

TRANSCRIPT

Andy: Welcome everyone. Andy Drish with another episode of Starting from Nothing – the Foundation Podcast. Today, I'm coming at you from Des Moines, Iowa in Dane's bedroom/office actually right now for the guys watching video. I'm really excited today.

Today, I've got with me Chris Maxwell-Gaines and Chris is the co-founder of Innovative Water Solutions, a company that provides water conservation solutions to homes and businesses. He launched his business in 2004 while he was still working at his day job and since that time, Chris has been able to grow it past seven figures so I asked him to come on the show today and tell us how he did it.

Chris, thanks for coming on the show man.

Chris: Hey, thanks Andy. Thanks for having me.

Andy: I'm really excited today because this is a niche that I just didn't even know existed and you guys build a seven-figure plus business and something so unique. For me, just kind of random. I think it's so cool. Tell me a little bit what is ... what do you guys do, exactly?

Chris: For our business, our ... what we started out doing was rainwater collection systems. Basically, collecting rain off of a roof, put it into a tank and then using it for ... at the beginning, we were just doing irrigation use only systems. Well then, we started to grow. We're in a great area be in Central Texas where ... because of the drought, because of water issues and because of population growth, there are tremendous number of people coming to the Central Texas area, building homes. And so when they're building homes and there's no water pipe available for them to tap into, they only have two options: drill a well or install a rainwater collection system to supply the entire house with water.

Then, once we grew a little bit, we fell into doing those type of systems and then from there we just added other types of water conservation technology such as great water reuse, we've gotten

into efficient irrigation systems. Not your kind of typical spray water everywhere.

Andy: Yeah.

Chris: And then we're also getting into kind of this thought of re-landscaping. Someone who has a landscape that's very water thirsty, we can go in and with a new design and kind of revamp that whole landscape so that we're setting people for future because water issues, especially down here, are just becoming more and more pressing.

Andy: Let's talk about this for a second. Because when I hear the words efficient irrigation system, my mind just kind of goes numb. What does that mean? What I don't want to happen is ... there's some really good lessons in your story and I want people to be able to pull them out. I think what happens is when they hear what you're doing they don't see how they can relate to it. Like, where the similarities and commonalities are.

Chris: Absolutely.

Andy: It's so impressive because scaling a service business is so hard to do. You guys have done it really, really successfully. Tell me from the mind of the customer. What process do they go through? Do most customers know that this is an option available to them? Is it only ... when do they search for your product? Is it only when they're building a house or is it for people who have a house? Tell me about that.

Chris: Yeah. Very good question because that is something that over the years I've had to learn because of ... When you market, especially a service business, you start out doing the yellow pages and then you end up figuring out that that doesn't work because no one uses the dang yellow pages anymore and so we're having to adapt a marketing method. We've actually had to learn a lot.

Basically, we are fortunate to be in the area that we're in that has tremendously helped our business. But, people come to this because

they're wanting to have a more sustainable lifestyle? Once you go down this path of becoming more sustainable, you start picking off the low fruit, right, on a tree?

Andy: Yeah. Totally.

Chris: You start doing the easy stuff and like, "Oh, okay. I can insulate my house. Okay, I did that. All that." And then you take it to the next step and you go, "Wow! What can I do for water conservation?" Okay, you switch out all your fixtures in your house, now you're using less water but then there's still people who want to take it to the next step. That's where we come in and that's the type of people that we're trying to get to with our marketing message is the environmental footprint. People who are looking to reduce their ... This is a subjective type of thing, but to reduce their environmental footprint, the what ... has really been a key for us is locating the partnerships with, say, strategic partners like builders. Really going to those guys and saying, when you have a client that starts talking anything about water conservation, we want to be your go-to guys.

Andy: Yeah.

