

A clean path

'20-something' entrepreneurs set sights on their new venture

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Charles Edison, 27, never realized that owning his own business would require a bit of detective work. That's because Edison, vice president and co-founder of Ward-Edison's Professional Cleaning Service LLC, never had to deal with a stubborn coffee stain before.

"Do you know that the chemical base of a cleaning solution needed to remove a black coffee stain versus a coffee stain with cream and sugar is completely different?" he asked.

That's one of the interesting tidbits of knowledge he's gained since he launched the business in 2003 with Samuel Ward, 28, who is president and a company partner. Ward, who is the full-time manager of another company, is not involved in the cleaning service's daily operations but he helps make major decisions to guide the business.

Its services range from interior and window cleaning to parking lot sweeps and even replenishing supplies such as hand towels.

Edison not only watches and manages his 10 part-time employees, but he works alongside them. "You need to stay close to your business," he said.

The attention to detail has paid off. Ward-Edison's client roster includes common areas of Preston Pointe and the offices of Old National Bank and Cobalt Ventures that are located there.

Getting started

Edison and Ward met while attending the University of Louisville. Edison graduated in May 2002 with a bachelor's degree in business administration with a marketing concentration. Ward graduated in May 2001 with a bachelor's degree in communications with an advertising emphasis.

The two shared an entrepreneurial spirit and discovered the janitorial business had large growth potential and low startup costs.

"We had no prior experience owning a business. We just knew we wanted to work for ourselves. The key was surrounding ourselves with people who had experience and a successful

track record to advise us," said Ward.

After speaking with Lenny Lyles, a former University of Louisville and NFL football player and local businessman who belonged to their church, West Broadway Church of Christ, they were referred to George King, who at the time owned Mr. Klean's Janitor and Maintenance Inc.

King, who sold the firm in 2005 after 33 years, now serves as their mentor.

"They are a first-class, top-grade cleaning service. These young men are doing a fantastic job. As long as they continue to work hard, I'm willing to stick with them," said King, who recommends them to businesspeople.



Samuel Ward, left, and Charles Edison are shown with the tools of their trade.

RON BATH | BUSINESS FIRST

WARD-EDISON'S PROFESSIONAL CLEANING SERVICE

Partners: Charles Edison, 27, and Samuel Ward, 28

Company description: Provides cleaning for commercial operations

Employees: One full time and 10 part time

Address: 911 S. Brook St.

Phone: 589-3006

Fast growth: In 2006, the company more than doubled its 2005 revenue and gained four new accounts

Founded: 2003

Best part about owning a business: "I haven't run into one aspect of owning a business that I haven't enjoyed. I won't enjoy losing a customer. But I know I'll enjoy the chase of getting another one," said Edison.

And their church became their first client. "The church account was the icing on the cake," said Edison.

"We didn't have any startup costs. It was sweat equity. The church provided everything. We put in the time and saved the revenue. That helped us buy equipment and supplies."

Slow and steady

"The biggest challenge is being impatient and wanting to move too fast before getting a good grasp on how the business works," said Ward. "Mr. King keeps things in perspective for us. He has helped us avoid pitfalls."

Edison attributes his strong work ethic and motivation to his late grandfather, as well as his father, Charles T. Edison, who lives in Louisville. "They taught me to work hard and not make excuses," he said.

Ward finds motivation from his family, which includes his wife, Cassidy Ward, and children, Samari, 10, and Samia, almost 2 years old.

The two are dedicated to advancing their fledgling company. "We want to move forward in the business world and Louisville community," said Edison. "We want to gain work, maintain it and keep our customers happy." |