

**The Life & Times of John M. Downey IV: Trailblazer, Troublemaker & Buckeye!
A Century + 20 Years in Carpet Cleaning — a Family Odyssey Spanning 5 Generations...**

Thank you, Vince. Thank you DuraClean associates, franchisees and business owners. It is a pleasure to be with you today in the Big Apple.

When Vince Caffarello asked me if I would speak at this convention — by the way, this was *after* we had exhausted all the other options — initially it was to be for two hours about myself, my first thought was “*Are you kidding me?*” Who would want to hear me talk about me for two hours? I mean even our current and immediate past presidents— our “Narcissists in Chief”— could not get away with two nonstop hours about themselves!

Before I had a chance to say no, Vince explained to me that what you all wanted was to hear the story of someone generally considered successful, about the journey. And as I thought about it ... I WAS STILL PETRIFIED! But I have too much respect for Vince Caffarello to say no, so here I stand. Fortunately, he did agree to shorten my time to an hour.

I thought about it more. I realized that my story, while unique in some details, is also very common in the cleaning and restoration industry. I’ve been involved in family businesses for nearly 45 years and have the emotional scars to prove it. I’ve been the son of the boss as well as the boss of sons and daughters. I know what it is to “grow” a business and I know what it is to be a mom and pop. More importantly, I’ve known success and failure. And I’ve lived to tell the tale. This morning I will talk about both. Perhaps more important, and certainly more interesting, I’m going to expand the scope and talk about my family’s journey of some 120 years.

As we go, feel free to interject or ask questions. If this talk is a lecture, I’m afraid it will be a dreadfully boring one; if a discussion, it will be much more valuable for all of us.

Before I begin, a little background: I am a son of a ... son of a son of a carpet cleaner. In case you weren’t counting, that’s fourth generation. I am the third of eight children and the oldest son. My father was a great innovator and a successful businessman; he was also an alcoholic who could have been much more successful if not for his demons and addiction. I have four sisters and three brothers.

This Document has been modified from a speech given by John Downey on July 14th 2017 at the annual convention of DuraClean, International, serving as background for an IAQradio interview on May 3rd 2019

One of my sisters chose to be involved in the cleaning industry. She owned a carpet cleaning and maid service business in Toledo for more than 20 years. All three of my brothers have been involved in the industry. One invented a new type of hot water extraction machine, a *high-flow* extractor. It's called the Steamin Demon. Another developed a company that handles overflow calls for small service businesses, now called Perceptionist. The third is a musician and free spirit. He worked as a carpet cleaner in the family business when he needed money, but was mostly content with that.

I was born in 1957 and grew up in Columbus, Ohio. I married my high school sweetheart, Cecilia. We will celebrate our 40th wedding anniversary next month. We have nine children. The oldest will be 40 in January; the youngest turned 22 in March. My clan consists of seven boys and two girls. We are expecting our tenth grandchild around Christmas.

I am not an alcoholic like my father, but I am a *workaholic*. Some of you may see in this a boast — it is not. Being a workaholic is not a badge of honor. It's an addiction. It robs people like me of our ability to relax and enjoy life. It is something I am not proud of, and struggle daily to control.

I am a cradle Catholic, as is my wife. Our faith is rather orthodox in character and is very important to us. We try — sometimes more successfully than others — to keep God at the center of our lives.

Currently, two of my sons work in my carpet cleaning business, and a third owns a carpet cleaning business in Bozeman, Montana. At one time or another, all nine of our kids have worked in the business.

My family's journey in carpet cleaning dates to 1897, when my great grandfather, the first John M. Downey, joined his brother-in-law in a company that is known today as Martin Carpet Cleaning. A few years later, for reasons lost to time, my great grandfather struck out on his own. Interestingly, both companies continue to this day in Central Ohio. Both run by fourth-generation descendants of the founders.

There is much to love — and not — about family businesses. There are many upsides, but there are also many downsides. As you will see, through the generations my family has experienced both — ABUNDANTLY!

Apparently, my great grandfather was quite the entrepreneur. He ran three businesses out of a storefront on the west side of Columbus. In the front was a bakery. Not much is known about the bakery business, other than it did not survive to the next generation. In the back were two businesses. One was a rug cleaning business called Downey's Columbus Rug Cleaners.

The other business consisted of a boxing ring. Like my father, my great grandfather had eight kids, four boys and four girls. His sons — like many of the shanty Irish of that time — were boxers. My grandfather was the oldest and apparently the toughest, but along the way he injured his leg and never boxed professionally. Two of his brothers did, however. Joe was a heavyweight. His biggest bout was with an Argentinian, Firpo the Bull. Firpo fought Jack Dempsey in 1923 in what was then called “The fight of the century.” It was Joe's chance to break through. Unfortunately, when fight day came Joe was sick with a 103° fever. In those days you didn't cancel a bout, you fought on. Joe did and got the snot kicked out of him. I met Joe once; of the Firpo fight he said “I was lucky he didn't kill me.” He meant it, literally.

