

## **Leveraging a Coach with Jay Burns**

### *The Shred Coach Podcast* Transcript

**TOM**

Jay Burns. Welcome to The Shred Coach Podcast. How are you today?

**JAY**

Good. Good. How are you doing?

**TOM**

Good. It's so good to have you on the show. So, let's set the context. Tell me a little bit about your company, where you are, what's your service area? Let's start there.

**JAY**

Yeah, we're in central Florida, in the heart of Florida, a city called Winter Haven, Florida. And we're actually right in the middle between Tampa and Orlando. And been in business 19 years. We have a couple of other locations, we have a Daytona Beach location, and then three years ago we acquired a small shredding company in Fort Myers. So, now we have a truck down in Fort Myers.

**TOM**

Got it. Nice. And are you fully truck? Are you a full truck operation? Do you have a plant? What's the makeup of your shredding business?

**JAY**

Yeah, we're probably 99% mobile shredding. I started that way and now that we've been doing it for so long it's kind of hard to get away from that. Just the way we're set up. And so, we're strictly mobile. And we also can obviously do the hard drives since we have the hard drive machines on our trucks now. And then in the Winter Haven office, our main location, we also do record storage. So, we've been doing... we've been record storage for about 10 years now.

**TOM**

Okay. So, that part of the business is obviously a unique and interesting side of it in this industry. How much focus of your attention goes to record storage versus shredding? Is it like a 80/20 split? How do you kind of see it in your mind?

**JAY**

Sure. Probably as much as our revenue; it's probably 90/10, probably. So, you know, we found this amazing building that used to be a boat storage facility. Had high ceilings and we just thought it was the perfect package for us to go after, after that building acquire. And from there we started the record storage from scratch and, as most people know, it's just a long, slow sales process and I'm still glad we did it, but, you know, capital intensive for sure. Long, long sales

cycle. But overall, it's going well. A lot of the racking that we've purchased over the years is about to be paid off. So, we're going to be able to see more cash flow from that side of the business, but we still have another... if we have half the warehouse full now, we still have another half to fill. So, it's always a reminder when you walk in every morning and see half the warehouse empty, but at the same time it just takes one big one or couple decent size ones that would fill the warehouse and I'm singing a different tune. So...

**TOM**

Yeah. Well, one other question about your overall business. What's the... you know, how many staff, like full-time equivalent staff are you, do you have with Crown? What's your current number roughly?

**JAY**

Yeah, I think we have about 35 employees. Probably about 15 of those are service techs or drivers. And the other ones are a mix between administration and sales.

**TOM**

Got it. So, you've been in the game a long time, 20, roughly 20 years you said. So, you've had a lot of life and experience in this now. As you know, the focus of our podcast is things you've done that create, you know, a really solid result for you. So, what's happening in your world or what's happened in the last number of years that feels like it's given you a lot of leverage or direction or focus, or tell me, tell me what's going on for you?

**JAY**

Yeah, I guess when, you know, when I first started, I met, I first met my first major partner, so to speak, in the industry was Shred First. And those guys were, you know, John Bauknight and Nick Wildrick and Ray Barry. And I was actually the second person to ever go through their shred school. And just really learned a lot about those guys and how they ran their business, how their culture worked, how to treat employees, how to, you know, at least look to scale your business. So, when I first got into the industry to be able to see that type of business and see how they operated and know that, hey, that this level of business is possible. That to me was a huge find for me to be able to find that company, find those individuals who were willing to share their techniques and strategies as opposed to, you know, maybe if I would've ran to somebody who only had two trucks and been in business 20 years, you know, those guys I think would... they probably said they had a hundred trucks, but they do have, they do have a lot of trucks. But they ended up selling out to SIM tos I think in '07... but this was a bunch of great guys and learned a lot from them. And they had a, you know, the teacher's heart, so to speak, where they weren't worried about competition, they were just trying to help others and, learned a lot from them.