Chris: No matter if that's rainwater, if that's greywater, if that's irrigation, if that's landscaping. Just then setting up all the ... being the good guy that they can call on if they have some questions. Even though it may not pan out into an actual job, just be in there a resource. Kind of that whole free thing. Give them free resources so that then it makes you become the expert and then you look better in their eyes. When do they have a customer that actually wants to move forward, they come back to us.

Yes. Being such a niche business, we have had to figure out better ways to market but what has helped is just been the SEO. When we put our website out there first, we did it pretty good and I think it was way better than any of the other guys that were out there especially in Texas.

Andy: Yeah.

Chris: And so we just zoomed up to the top of Google. For the keywords that people are searching here locally and then we changed to a new format website, much better SEO and ... man, we just ... We don't market. That's ...

Andy: Yeah.

Chris: Other than going to a few local shows, doing some of our membership things like with the Home Builders Association. Other than that, that's really all of our marketing cost. Everything else is just pure leads that come through a website because people are looking for information first. They wanted to educate themselves about this type of systems that we do rainwater collection. They want to educate. So, first off, they're going online and so we want to be there to present that information. Then, if they do want to pick up the phone and say, "Hey, you have a free consultation? Come on out and ..." [inaudible 00:07:01] out to a job immediately but six months, a year from now?

Andy: Yeah.

Chris: When they do ... are ready to do something then we're there for them. We've actually ...

Andy: Let me ask you this. How did you get started in this niche? Like I said, I didn't even know this option existed, this product for this service. How do you get started in it?

Chris: For rainwater, not necessarily for water conservation but for rainwater, my business partner and I, we met while serving in the Peace Corp in South America.

Andy: Oh wow.

Chris: In a small country, small country called Suriname. It's on the Northern Coast. The country ... when we got there, they basically put us into the little communities and our community that my wife and I were stationed in had no well, no running water. The only water available was rainwater that people collected into old gas drums from the gold miners.

Andy: Yeah.

Chris: Or they went down to the river and get the bucket in the river and brought the water back and drink from that. We had a rain water collection system on our small little hut and so that kind of open the flood gates for me particularly being a civil engineer. Going through college you learn all about centralized systems.

Andy: Yeah.

Chris: Sending water to a house and then flushing the toilet and then sending out water miles and miles away to the treatment plant and then that whole cycle just keeps going. For me, to be in this middle of the rainforest and have no water connections, living on rainwater, we had a latrine out back.

Andy: Yeah.

Chris: It just really taught me a much better appreciation of water. Once we came back here, that appreciation ... we just kind of looked around and said, you know. Why aren't more people doing rainwater collection in these other type of water conservation systems and that's kind of how it all started. This was 2004.

Andy: Did you always want to start your own business?

Chris: No. That's just it. I grew up in a small town in Texas then went to A&M, Texas A&M; graduated Civil Engineer. My wife and I, we didn't want to go and just start working. Right? We wanted something different and so we looked at the Peace Corp and that was a perfect fit for us and it was ... I tell everyone, they need to do Peace Corp. I knew I wanted something different. I didn't want just a typical engineering cubicle lifestyle.

Andy: Yeah.

Chris: I had done that for a couple of years during college working with a firm and then going back to school, that type of stuff. And it just kind of gave me that taste of going ... You know, sure, you can have a comfy lifestyle and you can make money but it's something I don't want. That's why I think the Peace Corp was at first kind of like, let's do something different, let's push off the [inevitable 00:10:00] of getting this difficult job and whatever.

Yeah. I look back and I see kind of some that start there but I didn't realize it during that time. It wasn't until we came back, and again, maybe it was the Peace Corp and the freedom of having two years of being in this village where we were directing ... helping to direct the projects that the villagers were wanting. That maybe fed into it. When I got back here and actually got an engineering job, I kind of just was like, wow! This is not for me.

Andy: Why do you say that everyone should join the Peace Corp for a period of time?