The other boxing Downey was Bryan. Bryan fought and sort of won the middleweight title. I won't get into the details other than to say it was a contested decision. Ultimately it was declared a non-decision and a rematch was ordered. In the rematch they fought to a draw. As reigning champion, the other boxer retained the belt.

Anyway, back to the carpet cleaning business. I don't know when, but at some point my great grandfather's first wife, the mother of the eight children, died. He remarried a woman named Mary. When he died, in his will he left the rug cleaning business to my grandfather, but Mary contested the will. The resulting decision split the family business and the family as well. My grandfather was given the business phone number, Mary was given the name.

Now, where once there was one, now there were two: Downey's Columbus Rug Cleaners, which later became Downey and Kerin's when Mary remarried, and John M. Downey Rug Cleaners. Later a third Downey business would emerge, started by my dad's cousin, Ray. Ray named his business The Original Downey's Carpet Cleaning. He made a good living capitalizing on customer confusion about which business was which. My dad did a lot of advertising. Dad's advertising made the phone ring — both for dad and his cousin.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. I never knew my grandfather; he died before I was born. But from my dad, and my grandfather's siblings, I learned he was quite a promoter in his day.

It may seem counter-intuitive, but the heyday of his business was during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Dad told the story of how grandpa would drive a flatbed truck down the streets of the wealthy areas of Columbus, with workers sitting on the bed. Mounted on the truck was a loudspeaker. Driving slowly down the street, Grandpa would broadcast to the neighborhood, "It's Downey's, the rug cleaners! Bring out your rugs!" Housewives would appear at their doorways and signal they had rugs to be cleaned. The workers would scurry over to the house, get the rugs, load them on the flatbed, and off they'd go to the next house.

I share this story not only because of the unique door-to-door selling process, but also to make the point that in the cleaning business, economic conditions do not determine our fate. Like my grandfather, I have found there is at least as much opportunity in bad economic times as there is in good economic times. In our business especially, FDR's famous words apply, "All we have to fear is fear itself."

Like my father, my grandfather was an alcoholic. Perhaps you've heard it asked, "Why did God invent alcohol?" The answer, "To keep the Irish from taking over the world." There's a little truth in that saying. Dad left to do his duty in World War II and by the time he returned the business was all but defunct. Dad opted not to join the family business, instead pursuing a sales career. After World War II it was good to be in sales, and Dad had a knack for finding hot, emerging markets. First, he sold cars and later televisions — the PCs of the time. It was while selling TVs that he met my mom. They were married in 1953.

By the time of my grandfather's death, in 1955, his carpet cleaning business was fully defunct. Frankly, I don't know what prompted my dad to resurrect it. Maybe it was family loyalty, or maybe he saw an opportunity — because by the mid-1950s millions of new homes were being built and their floors covered with a trendy new floor covering: tufted nylon wall-to-wall carpet. I suspect it was a little of both, plus the desire to be his own boss.

Dad started out like most of us do, part-time. It was a side job to generate some additional income. Dad wasn't lazy, but neither was he particularly fond of physical labor. Besides, his strength was sales. Soon he hired his cousin's husband, a fireman, to do most of the cleaning while he focused on getting the work. Similar to his dad, he would go door-to-door in the affluent neighborhoods offering free estimates. Dad was a good salesman, and charismatic, within a couple years he had enough business to quit his sales job and devote himself full-time to building his company.

I mentioned that my dad's strength was sales, and that's what he focused on. Let's take a minute to talk about that. Dad did a really smart thing focusing on his strength. It was probably the most important factor in his business success, and it is important that we do likewise.

Several years ago, I took an entrepreneurial training course called Strategic Coach, by a guy name Dam Sullivan. At the core of the course was a concept called "Unique Ability."

We all have a unique ability or a set of unique abilities. What is important for business success is to identify our unique ability and develop strategies to spend as much time as possible in unique-ability activities, delegating to others, as much as possible, those things that fall outside our unique ability. Then, to take it a step further, we hire people whose unique ability fits their job. I doubt that Dad consciously set about doing that, but intuitively he did.

By the early 1960s Dad had a reasonably successful carpet cleaning business. It was similar to many carpet cleaning businesses both then and now. Mom answered the phone and did the bookkeeping (by then with four kids in tow). Dad sold the jobs and helped out with cleaning when the demand required it. But Dad was not content; his ambition was for bigger things.

In the early 1960s, Dad came up with a set of ideas that would revolutionize the industry for better *and* worse. The first idea was what Dad called “flat-rate” pricing and is now called *room pricing*. Dad believed that the mystery of price was an obstacle to growing the market for professional carpet cleaning. A great many people — especially the non-wealthy — would not call because they feared that a salesman would come into their home and sell them something they couldn’t afford.