**TOM**

Yeah. So, if you were their second person, I mean, they were around a long time. They originally founded, Ray and team, founded shred school. So, like when that first happened, what was sort

of some of the major impact of that in your early business? What levers did that pull for you more than just knowing what a big company looked and acted like? What were some of the major effects that came out of that for you?

**JAY**

Really just, you know, I was 26 years old when I started the business. So, you know, I graduated, I was 23 years old. My first job was with Black and Decker at an entry level job. And, you know, I was out there marketing and talking to users of power tools and maybe the retail side as well, but didn't really know how to go about and start a business. And the shred school back then was one to one. So, I was sitting there across the table from Nick Wildrick and Ray Barry, and so it was almost at the time it was kind of VIP treatment, so to speak. But the simplest thing, which I think, you know, helped me out and helped me grow faster than the typical company was just a CRM, to be honest with you. It's pretty simple. But ACT back then was my go-to.

**TOM**

Yeah.

**JAY**

And obviously everybody has Salesforce now and it's basically ACT on steroids, but looking back at it, just to be able to understand the sales process and how to follow up with people and how to maintain that information and be reminded to say, to set alarms, to call somebody in a month or send a letter in two weeks and... you know, in '03, '04, obviously the internet was around but I don't remember us having pay-per-click or any of that kind of stuff. So, it was all outbound. And in college I sold books door to door just to kind of learn the sales cycle. So, the sales part wasn't necessarily a big deal as far as being rejected. But with this industry, we all know that there's a lot of small customers, so you need a lot of volume and just to be able to manage how you keep up with prospects, how you remind them of our services. And so, as simple as it sounds, the ACT software, the CRM at an early age to me was a huge asset to implement.

**TOM**

Yeah. Yeah. And so, that for you... because I'm assuming, based on what you just said, you were the lead sales person in the company at that point. So, that information coming out of shred school pushed you to get ACT. You then go back and implement CRM and it just starts to drive sales for you.

**JAY**

Yeah, exactly. I mean, I remember, you know, I would basically... I moved back into my parents' house at 26 and turned my bedroom into my office. And I would just, you know, smile and dial and send letters from there. If I got a job, I'd jump on the truck and run the truck. And then if I wasn't, I was either on the phone, sending out letters, going to networking events, sending out my cards...

**JAY (cont.)**

And, you know, there was one story where I was actually on the phone with somebody and my mom's actually coming down the hall to ask if I wanted lunch. I said, I told a lady who I was on the phone, I said, "Excuse me, that's my secretary. I got to take this." That was actually my mom asking for, to make me lunch. So, that was a funny story.

But yeah, I mean, I did everything and to now- it's kind of exciting now to look back. I mean, you hear about people working somewhere for 20 years or being somewhere for 19 years. I'm like, it just went so fast. As long as it's going well, it goes fast. But when you look back, there was a lot of trials and stressful times, but at the same time you look back, you're like, well, it all worked out. But obviously at the times of those trials you don't feel that way.

**TOM**

Yeah, well, it's such a good story Jay, because, you know, being in your, in your parents' house of 26, dialing for dollars, making things happen, your mom bringing your lunch, is really such an important part of understanding how this business operates. And to be in it 19 years later, you've had so much flywheel effect now. Undoubtedly, you've probably still got clients who you got early on that are still with you, I'm guessing.

**JAY**

Oh, sure.

**TOM**

Yeah. And that's the massive advantage I see in people who have done what you've done, just, it keeps flying and then it just grow, grow, grow, grow, grow. And it's incremental a lot, it's not big. But it really makes things happen.

So, besides ACT, or maybe you want to sort of move forward in the timeline, because that had obviously a big leverage effect in your business. Has there been other levers related to either what shred school did for you or other kinds of influence or whatever that really has driven the company forward?

**JAY**

Yeah. About 10 years ago I joined a business group called Vistage. And they're nationwide. And obviously you join other business owners and that was obviously- and I'm still doing Vistage. I've been there probably 11 years and to see other business owners and how they react to situations and issues and... you just learn a lot. There, when they have issues, you learn from their trials.