Chris: Oh, it changes your life. It opens you up to an amazing experience. No matter if you do it ... whatever age you do it. We did it when we were right out of college so ... we went in believing we're going to change the world, right? Like all young people. You're ready to go and you got all these fresh ideas, you're out of college. It really was there where I realize that ... you kind of have to look and throw out some things first. You're not just going to go guns blazing and just change the world but it really matured myself. It really took me to a different plane.

Then, I realized immediately when I got back and started working at an engineering firm that this is not what I want. I want something else. If I would have just gone straight into doing a typical engineer's path, I might have realized this and had a midlife crisis. I don't know. But the Peace Corp really helped me with that. Other than that man, it gives you two years to go and you basically are paid, a little bit, by the government to live in another place and you actually do some good stuff for people all around the world. That's why I say everyone should try to do it. I even say that even if you're older and retired, apply. Because we got a few older couples in our group. That was the most amazing thing to ground us.

Again, that maturity level, it really ... So the whole lesson in terms of business with the Peace Corp was the maturity. Again, it helped that we were living off of a rainwater system which then we developed into a business but it doesn't mean that you're going to

Peace Corp looking for a business, it just opens you up to the opportunities and it just matures you.

Andy: It's so interesting to me because so many people struggle with coming up with ideas. Like where do good ideas come from? Most of the time, they don't come from just sitting around, they always come from action; at some level. I love the Steve Jobs quote where he says, you can never connect the dots moving forward.

Chris: That's right.

Andy: So you don't know what the next thing is going to lead to but in hindsight they make perfect sense.

Chris: Absolutely.

Andy: Was there a moment when it hit you, when you're in Austin you're like, "Yes! We need to do this." How did actually go from this thing that you experienced as you were overseas to ... we're going to try this as a business.

Chris: I guess it was ... myself and my business partner, so we both moved back here to Austin; even though we're from separate cities in Texas. We're both kind of driving our wives crazy about ... when it would rain we were just be going, "Man!" In Suriname, we would be collecting this rainwater. Why weren't we doing it here?

Andy: Was he in the Peace Corp with you?

Chris: Yes. We actually met in the Peace Corp. We were fellow Aggies even though he's a few years older than me; an immediate bond both from A&M.

We just got together and I think it was raining, all kind of fuzzy on all the details but I think it was raining, we were drinking some beers and we just said, "You know what? Why don't we try this? Why don't we just do it?" I was driving down the road the next day and I saw a billboard for the local home and garden show down at the convention center here and had a little banner on it, it says 'booth still available.' And so I said, "Hey, let me call them." Call

them up, it was a half price deal for three days and I just said, “Okay, let’s do it.”

Andy: What it cost?

Chris: It was \$400. The typical was 800. Nowadays, it’s like 2,000. It’s crazy, these trade shows. But it was 400 bucks. We didn’t have banners, we didn’t have anything and it was two weeks away. We just start scrambled and we got some banners together. We had a friend of mine doing a little logo for us. During that time, and we still use the logo today, again, we’re not Coca-Cola so who cares about our logo.

But, we’re still using that. We made up a banner, we got a little blue bed sheet, threw it over the table, had a little laptop there with some images running and some print outs. I can’t remember what print outs we had but ... I mean, I look back at pictures and I just say why in the heck would anyone come up to us? But, now, with the whole lean startup movement? I mean, it fits rights in. That was kind of our lean. Let’s put it out there, let’s test. Four hundred bucks and let’s get a booth and see who comes up and what comes out of it.

Now, thinking back, it was kind of a smart move because I guess that if, if we would have [slammed 00:15:24] out, we will just stop and all we would have had is \$400 investment and some time, you know?

Andy: Yeah.

Chris: So, yeah. That Sunday, that last day, we had older couple come up and said, “Wow! We want to do this. What’s the next step?” We were so surprised we said “We’ll call you back. We need to figure something out. We’ll call you back.” We didn’t even have ... how to contract, how to do any of that stuff, right? Because it was just get out there and test.