Dad reasoned that the room size of any given job was not that important; that as a business it would even out over time. He came up with a plan to pitch a flat rate to clean the most commonly cleaned areas: He would clean any living room and hall for \$19.95 or any living room, dining room and hall for \$29.95, regardless of size. Other rooms would be priced by the square foot.

Dad set up a test. He ran an ad in the *Columbus Dispatch*. He determined that if he booked five jobs from the ad it would be a success, anything less and he would shelve the idea. By noon the first day he had booked 10 jobs. Room pricing was born.

A side note: At the time, there was a local carpet cleaner’s association called the Columbus Carpet Cleaners. Dad was the vice president. The day after the ad ran a special meeting was called. Dad described it as an inquisition. He was seated by himself, facing a semi-circle of the other members. They peppered him with questions about why he would do such a thing. Dad never said much about what he said; he probably just explained his reasoning. One inquisitor in particular got his attention, Denny Dicke, the president. He was furious, red faced, foaming at the mouth, unable to control his emotions he blurted out, “Downey, what you have done will be the ruination of this industry! Mark my words!”

That was the last meeting of the Columbus Carpet Cleaners Association.

Dad always said that to some extent Dicke was right. Certainly it changed the industry.

Ultimately it opened the door for the bait-and-switchers. On the other hand, in large part due to Dad’s insight, the industry grew exponentially over the subsequent years.

Up to that time, professional carpet cleaning was for the wealthy. Room pricing opened the door to the huge middle-class consumer market, who now realized they could afford professional carpet cleaning.

Dad's second insight was equally controversial, maybe more so. Once it was clear that flat-rate pricing meant a much larger business, Dad would need men to do the work. Dad was a great salesman but he wasn't a great manager. He came up with a concept that he hoped would result in higher-caliber, self-managed workers: they would be his partners. He would be responsible for getting the work and managing the business, they would be responsible for doing the work. Together they would ensure customer satisfaction. To accomplish this, he "hired" them as subcontractors and split the revenue 50-50.

As with flat-rate pricing, it worked like a charm, especially at first. He brought in young, ambitious blue-collar guys and sold them on being partners and business owners together. The cleaners made much more money than they had at their prior hourly jobs. And they had the pride of ownership.

Of course, there was a downside too, and over time it became apparent. Hiring mistakes brought in guys with a lax work ethic. Although there was a process to deal with substandard quality, you couldn't implement much of a proactive training and quality control process with subs. Mostly it was after the fact, through customer follow-ups and recleans, but by then the damage had already been done. Dad also hired and trained a lot of men to become his competitors.

The practice of using subcontractors became common among bait-and-switch companies. It was a way to reduce training and overhead costs. Rather than hiring and training cleaning technicians, they hired high-pressure salesmen. The jobs they were given — for example, five rooms for \$29.95 — were so underpriced that unless they tripled or quadrupled the ticket, they'd actually lose money doing the work. Ethical subs quickly got out while con-men prospered. Meanwhile, the industry took a hit because of the bad publicity the bait and switchers brought. In time, it also brought an IRS crackdown on the use of subcontractors.

One more thing before we move on. There's another little company based out of Central Ohio you all might have heard of. They drive around in yellow window vans...

Who can tell me their name? Yes, Stanley Steemer.

The founder of Stanley Steemer was Jack Bates. My dad and Jack Bates were friends, drinking buddies, actually.

In the late '60s, Dad was asked to do an estimate at a bar and concert hall close to the Ohio State campus. Dad had recently purchased a new type of carpet cleaning machine: a steam cleaner. Dad was an early adopter. He liked to be the first with something new. He decided to also do a demonstration when he did the estimate. It just so happened that while they were doing the demo, Jack Bates, who had also been called for an estimate, showed up. As they were finishing the demo, Dad walked over to Bates and said, "Well Jack, what you think?" Bates looked at him with a scowl and said "That piece of shit will never clean anything!"

Within six months Bates had his own piece-of-shit steam machine. Within a year, he was building them. Within two years he had renamed his company Stanley Steemer and launched a franchise.

Once Stanley Steemer's success had been secured, when he was in town Bates would drive his Rolls Royce over to our offices to see Dad. He had this HUGE Stanley Steemer diamond ring. He'd flash it at Dad and then he'd say, "John M., all this is because of you!" They'd laugh; both knew it was true.

Bates was not a great innovator himself, but he knew a good idea when he saw one.

It wasn't just steam cleaning either; the concept of flat-rate pricing leant itself to mass-media advertising, and Bates used it to build Stanley Steemer's brand.

But Bates did one thing different than Dad, and it was key: Instead of partnering with subcontractors, he partnered with franchisees.

