

en·tre·pre·neur

ä'n-trə-p(r)ə-'nər\ *noun*

1. One who manages and assumes the risks of a business
2. A woman's journey from undercover cop to CEO

By Jill Abrahamsen

As an undercover narcotics and vice detective, Laura Spaulding-Koppel showed entrepreneurial qualities from the get-go: Bravery, creativity, and strategic thinking are just a few traits that come to mind.

Working vice on the streets of Kansas City, Spaulding-Koppel had to go undercover as a prostitute. "You wouldn't believe how many men would pull up in luxury cars with baby seats in the back, looking for services," she says. As an undercover narcotics detective, she posed as a crack junkie. Working the streets, she saw it all.

"This wasn't at all how I grew up," she says. "I was raised in a normal, suburban household. I was kind of sheltered."

Although the 22-year-old's career was exciting, it wasn't sustainable. "I had no wire or gun, and I was risking my life for \$35,000 a year. It wasn't worth it," she says.

Looking for a better opportunity, she enrolled in an MBA program at Baker University in Baldwin City, Kansas and learned about the world of business while simultaneously continuing her work in law enforcement. Then, during a homicide investigation, a light bulb went off.

"Who comes in now to clean up?" she asked colleagues. No one knew. School taught her to look for opportunities, and at that moment, she started laying the groundwork for her business: Spaulding

Decon, a restoration and decontamination service specializing in crime scene, drug lab, hoarding, unattended death, and mold cleanup.

In 2005, with crime scene certification under her belt, Spaulding-Koppel took a giant leap of faith and moved to Florida to start her business. At first she just specialized in crime scene cleanup, but soon she recognized other areas that could be added to her list of services, like hoarding and drug-lab cleanup.

The 2008 housing market crisis brought on unprecedented foreclosures and led some to crystal meth production. (Remember Walter White in "Breaking Bad"?) Then came the drug busts and a need for cleanup. While the police usually remove the chemicals and toxic materials, residues still remain all over the property, in the air ducts and on the walls. Spaulding Decon goes in for the cleanup.

Granted, it's not a job for everyone, but the business has high margins and huge upside potential. "A great thing about this business is that a homeowner's insurance usually covers the cost of our services," she says.



CRIME SCENE



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Eventually, Spaulding-Koppel had more work than she could manage on her own. In 2015, at the advice of her lawyer, she started franchising. Today, she has ten locations and plans to add 15 more this year.

Just like with other franchises, the key to success is sticking to the system. “It’s just like following a recipe. If you can bake a cake, you can succeed at this business,” Spaulding-Koppel says. We know what marketing methods work and how to partner with the right people.

Then there’s the “ick factor.” Can you handle a business that deals with blood, death, drugs, toxins, and mess? It’s not for everyone, so Spaulding-Koppel insists that

in addition to traditional training, potential franchisees participate in a “discovery day.”

The two-week training in Tampa includes hands-on work at the staged “crime scene,” where pigs’ blood is used to recreate clean-up scenarios. Real-world training comes next: Franchisees go out with a live crew and work actual jobs.

Although no store front is required, franchisees need warehouse space and a truck. “This is a turn-key business. We give our franchise partners everything they need for success, and we’re with them every step of the way.”

For more information on Spaulding Decon, visit www.spauldingdecon.com