Yes, they became our first clients and this was actually ... we have pictures from that as myself and my business partner on the weekends, going out there and doing the work us ourselves which I haven’t been out in the field in years. But we started out, just me and

him, swinging pickaxes and do those shovels (crosstalk) to work.

Andy: What did you charge for your first client?

Chris: Oh man, it was a fairly large system so it was a 9,000 gallon system. I think it was probably in the ten to 15,000 range for the system. There was a lot of piping, there's a pump system involved, electrical work.

Andy: Yeah.

Chris: All this stuff and it was just us jumping into it, right? It wasn't like, "Oh, let's research and how do we do a pump system or how do we do electrical?" We just kind of jump into it. Basically, from kind of using my knowledge, I guess, of engineering principles of pumps and everything but also my business partner having some, kind of handyman, little stuff over the years as he was growing. Yeah, we just did that and that was the first client. I think we maybe had one or two other clients that first year. Just not much at all. That's how it all started.

Andy: You get your first client, you finish the job. Where did your next clients come from?

Chris: I think we did, at that time, we developed a website and we put it up. It just had a ton of text on it; a ton of information about rainwater systems. Not many pictures because we didn't really have portfolio and we just ... yeah. I think it was from that. It just started to role in. Little bit. But again, we were both still working our day jobs at that time.

Andy: Yeah.

Chris: We weren't dependent on this being, okay, we got to make it work. We just kind of put it out there and just as emails rolled in, if people going "Hey, I want to consider this," then we would go on the weekend and have a consultation at their house and pitch them the estimate. Yeah, like I said, we only ... we probably ... I don't have the numbers, I don't remember but there's probably only a few people that contact us that year and we only did two or three jobs that first year.

Andy: Yeah.

Chris: But again, it was towards into that year, we kind of started to see that ... what's picking up. My business partner kind of changed his scheduling where he was still working but could work. And then eventually within a year or so, he quit and went IWS full time. Then, we were working out of his backyard.

Andy: Yeah.

Chris: Again, I'm talking like lean startup.

Andy: Oh yeah.

Chris: We didn't go and like rent this big warehouse and all that stuff. We're running out of his backyard. This plays into the whole thing about ... we were making, having revenue coming in but just not enough profit. It was because of these inefficiencies of having to unload all the tools everyday to his backyard and reload in the morning because we didn't have a place just to park the trucks, you know?

Andy: Yeah.

Chris: Very inefficient but it taught us a lot of great lessons. That's kind of ... First years just kind of getting over that hump of all these inefficiencies.

Andy: Yeah.

Chris: Actually, learning a service business when we were both coming from a background of not being contractors. Having a technical knowledge of being an engineer and then my business partner being more of a human resources, fun loving, psychology type of guy. Yeah, we really didn't have this contracting background to fall back on so we were really learning a lot of business lessons as we went.

Andy: It seems really hard to scale a service business. At what point do you ... how did you decide it was time to leave your job? Because you had a family at the ... like, you're married and ...

Chris: Yeah, just married. Yeah.

Andy: That just adds a different level of complexity plus

your business partner, right? It's like two different families to support now. How did you make that decision and where was the business at when you did that?

Chris: Well, so we ... I say putted along for a couple of years, right?

Andy: Yeah.

Chris: The way that for an engineer, you have to work a certain number of years, add an engineering firm in order to be able to take your license exam to become a professional engineer.

Andy: Okay.

Chris: I had to work to at least 2007 to crew my four years and then take my exam. I knew that I was working at this engineering firm for that long. Basically, during those first years, I didn't take any money out of IWS. It was all put it back in. Blake started to take a small salary.

Andy: Yeah.

Chris: But I was just like, hey, I'm making enough over here and I can just work at night and work on the weekends. I don't need any extra money.

It wasn't until 2006, so we're about ... almost two years in to where it really started to ramp up and we've started to get a lot of interest for people building homes in the Hill Country which is to the West of Austin where there are no water pipes and, again, its wells or rainwater systems. It was ... then we were like, wow! There's a lot of demand out there.