But what really took it to the next level was one of the members had a coach or a consultant. And we ended up hiring her and she's been with us now for six years. And it just really helped take myself and my team to the next level, understanding where we should be, what our thought process should be. If you really want to, you know, go to the next level, whether it's revenue growth or scalability or work on your culture, this person, our coach, she's has a lot of experience

was with Proctor and Gamble. So, she's seen the corporate structure. She's seen how to coach people. And so, we've really learned a lot from her. Not only does she coach me, but she coaches my managers too. So, if I'm mainly being difficult, she's able to coach them on how to handle Jay. So, all around has been... it's really helped us before as naive and as elementary as it might sound, I used to think meetings were just a waste of time that just to go through an agenda that we all know what's going on. But she got me into the flow of having managers meetings, which is obviously very, very basic. And before you know it, I was like, "Wow, what I think is elementary, my team members are getting so much out of this, not only exchanging that information, but just building those bonds and the culture between them."

So, that had to be, like I said, seven years ago, we've over doubled in size since that happened. So, I like to think a lot of that is because of her work and our partnership.

**TOM**

Yeah. And often in situations like that, you are still doing the work, but there's this perspective shift that begins to happen undoubtedly, like you just said, even related to meetings. Meetings change when somebody gives you the perspective to change them and help you to look differently at them.

So, how does she intersect with you as it relates to, say, your management team? Does she show up in meetings? How are you experiencing her, you know, her integration with you as a team? I mean, she's been at it for seven years, so you got deep roots with this person.

**JAY**

Sure, sure. Well, you know, at first it was, you know, she sat in a meeting to kind of, to watch and see the different personalities and my personality and how I dealt with things. And so, over the years she's learned my strengths, my so-called opportunities for growth or weaknesses. And, you know, we've all taken these personality assessments and one of the opportunities I have for growth is my emotional side. I'm a pretty emotional person when things happen. And one thing she's really helped me to get a lever on is the reaction of when something bad happens or...

You know, so yeah, at first, she'd sit in a meeting. But after that I would run the meetings and after that we had situations when we have our monthly get togethers or phone calls, you know? A lot just bouncing the ideas off her is also a huge thing because sometimes you're thinking, you know, am I even on the right track? Or plan out scenarios of like, "Hey, I had this employee issue. This is what I did. I think I handled it pretty well, but what else could I have done?"

**TOM**

Right, right, right. Yeah. It's that trusted voice that you have over a long period of time that allows you to have, you know, really honest conversations that you can't always have with your team.

**JAY**

Exactly.

## **TOM**

That's really cool. Where else do you feel like she's provided significant benefit to you? It sounds like, you know, you talked about your personal emotional reactivity or reaction. What, you know, from the business side of things versus just the purely personal, you know, professional side, what else has been some of the influence that you've seen and how has that affected the business as a whole?

## **JAY**

Yeah, I think, it'd probably have to be in the culture aspect. I came up with the idea I wanted to do focus groups. So, we started out with our drivers and we all know that we can talk to her blue in the face to our drivers and ask them to tell us what we're doing wrong or what can we do better? But 99% of them aren't going to open up to you. So, she actually would take them 2, 3, 4 at a time to lunch or dinner. Obviously, we had a set of questions and agenda of what we wanted to gather from them. And what is Crown doing right? What is Crown not doing so right? What should Crown continue to do? What should Crown change? And, it was eye opening. I mean, it was just, it was huge.

And I'll be the first one to admit when I've got all the feedback and she sat across the table from me, my face was red cause I was so angry at what I thought was frivolous silly things they wanted. But looking back at it, you know, it was the best thing I ever did. And we've continued to do that focus group idea with our sales team, with our front office... And I kind of see myself or our company doing it on a regular basis, maybe every other year or every two years, you pick a different department and do that focus group, because the personalities change, the people change. You know, the leaders I have now have all started with me from the ground up and they've grown with me. And so, that has been huge that they've grown with me, but at the same time, they probably, a lot of them didn't ever anticipate them running a department or being a manager or us getting as large as we are, you know, they started out as just typical admin people doing data entry. Now they're dealing with drivers and dealing with situations that they probably didn't think they were capable of doing.