He built a franchise network. That made all the difference.

It's why — with apologies to Vince — Stanley Steemer is the most recognized name in professional carpet cleaning.

I made my industry debut in the summer of 1971, lugging five-gallon buckets of water to and from a SteamWay portable. Also during my high-school years, I worked for a company Dad bought called SteamVac. SteamVac made a direct hookup steam machine called Steri-Steam.

I graduated high school in 1975 and went to work at a branch office Dad had opened in Cleveland. I worked under Bill Shisler. Bill was the longest-tenured subcontractor in the company. Other than Bill Casey, the fireman, Bill was the first man Dad hired. He was old and crotchety, but very good at what he did. He trained me well.

I just mentioned that as I went directly from high school into the family business. Other than some business and journalism classes several years later, I did not attend college. At the time it seemed clear that my career would be in the family business and all the education I needed could be found there. Things don't always work out the way you expect. Looking back, I regret that I did not attend college; although, truth be known, I hated school!

I was in Cleveland four months. My high school sweetheart and future bride was back in Columbus and I missed her. When I returned, I worked as a subcontractor in the Columbus office for about three years. Cecilia and I were married and had our first child, John Mathew Downey V. It was the late 1970s. The prior decade had seen the rise of bright, loud carpet colors: gold and avocado green were everywhere, especially in apartments. When styles changed and earth tones became popular, an opportunity arose for carpet dyeing.

Dad seized the opportunity. He convinced me to take Cecilia and our months-old son to Miami and start a carpet dyeing business with him.

What can I say about that experience? Well, it was educational.... It was challenging — did I mention I am color blind? Most of all, it was a nightmare for Cecilia, who at 21, with a six-month-old child, moved 1,000 miles away from her family — an extremely close family — to live with her father-in-law in a cramped apartment a block from Miami Beach.

Dad and Cecilia went together like oil and water. Dad, a party animal and night owl, was most at home in a bar. And he wanted my company as we plotted the rise of the Downey Dyeing Dynasty. Cecilia, alone in a strange city and with an infant child, wanted me home after work. I wanted to please my Dad and my wife and made neither of them happy.

The arrangement lasted seven months before we threw in the towel and headed back to Ohio.

The relationship between Cecilia and Dad never fully healed.

Now is as good a time as any to talk more about family businesses. Only in family businesses do such things happen; and it is why, although I am fourth generation and my children fifth generation in a family business, I have mixed feelings. Don't get me wrong, family businesses can bear good fruit. They provide unique opportunities for inter-generational learning and connection. They can be a very good thing.

The key is to keep the family and the business separate. Even with the best intentions, this is very difficult. Most often, the business bleeds into family relationships and family relationships bleed into the business. Sibling rivalries are more difficult and manifest in different ways when the relationships spread from the realm of the family to the realm of the business. The biggest challenge — other than the thorny issue of succession in a multi-generational business — is that the business becomes a member of the family, present all the time.

It is hugely important, both for the family and the business, that work and personal lives each have their own space, apart from the other. For those families able to accomplish this, the family business is a blessing. But it's not easy. Family dysfunction — which is inevitable in even the best families — is made noticeably worse when the dividing line between work and family is lost.

When I returned to Columbus, two months shy of 22 years, Dad made me manager of the Columbus office, while he stayed in Florida. Thus I became the boss of men who had been working there since I was a child. Looking back, I think, “Wow — that was crazy!” But at the time I thought I had all the seasoning required. I was ready. I was ambitious. This was what I was born to do!

On a basic level the job was comprised of routing the jobs each day for the subcontractors, running estimates for commercial work, and handling the more serious customer complaints. In addition, I set up a carpet dyeing division in Columbus and I took over — and greatly expanded — our advertising.

I wanted to grow the business, and I did. We went from eight crews when I arrived to 15 when I left five years later. Growth is exciting, but it's also turbulent. For me, that wasn't a bad thing; I'm a workaholic! That meant more opportunities and challenges. Just work harder and longer.

I didn't spend my nights getting snickered in bars. No, not me! I was home with my wife and ever-growing family. But while I was home, my mind was still on the business. Obsessively.

After a few years Dad made me president, responsible for all operations. He announced he was going to kinda-sorta retire to Florida. By then the dyeing business was more a hobby than a company, but it kept him occupied. He had a boat and each day featured, as he liked to say, "That same old boring sunshine."

My future was set ... until it wasn't.

After a few years of retirement, Dad grew bored. He started splitting his time between Columbus and Miami. He kinda-sorta unretired, but left me in charge of the business while he looked for something new and cutting edge.

This was the mid-80s, and he found it with a maid service, a business, he reasoned, that was set to grow exponentially, as millions of women transitioned from being stay-at-home moms to working women.