Andy: Yeah.

Chris: It just got so busy that immediately, early 2007, once I took my exam and passed it, I said "Sayonara. I'm out of here."

Andy: [Inaudible 00:21:50].

Chris: I already have this other business to go in.

It was just kind of a slow ramp up. I don't know if there was a time where I just said, "[inaudible 00:21:59], I got to get out of this." It was just I knew I had to work to a certain time. I know that's not a

good answer for some entrepreneurs out there who are working a job and trying to figure out when is the time that they need to just make the jump. But basically, almost had like a planned out like I said.

Andy: Yeah.

Chris: If this business is doing certain number by this time then I'm out. Maybe, people can plan that around a life event or something but for me it was just this exam that I had to take because I knew that I needed to be a P.E. if I wanted to take our business here to the next level which it totally has.

Andy: Yeah.

Chris: That was a great decision to continue and become a Professional Engineer. Yes. It wasn't just, I got to do it, it's the time. It was just, wow! I'm spending 80 hours a week, 40 hours working my day job and then 40 hours doing IWS.

Andy: Did your company ...

Chris: When ...

Andy: Go ahead.

Chris: When I do pass my exam, I'm out. Immediately. It was that top of deal. It wasn't like a pre-ordained thing. You know.

Andy: So, did your company know you're starting this on the side?

Chris: No. No. I don't think he has any ... had any idea. It really didn't interfere with it other than occasionally because I had our phone number on our website that would ring directly over to my cell phone.

Andy: Yup.

Chris: I would get some calls during the day and so I would just close my door of my office, arrange the consultation for maybe later that night, five, six, seven o'clock after hours or on the weekend. And so, other than that, there was no really overlap on to my day job and IWS. Yeah, I don't think he had any clue, my boss.

Andy: Chris kind of went over numbers ... we got some

rough stuff. Just for the audience to give you an idea of what we're looking at. The first year was ten to 15 grand in business this 2004, second year around 60 and then third year around 200. Growing pretty rapidly.

Chris: Yeah.

Andy: That was still, the three years you were still working full time at your job.

Chris: That's correct. Yeah.

Andy: Do you remember ... you guys did say 200 grand in revenue. How your margins were on that?

Chris: Margins. Actually we were still slightly negative.

Andy: Really?

Chris: Yeah. It was still putting money back into the systems, putting money into buying equipments.

Andy: Yeah.

Chris: Buying tools, buying trucks. I think 2006 was our first official truck purchase. It was still putting money back into it. Yeah, 2006 we were actually still 2%, negative 2% profit margin on there.

Andy: Wow.

Chris: Again, it was a large learning curve. You know?

Andy: You're working 40 hours a week at your job, another 40 hours a week at this, three years and you're not seeing any revenue.

Chris: Yeah.

Andy: What kept you going? What didn't ...

Chris: Passion. Passion. Passion.

Andy: ... get to the point where you just be like, bah!

Chris: You know? I guess ultimately in my head, I knew it either had to work or we were just going to shut it down.

Andy: Yeah.

Chris: I knew that ... how to build a base. And so ... luckily, I did have my day job and I could work towards it. But, I

don't know. I guess, I'm just super passionate about what I do. That's what held me. I think that's what ... for a lot of entrepreneurs, trying to find that passion is key.

Andy: Yeah.

Chris: Because once you find your passion, what's that quote? You'll never work a day in your life if you find what you love. It's one of those things. Sure, you'll have stresses with deadlines and all that stuff but when you know that you're working on your passion and you're actually helping to build something that could become something greater than yourself ...

Andy: Yeah.

Chris: I think that was it.

I grew up on a small farm. I had this work ethic. My first job was when I was 14. I went to chop cotton in my uncle's cotton fields because I wanted to make money to buy a stereo system.

Andy: Yeah, totally. I can totally relate.