And so, you know, now we're just now getting ready to probably hire outside of the company, just to bring some fresh ideas and different leadership styles to our group. But, yeah, that's, I mean, I think the culture and the focus groups and understanding, you know, obviously in this day and age everybody wants to make money and everybody wants to grow, but making it a small business atmosphere, so to speak, and where you remember birthday, you remember anniversaries, that all adds up. And if you do those things, I think, long term and consistently, if somebody's offered a bigger pay package, so to speak, they may not. They're probably not going to leave unless it's just that much higher.

## **TOM**

Right. Let me just back into that focus group concept a bit, because I think it's a really powerful example of what you're talking about here. If you had have personally done the focus groups, what would've been missed from her doing it?

**JAY**

First of all, I would not think of any half the questions that she would've asked or the way she asked them or went about asking them, first of all. I tend to be a very direct person. And so, that wouldn't have gone well. I think they obviously open up to her because I'm not there. We made it anonymous where, you know, I don't care who said it, we just want to know what the information is.

And so those two things are definitely the, the biggest two items that I can think of, but even just doing the focus groups that we give a damn, you know, that we actually care. And then on top of that to make it even better, to actually come back to those guys and say, "Listen, this is what you said. This is what we heard and this is what we can change. And this is what we can't change." And to me, I mean, there's not many people, I don't think companies these days... I mean, I know that the last two years for us have been crazy and we've lacked on those things of the culture and little things that add up because we've just been trying to keep the train on the tracks. But we're trying to get back to that level. But overall, you know, these big companies, they probably don't- they worry about the balance sheet more than they do their people. And I think that's a huge advantage for us is to really focus in on those people and those focus groups.

**TOM**

Yeah. So, let me come at it a different angle, because I think this is such an important process that you've engaged with this consultant. What have you learned about... You know, if somebody came to you and said, you know, "I want to hire somebody in my backyard or I want to hire somebody who does this, what should I be looking for? How should I be thinking about this? What have you learned from that perspective?" Because you've been with somebody a while now. But what are the lessons not so much in terms of what it's done for the company, but how you hired or how you have kept somebody that has that kind of capability?

**JAY**

As far as personally how I...?

**TOM**

Yeah, well it's yeah, because people often want a coach and I mean, you know, that's what I do too. But there's a fit sometimes that has to happen. There's got to be something that allows you to go, "This is somebody I'm willing to work with versus all of the available options out there." Because there's a lot of people pitching coaching. There's a lot of people who talk about it. The question is, you've worked with somebody for a long time. there's obviously reasons you chose this person and there was sort of criteria for you in some regard.

**JAY**

Yeah. I mean, first just obviously referrals. So, how you hear about somebody is huge. Who are these people that are referring to them? And the companies I knew were successful and had pretty great owners, sharp owners. And then after I met her, you know, it was, it wasn't some coach that was up in your face or pretended that she knew everything or had all the answers.

Typically, just like a good salesperson, you know, they listen and they really listen and they have experience and they've been where you've been before. And, you know, a lot of us taken this face to... and in my opinion, as you get larger and expand it's more or less emotional intelligence, you know, not letting your emotions dictate your decisions and staying in the center, so to speak.

And, you know, that's one thing she's helped all of us learn that, you know, maybe something bad happens doesn't mean you need to respond to it that day or even that week, you know? And that was huge for me. I've always been... one of our things around our company is a sense, have a sense of urgency, you know; take care of it, take care of the customer, if something's going on, take care of it, but that's not necessarily true when making decisions. And, I've learned that. I've learned that over the last, you know, six, seven years that there might be an employee that's given you some issues, and as long as it's not going to be a safety hazard or anything extreme, let it play out. Maybe have a little touchpoint with them. Have a small conversation, then come back to it. So, how to deal with situations and not having to have this, it may not be all a decision or a situation you handle in one day or one hour. It may be over time. And with that, taking the emotion out.