Meanwhile, I had a vision of my own: I saw what I thought was a better opportunity: expand into the emerging disaster restoration business. We clashed over which to pursue. He owned the company, so maid service it was. We put disaster restoration on the back burner.

I can't say that I saw the handwriting on the wall. But I knew I wasn't happy, and I knew that a business can't have two leaders with two different styles and visions.

It came to a head in a meeting with the contractors. I don't remember what the issue was, but one of the men spoke out of turn. His insult was directed at me, but Dad took offense and blew up. The meeting became adversarial and was adjourned.

Did I mention alcohol was involved? Remember, they were subcontractors and we could not require them to attend meetings — so we bribed them with pizza and beer!

After the meeting, Dad called me into his office and told me to get rid of the contractor as well as the manager I had hired. It was clear to him that I had lost control of the company. I refused and left. The next day we met again. He was adamant that both must go. I told him it was his company and he had the final say, but if they were to go, so would I. He said, "That's your decision."

It was March 1984. I was 27 years old, expecting our fifth child any day, and I was on my own.

Fortunately, Dad was not vindictive. Recently, I had landed the contract to be Lazarus Carpet Cleaning, a department store in Columbus. Dad offered and I took the contract.

I rented out a small office space in a Columbus suburb. My first day in business, flowers arrived. With them, a note. "We believe in you," it said. "Love Cecilia". I have never, before or since, appreciated anything as much as I did that simple message. I was so grateful she believed in me, because I was filled with doubt.

Now as fate would have it, the previous year, DuPont introduced Stainmaster carpet, the first "stain-proof" carpet. At the same time, they did something that sent shockwaves through the professional carpet cleaning industry: They named Stanley Steemer the official carpet cleaner of Stainmaster. This set off a series of events that had profound and lasting effects in the industry.

I became involved with other cleaning companies as a member of an association. In fact, many cleaners became involved in industry associations in a spontaneous act of perceived self-preservation. I was one of the founders of an association that started in Ohio: The United Carpet Cleaners Institute, or UCCI. I was elected the UCCI's inaugural vice president. (You may recall that Dad was the Columbus Carpet Cleaners Association's vice president when it disbanded. So I kind of started where Dad left off.) The UCCI borrowed a California association's bylaws to create its own. Under the bylaws, it just so happened that the responsibility of the vice president was to publish the association newsletter. So that was my job and the germination of what would become Cleanfax.

Much to my surprise, I found that I enjoyed writing, editing and publishing. Prior to that time, I had no idea that I had a gift for written communication. In fact, I was at best a "C" student in English throughout my school years. I struggled with all those stupid rules about prepositions and comma use and past versus past perfect. And I *hated* to diagram sentences. Heck, even today I would probably get a C!

More surprising, the board of directors liked what I did too, and they kept allocating more money to expand the distribution and content. Within a couple years it had grown from a newsletter into a magazine. Published quarterly, it was distributed in Ohio and surrounding states.

Initially it was called *The UCCI Cleaning Scene*. After the first issue was published, I received a call from Doyle Bloss with Steamway International. Steamway published a newsletter called *Clean Scene* and Doyle was concerned about marketplace confusion, so he asked me to change the name.

I've often been asked about the name. Don Douglas, the inaugural president of UCCI, helped out with the publication sometimes. In a meeting at Don's house, we brainstormed new names for the magazine. Don's wife, Sue, was there. It was Sue who came up with Clean Facts, two words, C-L-E-A-N F-A-C-T-S. At the time, fax machines were a new, cutting-edge technology. I wanted the name to be kind of edgy, so I suggested replacing F-A-C-T-S with F-A-X, and making it one word. That's what we went with. *Cleanfax* was officially born.

For the next two years I published *Cleanfax* for the UCCI. We added advertising to offset the cost, but for a limited-circulation magazine, you couldn't charge enough in advertising to cover the printing and distribution cost. It was costing the association more *money* than it could afford and me more *time* than I could afford.

In the first half of 1988 I took an idea to the board. I proposed to expand distribution throughout the United States. In Ohio and surrounding states, UCCI would be the sponsoring association. In addition to the national content, in the center of the magazine would be a special regional section that would contain informational and promotional content provided by the UCCI, as well as regional ads. There would be no cost to the UCCI. In other parts of the country, other regional associations were offered the same deal: *Cleanfax* could be their official association magazine and it would cost them nothing. The UCCI board of directors accepted my offer, and soon thereafter the company that published *Cleanfax*, was born.

Cleanfax became my primary business late in 1988. The first nationally distributed issue was March/April 1989. It was also very nearly the last.

I had a little money saved and a modest line of credit, but it was crucial that the magazine be printed and mailed on time so I could invoice and collect the advertising revenue — initially *Cleanfax*'s only revenue source. The first issue was produced using then standard printing methods.

