIVING BACK: THE JDOG FOUNDATION AND MILITARY SPOUSES



JDog is philanthropic by nature, donating furniture and usable goods to veterans in need and using proceeds from recycling for charitable events. But now they're giving back to America's finest too, with the recently formed JDog Foundation.

The JDog Foundation's mission is to "provide leadership, support, awareness, and funding to Veteran Organizations that are charged with rebuilding or repairing homes and lives for our Veterans."

They've landed a good representative to head the foundation... Ralph Galati, a former POW who was captured when his plane was shot down and landed in the Hanoi Hilton with John McCain. He was released in March of 1973, just after his 25th birthday. Galati is the former

Director of Veterans Services at St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia.

JDog franchise owners also benefit from Tracy Flanagan's Military Spouses program, the group of women supporting their business owner husbands. Tracy writes a newsletter and manages the group, Jerry says. "It's just supporting their franchisees out there through the women which really run the operations and the houses behind the scenes really.

"We all have to answer to somebody and it's those women out there that are really strong."

If you'd like to find out how to contribute to the JDog Foundation, it's at <https://www.jdogfoundation.org/>.



veteran business was that strong."

So why don't more veteran-owned businesses trumpet military service, such as with the stunning camouflage-painted trucks like JDog uses? Gagnon thinks it's a reluctance to use their service for personal

gain. A reluctance that both he and Flanagan believe is misguided.

"I see it as a way to communicate that we're respectful, that you can trust us, and that we carry ourselves with integrity," Gagnon says. "Veterans became different

people the moment they signed up. They've served everyone, and that brings with it some weight and value."

Flanagan agrees that it's an unquestionably impressive credential.

"The way I equate it is this: if you went to get your MBA at Harvard or you graduated MIT, what are you going to do? You're going to put that on your LinkedIn, you're going to put it on your resume, you're going to let the world know, right? Well, veterans don't do that, and veterans need to, because you could equate it as something similar of an accomplishment.

"There's veterans out there that own a business, you'd never even know they're a veteran. They've gotta figure out how to get their brand out there, because it really works.

"Customers are longing for someone to open the door up in their home, and say thank you, good morning sir, look them in the eye, do a really good job and have respect, have integrity and have trust. And the company was founded on respect, integrity, trust.

"They're going to use us over and over again. They're going to tell their friends and family. They tip us, they make sandwiches, they leave their doors unlocked for us to go in when they're not home. It's insane. There's not one other service model out there, plumbers, painters, you always feel like you're getting ripped off. In our case,

it's the opposite."

JDog is not only a phenomenal success story for veteran employees and franchisees, they're a tremendous boon to communities they serve, both by helping local veterans and protecting the environment.

Between 70% and 80% of what JDog collects, according to Gagnon, never reaches a landfill. They use a process R.J. calls the three Rs: re-purpose, re-sell, or recycle. Still-usable items, such as furniture, get donated to charities helping veterans in the area. For items that are re-sold, proceeds go to funding charitable functions. Other items get recycled, including paper, cardboard, glass, plastic, wood, and metal.

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Everyone benefits. "Those programs are part of the reason why they decided to go with JDog. People know that it's not just a junk removal company. We're actually doing something good here."

Their 200th franchise in the Cradle of Liberty, while obviously momentous, is just another stop on the freeway. JDog has signed on for 300 more franchises, including a few more in the Boston area.

In the space of just a few years, Jerry Flanagan and his warriors have built an extremely lucrative business with one simple premise...that military values of respect, integrity and trust bring an almost unbeatable competitive advantage to an enterprise. More importantly, Flanagan, his wife Tracy, and his business family like the Gagnons, have found a calling.

"The model that started out as a way of survival has turned into a massive inspirational company that's changing families and lives," Flanagan reflects.

"We're bringing veterans back together under one ethos of brotherhood. And that gets me up very early every day. It just doesn't stop, because if there's a veteran out there in the United States, my obligation is to put them in business wherever they are in the country."

Judging from JDog's astounding growth, it looks like Americans are on board with the plan.

For more information about JDOG Junk Removal, visit bostonmanmagazine.com

THE POWER OF APPRECIATION

Jerry and R.J. have stories to tell about how grateful their customers are for their military service. Jerry has a favorite tale of one woman's gratitude.

"When I was in my second year of hauling, there was one candidate that came from compensated work therapy. He was a very, very, experienced combat veteran who lost a lot of friends in the war, and he was going through the VA. We were hauling junk together.

"I knew that he was looking to get his own apartment and trying to take that next step in his life. So I was hiding furniture, because the guy wouldn't even take a sandwich from us. I would bring him home for lunch and he wouldn't eat. I kept hiding furniture in my basement if I saw good stuff in the field. He had no idea. I was like, oh, there's a good couch, there's a good this, there's a good that.

"So we go to a job, and I always brag about my combat veterans and the guys I'm bringing along, because the customers love to support those type of guys. I'm not a combat veteran, but I'd say just this guy's an Iraq war hero.

"I was talking to this one customer and said, he's getting ready to get into an apartment and we're excited. And she's like, does he need a TV? And he doesn't even listen to the conversation...I said, matter of fact, he could use a TV.

"She goes, take that one. It's a brand new 60 inch television in her living room hooked up to her cable. She's like, I don't need that, I'll get another one. I'm like, ma'am, that is way over the top.

"I said to him, this woman wants to get rid of that television, I know you're moving, so you want it? 'No, I can't take that.' I went back to her, she said, just take it. And I said, okay, I'll take it. I'll put it in my basement.

"I put it in my Hummer and we're leaving and we're driving and he's like looking out the window. I go to drop him off where is dropoff point is. He gets out of the truck and he says, I'll see you tomorrow.

He walks out and comes back, 'are you really putting that TV in your basement?' I said, you want it, don't you? So he's like, 'can I have it?'

"The woman just felt so compelled to help this veteran, that she took the TV out of her living room and went out and bought another \$1,500 television herself, because she felt that she could give back.

"And we're charging her for the job. She tipped, I think both of us \$100 and she gave us a \$1,000 television.

"That kind of stuff that goes on in our space!"