**TOM**

Yeah. That's good. So, if somebody comes to you and says, I want to do this, what advice would you give them? Like another shredding company came to you and said, I want to do something like this. What's the advice?

**JAY**

Yeah, you got to be coachable as far as you got to be open minded. You know, I think, there's a lot of feedback I got that I really didn't like, you know? And so, you have to be willing to be open to change and different ideas. I knew that, you know, being a 26-year-old, I didn't have a lot of experience in management obviously, or running a business. And even though I didn't meet her until probably 13, 14 years in my business, I didn't know what I didn't know. And so, you know, somebody with a lot of experience and has a proven track record, somebody who hasn't just been consulting their whole life, has a long record of success, whether that's with a company or their own business, who's kind of walked that line already.

**TOM**

Yeah. No, that's really good because I think what you said there, be coachable, and that sense of honesty about it's not all easy stuff. Like you've got to put yourself on the line before you bring somebody into your company in a more full way. You got to be open about the fact that you are often the biggest challenge in these businesses. So, those are difficult processes to work through. So yeah, that's really helpful. So, any final words on hiring coaches or advisors that you've learned over the years?

**JAY**

Just get lots of feedback, you know, ask about their current clientele. And I think maybe even more importantly, their past clients who may or may not be with them anymore. Maybe

somebody who's been there or worked with them five years ago. Not just the present ones. And I think that says a lot about who that person could be.

**TOM**

Yeah, that's really good. So, another kind of question from another angle as we come to the end of this conversation, this has been really helpful. Thank you for your perspective on things, Jay, but... there's a lot of people who know Florida, but there's a lot of people who don't and if somebody comes to Winter Haven and you are, as a born and raised, been there all your life, what's the non-negotiable thing to do (and wherever you think based on your perspective), what's the thing that non Floridians need to know about when they come to your area, whether that be Orlando, Winter Haven, that you have an inside track?

**JAY**

Yeah. As far as geography, the cool thing about my business is we're an hour from Orlando, an hour from Tampa.

**TOM**

Right.

**JAY**

So, it's almost like I couldn't have picked a better spot to start a business from a logistics and business wise. But as far as the culture and the areas, we actually had Florida's first theme park here, it was called Cypress Gardens.

**TOM**

Oh, yes!

**JAY**

And that was the first, Florida's first theme park. And at- before Disney. Disney was in, I think it was in the seventies. And that was in the fifties I think when Cypress Garden started. Back then Johnny Ca- or Johnny Carson, and all the big names would come down here to do shows and everything. And now it's, Legoland Florida, now. But we do have also known as the Chain of Lake City where we have 18 plus lakes all connected by canals. And it's pretty cool. I actually can take my boat if I wanted to from work to the office by canal. So, it's pretty neat.

**TOM**

And have you ever done that?

**JAY**

A couple times. Yeah, definitely.

**TOM**

Really? So, what's your boat?

**JAY**

I just have a pontoon boat. Now I've got a wife and three small children and, you know, having a lot of truck debt, as you know, you got to have a cheap, simple boat.

**TOM**

That's beautiful!

**JAY**

So, I got a pontoon boat and we put all around on there and there's restaurants and everything. You can stop by and eat. And so, if I have a good week, I'll take the pontoon boat in and, on the way home, stop by the bar and have a cold one.

**TOM**

That's beautiful. Jay, this has been really good. I feel like you've given us some insight into your thinking and what's been really beneficial to your business. And as someone who kind of lives on the other side of the conversation we've just had, it's been really helpful to hear how you've processed that with somebody else. And I hope for anyone in our industry who's listening, that there will be a lesson for them in terms of the importance of hiring outside help to advise and guide and coach them through it. So, thank you. Really appreciate you sharing this today.

**JAY**

Thanks, Tom. Appreciate your time.