Type and layouts were set manually, galley proofs were reviewed and modified and printing plates were created and used. Based on experience, I expected this process to take not more than 40 days. It took more than 60. By the time the March/April issue was mailed, it was nearly May.

I was broke, stealing from piggy banks for milk money, but somehow we scraped through until the advertising revenue started coming in. I was broke in part because while I was waiting for that first issue to be distributed, I made the decision to transition to desktop publishing and invested \$5,000 in a state-of-the-art Mac desktop publishing system.

The investment paid off. The time it took for printing and distribution, went from more than 60 days to less than 30 days, and the printing cost went down by about 20 percent. Cleanfax was on its way to success.

Cleanfax was popular with cleaners from the start because the articles connected with them, and it connected with them because the editor — me — was a carpet cleaner. I published the kind of magazine that I — as a carpet cleaner — wanted to read. It was heavy on useful content, with not more than 40 percent advertising, and no advertorials. Advertorials, if you're not familiar, are articles written by advertisers about the things they sell.

As the old timers among us will recall, the standard at the time was *Installation Specialist* magazine, which later became *Installation & Cleaning Specialist* and then *ICS Cleaning Specialist*, until its demise about three years ago. ICS was pretty much all ads and advertorials, with ads making up as much as 70 percent of the content. The ads were eye candy, new truck mounts and gadgets. Most of the articles were written by advertisers about the eye candy.

That concept served a purpose, but it got old. I'd scan through ICS in a minute or two and discard it. What cleaners wanted was “meat.” I wanted to read — and so I published — technical and marketing and management articles. I wanted to know what was really going on in the industry. I wanted to read and understand about controversial topics.

Cleanfax was an entirely different kind of magazine. It featured news and opinion as well as meaty articles. The most popular feature was called “The Great Debate”. Cleaners loved it, waited for it to arrive every other month. About a week before the mail date we'd start getting calls from cleaners who wanted to make sure they hadn't missed their Cleanfax.

Most advertisers did not like it so much at first. For one thing, ads in this newbie cost 20 percent more than in ICS. For another, the publisher didn't cater to them. He insisted that there would be no advertorials. Advertisers and other suppliers to the industry could write for Cleanfax, but they couldn't write about the products they sold.

A handful of supply companies “got” the vision and strongly supported Cleanfax from the beginning. As for the rest, *cleaners* brought them to Cleanfax! When push comes to shove, vendors want to advertise where the readership is. The more cleaners talked about *Cleanfax*, the more advertisers got on board.

I was also fortunate in my competition. When *Cleanfax* started, ICS was fat and happy. For a couple years they looked at *Cleanfax* with disdain. Meanwhile, I was eating their lunch. By the time they realized it, I already had the momentum. Gradually they changed, adding solid editorial content and eliminating most of the advertorials. But they were following *Cleanfax* now, and never recovered the top position.

Early in my publishing career I read an article about magazines that never left me. The author wrote that a good magazine is a unique entity with a life of its own. Periodically it needs new blood, a new vision, or it becomes stale and declines.

He said about every seven years a magazine should be re-envisioned and new leadership brought in to execute the new vision. So pretty much from the outset, I planned to build and sell *Cleanfax* in seven years.

It was nine. I sold Cleanfax to National Trade Publications in 1997, nine years after it became my business and 14 years after I started writing that newsletter for the UCCI. I agreed to stay as editor on a part-time basis until the dawn of the new millennium. In January 2000, my Cleanfax years had officially drawn to a close.

I’ve been asked many times if I regret selling Cleanfax. Honestly, no, I have no regrets. They offered me a lot of money — well, in truth I demanded a lot of money and they grudgingly gave it to me. Humphrey Tyler, owner of National Trade, later told me later that he paid more for Cleanfax than any publication he had ever bought. It was gratifying that he added that it was also the best investment he ever made.

More importantly, by the time I sold Cleanfax I was burnt out. You see, I was an activist editor. I came from the industry and I cared deeply about it.

As editor, I would both cover and comment on controversial issues. When you do that you make enemies, and I made my share. I always said that if I was doing my job right, at one time or another everyone in the industry would be unhappy with something I wrote. I just hoped they wouldn't all be unhappy at the same time.

The tipping point for me was the IICRC. From the very beginning of Cleanfax, I extensively covered and promoted the IICRC as a uniquely valuable organization in the industry. Cleanfax was a highly visible platform, and our coverage did much to build recognition of the IICRC. But like any organization comprised of people, manipulation and corruption can creep in. When I saw it happening, I wrote an editorial warning about corrupt practices.

To that point, many of the people active in the IICRC were among my closest colleagues in the industry. My editorial touched a nerve. They turned on me with a ferociousness that I didn't expect. Their reactions confirmed my fears about what was going on, but also left me with an awful taste in my mouth. I was done. Time to turn my attention to other things.