Chris: Exactly. It was just ... My parents taught me this. I guess just nose to the grindstone for those years. I was just crossing my fingers and hoping and luckily it panned out. I know other entrepreneurs may not have that opportunity to wait that long but I just ... I ultimately had the plan in my head and I saw it through. Passion is what kind of kept me going through that.

It was just challenging. It was every system, every job presented different type of challenges. That was for me trying to figure out a different way to do the system, different piping configuration, whatever it may be that was kind of what kept me going for those years.

Andy: First three years you're doing about 200 grand or so, after three years. And then looking here, on 260 the next year and then in 2008 you pretty much doubled your business.

Chris: That's right.

Andy: 260 grand to 530.

Chris: Yeah.

Andy: What happened there?

Chris: That was basically a time where we jumped up to ... I'm looking at ... I had ... I went ... did some analysis.

Andy: This is so cool.

Chris: So we basically jumped ...

Andy: Thank you for being so open with these by the way.

Chris: Oh sure. Sure.

Andy: It's really cool to see this from like an outsider looking in.

Chris: Yeah.

Andy: I'm just thinking about it from ... If I'm trying to start a service business and I see like how you're scaling it, just thank you man.

Chris: Yeah, definitely.

That was a time when ... 2007, we had one commercial project. 2008, we really jumped into commercial projects and there were six commercial projects in 2008. Those are smaller commercial projects so it still wasn't the big time that we were looking for. It got us into that realm. Having my engineering background, it helped us to get into there which most of the other companies in my area that are doing the things that we do, are only focused on residential. That is what really kind of propelled us up to ... kind of that next level. And then from there, you just started getting more contacts with these larger contractors. So that whenever a particular system shows up on their plans for a new project, they know who to call to get a bid for that. They're not going around and just trying to search for someone. Yes, that kind of starts that scaling where we were able to move up because of ... getting our name out and making ourselves available. Taking that leap because going for residential where if things go wrong, you can fix it. Doesn't really ... Something goes bad on a commercial project site, you're dealing with liability ...

Andy: Yeah.

Chris: Worker safety.

Andy: Big deal.

Chris: Yeah, exactly. But, that allows you to have larger profit margins because of that larger liability. That's why we kind of got to that ... started to get to the next [round 00:29:13] was because of opening up to commercial projects.

Andy: That was 2008. You also quit your job in 2007.

Chris: Yes.

Andy: When did you guys start hiring employees?

Chris: Actually, I mean, from the get-go, we always had a small crew. It was always friends of friends, right? We had some good friends, they needed work, they love working outdoors. Hey, come on.

Luckily, we had friends who were college educated but again, went something else in life. They didn't want to just be ... maybe they were history majors and that type of stuff but they wanted to do something else and doing our business, it really made them ... gave them something to talk about. Like with their friends.

Andy: Yeah.

Chris: I'm doing something green; I'm putting rainwater systems; I'm helping to conserve water. All that stuff. We had these friends and they had a friend and so we were just slowly bringing on people. It just kind of grew from that. It wasn't until, probably, a year or two ago, we got to the point where we had to start just putting out ads because the friends of friends didn't work out anymore. We were looking for more specialized guys.

Andy: Yeah.

Chris: We really ... it's just been recently where we had to deal with interviews and doing all that stuff. But ... yeah, having that network of people at the beginning to kind of call on so that we could focus on some other business issues and not worry about the quality and labor because they were our friends. How could they do something bad for us on the field and then we're having a beer with them that Friday night, look us in the eyes. That allowed us to really

focus on other parts of our business and not worry so much about the quality of the guys that we have going to people's homes. Because that's the big thing with services business is ... who do you want showing up at a customer's home?

Andy: Yeah.

Chris: They want to feel that this person is trusting and all that stuff. That was, I think, good for us at the beginning.

Andy: How much ... A lot of your business comes from referrals right now, right?

Chris: That's right. Referrals and ... I mean it is a lot of internet, just website.

