

# Firefighters: Season 2

**On the look out for local business owners who are always putting out fires and need help improving**



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When we launched our inaugural Firefighters of Northeast Wisconsin initiative last spring, I'll admit that I really didn't know what to expect.

We came up with the idea back in late 2009 after watching so many small business owners needlessly suffer through day-to-day challenges of running their business. Often, their challenges didn't arise from not offering a quality product or service – indeed, from their customer's perspective, most appeared to be the best place to do business in the market.

But internally within their small company, these business owners were hurting because of a lack of organization, or a lack of consistent procedures, or challenges with technology, or in hiring and keeping good employees. These particular business owners were constantly putting out fires. They needed outside help to get back on track, an angel who could sit on their shoulder and work on fixing their business so that there no longer were any fires – or at the very least, fires that they didn't have to extinguish alone.

The idea evolved into a concept in which B2B would match up these business owners who were constantly putting out fires with professional business consultants from the region who would donate their time and service to help get to the root of their problems, map out a solution, and point them toward the promised land. Throughout the nearly five months of this a sort-of business-owner-makeover, we'd chart the progress in the pages of each monthly magazine, offering some exposure to these small business and their consultants, and offering some lessons to our readers along the way.

Beginning last winter, B2B put out a call for small business owners who were brave enough to nakedly share their challenges of running a small business with our readers, yet, who genuinely wanted the assistance to improve and move their company to the next level of growth and success. For our April 2011 issue, we selected IT Connexx/DVM Connexx of Green Bay and Action Painting & Carpet Care of Appleton to receive a business management makeover at no cost other than to openly share their journey along the way.

Through the generous support of Steve Van Remortel, president and owner of SM Advisors in Green Bay, and Gary Vaughan, president and owner of Guident Business Solutions in Appleton, the two business-

es received thousands of dollars worth of guidance to help them through some rough patches to get to a better place.

In the case of IT Connexx/DVM Connexx in Green Bay, co-owners Brian O'Shaughnessy and Kevin Scholz ultimately decided to dissolve their partnership, split the company in two and go their separate ways. It wasn't that the two co-owners weren't good together – the split resulted from recognition that the two companies weren't as well aligned down the same path as they should've been to make it an efficient partnership. Through their work with Van Remortel, both recognized they can be much more effective with their respective staff now.

In its work with Vaughan, Action Painting co-owners Ruben and June Contreras were able to get a handle on their cash flow, implement job descriptions and policies, and ultimately sleep better at night.

"It seemed as if we were always doing what we needed to do for the moment," said June Contreras, reflecting on their experience running the business before they began to work with Vaughan. "Now we have all that under control and we can look ahead to the future."

Now that's a firefighter endorsement.

B2B is back with our second annual Firefighters of Northeast Wisconsin campaign, beginning coverage with our April 2012 issue.

I'm accepting nominations between now and March 9 from small businesses owners who want out of the cycle of continually putting out fires. Feel free to nominate a vendor, a customer, even your own boss if you think it's appropriate.

We'll select a handful of nominated businesses to participate in our 2012 edition of Firefighters of Northeast Wisconsin, in which they'll be provided counsel and training to improve their day-to-day operations, leaving more time and energy to concentrate on the bigger picture of the future of the business. We'll track the progress of their development along the way, sharing their lessons and their improvements with our B2B reading audience.

If you'd like to nominate yourself or another small business owner, send an email to [sean@newnorthb2b.com](mailto:sean@newnorthb2b.com) outlining the challenges you face in running your small business. If you'd like more information about this campaign, feel free to email me or call me at 920.237.0254.

We'd be happy to share your story as a firefighter of 2012.