I did that — poorly. The seven years from 1997-2004, you could call my “Oh my God, what was I thinking!” years. I purchased or invested in not one, not two, but three Downey family businesses. And to top it off, I bought a failing competitor's business whose culture was completely incompatible with our own.

So many poor decisions, so little time. I stated before that I was ready to sell Cleanfax, and to this day I have no regrets. But at age 40, with a pocket-full of cash, I wasn't ready for what came next.

It started with the family business. My dad developed Alzheimer's in his early 70s and as a result, during the last five years of his life, the family business more-or-less ran itself. With a competent but uninspired manager running things, it didn't grow but it didn't decline; a feat, I'm told, is very unusual in business.

Dad passed about the time of the Cleanfax sale. Out of a sense of responsibility, I took over leadership of the business, and later I purchased it. In and of itself, that wasn't a bad thing. I had attended Jon-Don's Strategies for Success school, Steve Toburen's brainchild. Strategies teach a quality-and-ethics-based business model. It fit my vision of Downey's like a glove. The company manager and secretary attended Strategies. They bought in, and together we began to implement the Strategies program.

But I couldn't leave well enough alone. A couple months later my youngest brother, Tiger, earned his MBA. He had a vision for a company that would offer a high-tech alternative to the traditional answering service. Virtual Office Center, or VOC, would offer a full suite of back-end services, the key one being not just *answering* the phone but *scheduling* jobs. I was the initial investor. Soon that pocketful of cash started to disappear into that black hole of startup financing.

But that wasn't enough either. Soon a competitor came knocking on our door with a too-good-to-be-true offer: He'd sell me his business, Carpet Color Systems, or CCS, which in its heyday did nearly a million dollars a year in sales, for \$50K. His health wasn't good and he wanted to retire. All he wanted, other than the 50K, was for us to cover he and his wife's health insurance until they died.

CCS had been a high-volume operation because it spent a ton of money on advertising. It wasn't quite bait-and-switch, but it certainly wasn't quality oriented, and over the years its customer-service deficiencies had rendered its big-budget advertising less-and-less effective at delivering jobs.

But prideful me figured we could transition it to a quality-oriented business. Heck, the mailing list alone was worth the price! Plus, we would use VOC for scheduling and administration for both Downey's and CCS, thus generating cash-flow for the startup. Brilliant! Well, not so much. The next three years were a nightmare. We tried to run two completely incompatible carpet cleaning companies through a startup technology company whose technology was not up to the challenge. I burned through the money from the sale of Cleanfax, and then some.

By the end of 1999, Tiger had new investors and a new name, Perceptionist. CCS was dead — for all intents and purposes, it was dead when we bought it. A pig in a poke. We separated Perceptionist from Downey, moving Downey to a new location. The new millennium opened with my arrogant belief in my entrepreneurial omnipotence appropriately shattered!

But I wasn't quite finished involving myself in Downey family businesses. My brother Mike had been talking to me about working with him in his Steamin Demon business since before I sold Cleanfax. I decided to give it a try.

Mike has a brilliant mind for engineering. And high-flow extraction is a monument to creative thinking coupled with applied science. But he is clueless about marketing and sales. We set up parallel companies. Mike's company, Steamin Demon, would build the machines and sell them to mine at a low markup. My company would sell them into the industry.

Early on I determined two things: 1) The best market for high-flow extraction was the commercial market, facilities cleaning; and 2) in order to penetrate that market, we had to work through a network of Jan-San distributors. The challenge was to get distributors interested in working with a single-product manufacturer. I won't go into detail about why it was so difficult, that could be a talk of its own. Suffice to say that it was hard, very hard. Every day felt like pushing a boulder up a mountain.

Progress was slow and difficult, but steady. Over the course of two-plus years, with the help of Hank Unck and several manufacturers' reps, we built a network of approximately 60 distributors.

Then Murphy's Law came into play: Mike had a serious heart attack. I found myself responsible for running Mike's business as well as my own. And in the case of Mike's business, while I was responsible for it, I didn't really control it.

Of course, I'm a workaholic; so I can do that! And I did. Of course, doing it meant being on the road nearly every week. When I wasn't doing facilities' carpet care classes for distributors, I was at the manufacturing facility, in the Louisville area, 200 miles away.

Mike had a ... *eclectic* manufacturing process. Coordination was critical. Some of the parts traveled to as many as four vendors in the process of becoming assemblies. Final assembly was done by Amish, and then transported to Steamin Demon's facility for final testing and shipment. The process worked for Mike — of course, he had a heart attack — for me it was a nightmare. Still, I persevered — until the fall of 2004.

