

||||||| TALKING BUSINESS |||||

# ACCIDENTAL ENTREPRENEUR

*After 2nd layoff, Kurt Moon launches STR Resource & Associates to provide short-term skills to businesses*

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Kurt Moon knows what it's like to be let go from a good job.

After what he describes as a wonderful 24-year career with Armstrong World Industries in various operations, project management and engineering roles, Moon was shown the door in 2011 during some corporate reshuffling.

Spurred by what he describes as "absolute fear," he called on his network of contacts to help him cobble together work as an independent contractor.

Moon admits he wasn't very good at being on his own back then, and luckily he got a new corporate gig in 2012 with James Hardie Building Products.

But just over two years later, another corporate shakeup left him once again on the outside looking in.

After that second layoff, Moon reached out to SCORE Lancaster-Lebanon in an effort to make his second solo experience better than his first.

"I just said, 'I'm back on my own, I want to be a healthy independent. I have a variety of skills and I need some help figuring out how to do it successfully,'" he recalls.

Moon soon was connected with Hugh MacMaster, a SCORE volunteer and former Case New Holland engineer, who encouraged him by saying that he had real skills that would be valuable to a variety of businesses.

Spurred on by that positive assessment, Moon once again tapped into his business network, this time organizing retired colleagues, fellow corporate castoffs and under-employed experts in a team that eventually would provide valuable, short-term skills and expertise to a wide range of clients.

For his success, Moon and his STR Resource & Associates recently were honored with a 2019 SCORE Lancaster-Lebanon Small Business Award.

Today, his company is on the brink of passing \$1 million in annual revenue. The 54-year-old Moon finally considers his entrepreneurship as more than a stop-gap measure until the next corporate gig comes along.

"Now, in the last several months this business has stabilized enough



BLAINE SHAHAN | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Kurt Moon discusses his work with STR Resource & Associates.

to the point where I know it's going to be successful," he says "I'm sticking with this."

## Accidental entrepreneur

Moon said he never really meant to start a company.

"It has been reactionary," he says "I don't want to say dumb reactionary, but it has been a reaction to opportunities that presented themselves, then smartly putting energy into ones that might work, and not putting energy

into other things that didn't work."

Moon recalls that he moved beyond being just a one-person operation after a client suggested that he needed another person like him, a "mini Kurt."

That prompted him to call on the other people he knew who — like himself — had high-level experience with operations or special projects.

One person led to another and now he has 22 people in the fold, including four full-time employees with benefits. Many of the rest are former execu-

tives, plant managers and engineers who are available for short-term work.

And much of the work comes from a familiar company.

"Armstrong is now my second biggest client. Everything is amiable given the space of a little time," says Moon, who still hangs a framed photo of Armstrong's "Operating Principles" in the small office he rents at Warehouse 210, a co-working space on West Grant Street in Lancaster city.

"Armstrong just gave me a fantastic opportunity to see the world, learn new skills, at a variety of levels in a variety of functions," he says.

## 'Vibrant retirees'

As he began to connect former colleagues and business contacts with short-term gigs, Moon said he began getting more referrals.

"So far, sales is done by answering the phone," he says. "And so far, associate development is done by answering the phone."

While Moon emphasizes that he promises nothing to his associates, he often is able to get them work with clients who need such help as filling a temporary plant manager vacancy or getting engineering expertise on a specific problem.

"Companies tend to fill people up with the day job. When something big comes along, it's not that they don't know how to do it. There's just no one to hand off other parts of their day job to," he says.

To fill those special roles, Moon said he's tapped into "vibrant retirees" whose idea of retirement includes some occasional work assignments.

"In my lifetime, the vision of retirement has completely changed," he says. "I am actually a facilitator for people doing a different kind of retirement."

In many ways, STR Resource & Associates operates like a high-level temp agency, although Moon says he prefers to call it "operations resourcing."

After his in-and-out experience with corporate life, Moon says he is now comfortable with hitching his future to STR Resource & Associates.

Yet Moon is not so sure his own path is one he'd advise anyone else to follow.

"If anybody would ask me I would say, 'Do not give up your corporate job,'" he says.