One of the characteristics of workaholics is a sort of addiction to stress. Stress for me produces adrenaline, which gives me energy, which makes me feel alive. But I didn't marry a workaholic, and for Cecilia stress is not a good thing. When I was on the road, she did double duty: mom *and* dad, because dad wasn't around. As I mentioned, we have nine kids. During this time, several of them were going through their teenage years, in my experience with kids, the most difficult years. And I was AWOL!

Cecilia did her best. She's a strong woman. But in the fall of 2004, she gave out, collapsed. The doctors described her condition in various ways: pseudo-seizure, atypical migraine, acute fibromyalgia. What it really was, I think, was a nervous breakdown. Sitting next to her hospital bed, I had a moment of clarity: I'm killing my wife.

I knew what I had to do. I had to downsize my life.

Mike was sufficiently recovered from his heart attack that I gave him back the whole business, effective January 2005, which by then was five times the size it was when I started. He quickly shrunk it by half, to the point where he was comfortable and making a good living.

I opened a mom and pop — or, more accurately, pop and kids — carpet cleaning business in my hometown of Granville, Ohio. I still owned the family business in Columbus, so I split time between the two and supplemented my income from the startup with some from the family business. Still, my income declined by half.

In order to make it, we had to downsize quickly. We put the large and expensive family home up for sale, but the market had turned cold and it didn't sell. In 2007, we lost our home and ended up in personal bankruptcy — the business was a corporation, so it wasn't affected.

Nietzsche said, “That which doesn’t destroy us, makes us stronger.” Let me tell you, bankruptcy sucks! It’s humiliating ... and it should be. But it doesn’t destroy us, and humility is a virtue.

I could end this talk by telling you that I am an entirely different man today. But I’m not. Although neither am I the same. We humans are complex creatures. Change is difficult and uneven. Some things — for better or worse — are built into our nature.

I am a *willful* man. My willfulness has enabled me to achieve things that a less willful man would not. But willfulness fits like a glove with being a workaholic. Jesus said, “Not *my* will but *Thy* will be done.” Every morning I pray for a humble heart, that in humility I will see and walk the path that God has called me to.

Some days I do better than others. I, like every person in this room, am a work in progress.

Before closing, an update on the Downey family carpet cleaning odyssey. In 2009, I sold the family business to my brother, Tiger. A couple years later they began the transition from using high-flow extraction to truck mounts and from subcontractors to employees.

They have since begun to transition back. Nearly every time we talk, I yell at Tiger and he yells at me, about pricing. He’s too cheap; I’m too expensive. Brothers. Go figure.

A couple years ago, after another heart attack, Mike sold Steamin Demon. He’s back to training horses, his occupation before Steamin Demon. By the way, the name Steamin Demon came from a champion race horse reared in Ohio.

And I’m still doing more than I should. My little carpet cleaning business in Granville is doing very well. Two of my sons do the cleaning. At 60, it’s time for me to be off the truck.

But the workaholic must have an outlet. In 2013, the IICRC approved publication of a peer-review technical journal, *The Journal of Cleaning, Restoration & Inspection*. For now, I am the publisher and editor.

The Journal is the fulfillment of a command that goes back more than 20 years. How many in the room know the name Dr. Michael Berry? It is a name that everyone in the cleaning and restoration industry should know, but unfortunately, few do. Back in the 1980s and early '90s, Mike Berry ran the EPA's Indoor Environmental Assessment Office. It was their job to investigate problems with indoor air quality and a phenomenon known as "sick building syndrome." It was initiated after EPA's own headquarters' building in Washington was declared a sick building after poor indoor air quality left many employees ill.

Long story short, Berry figured out that the problem and the cure were pretty simple: Indoor environments need to be cleaned more effectively and more often. He wrote a book, *Protecting the Built Environment: Cleaning for Health*, that to some extent, changed cleaners' self-perception from "lowly rug scrubber" to someone who contributes to the protection of human health. It was an important paradigm shift that I covered extensively in *Cleanfax*.

One day in the mid-90s Berry called me up and said, "Your industry needs a science journal. Downey, you need to publish it." I got the point right away; only one problem: How to monetize it. You see science journals don't accept advertising and are costly and time-consuming to produce. The only organization in the industry that had the resources and capability to publish such a journal was the IICRC.

It took a long time to convince the IICRC. But finally, in 2014, Mike Berry's dream, which became my command, was fulfilled, and the first issue was published. What was originally imagined as a science journal has been downgraded to a technical journal. They are similar in nature — both are peer reviewed — but the bar of a science journal is set too high for the cleaning and restoration industry right now, there just isn't enough publishable research. Still, long-term, a science journal is the goal. Last year a technical conference was added, the second conference will be held next month in Big Sky, Montana. So there you have it.

My family's 120-year odyssey in the carpet cleaning industry — to date. I am known to call the carpet cleaning business the Downey family's birth defect. I wonder if maybe it's the other way around: Maybe the Downey family is the carpet cleaning industry's birth defect! Thank you.