Andy: Yeah.

Chris: We probably get two to three emails through our contact form a day.

Andy: Oh, wow.

Chris: Some of them are people who fit the type of work we do, others don't but ... it keeps that steady supply. Yes, other than that, we do a lot of referrals particularly from builders and other subcontractors. Not so much through homeowners because occasionally, they may have a family friend that wants what we do.

Andy: Yeah.

Chris: Most people, it's kind of one and done.

Andy: Yeah.

Chris: We're trying to learn how to figure out, how to cultivate more referrals from our past clients but ... definitely, referrals from builders and other contractors in the internet or our website has really kept us busy. We got to figure out other ways to scale if we're going to really start to open up [inaudible 00:32:17] a little bit more.

Andy: Yeah. I used to work construction with my dad. They've got a construction company and ... I remember one time, so we do tiling in fields.

Chris: Yeah.

Andy: Lay tiles to spread the water out so the crops get more of the water.

Chris: Yup.

Andy: I remember one time I had a tool bow and I had my knife on and I lost my knife somewhere. He's like, it was the end of the day pretty much and the job was pretty much wrapped up and I was like, "Oh, I just lost my knife. We'll get another one." We spent an hour searching for the knife. He's like ... a farmer can't just find a knife laying in their field. You know?

Chris: Yeah. Yup.

Andy: Because you are so adamant about creating an incredible customer experience.

What's your philosophy on customer experience and customer satisfaction? I assume that if you're doing most referral, a lot of business through referrals. It's got to be pretty ... something cool.

Chris: Yeah. It starts at the beginning with education.

People will get a referral. A builder will say, "Hey, contact Innovative Water Solutions." People will go to our website and it starts there. Right? They'll see the quality of our website. They could go around and search other guys and see that ... not as good quality. That is the information that we present and it's just kind of teaching people about these systems, showing off our portfolio, showing people the different options.

So, it starts there, really, I believe because people want to know that they're dealing with a company that they can trust and that has the knowledge to implement what they want. Because a lot of times people just go, "I want to collect rainwater. I want to save water," but they don't know the mechanism. To come to our website and then to feel comfortable knowing that these guys are the guys that could get it done and they have the experience and the knowledge. It kind of starts there.

And then it goes into the consultation stage where ... when you show up, you're presenting yourself the information that you're

providing to people. Even being a go-to source afterwards, you're telling them if you have any questions after the fact. Here's my card with my email. Please email. Please call. Whatever it might be. There's multistages particularly for our niche because there is a large educational, I think, component of it. But then, once it happens, then it is quality of the guys in the field for construction site. A lot of times, do you clean up at the end of the day? Right?

Andy: Yeah.

Chris: Do you come at a time when you'd say you were going to come? Or do you say, "Oh yeah, we'll be there Monday," and then you don't show up till Thursday. You know? And so, for a lot of construction service, it is a lot of low-hanging fruit that these other guys don't do. And that if you just put out a little effort, you can really jump ahead of the group.

Andy: Yeah.

Chris: It's multistage where we're trying to hold these people's hands and ... just be a trusted friend. Even if they don't decide to do this because we'll flat out come and tell people. In some situations, our systems, particularly rainwater, may not work. It will conserve a little bit of water but for the money that you're going to put into it, the return on investment is low. We'll be the first to tell people that.

Even if we don't get a job through that, we've been straight forward with people and I think people really appreciate that and they're not going to ... they know they're not going to get sold a bill of goods at the end and go, "Man! This is not doing what I wanted to do." Even though it may not mean business, more business for us, just being straight with the customer I think is a key part of our customer service.

Andy: When you see entrepreneurs getting started, where do you think they focus their energy? Where do they screw up when they're getting started?

Chris: Well, a lesson for me where I kind of screwed up is

being too involved in the business. You hear that all the time and ... It's hard at the beginning to go ... I should be working on developing this system. I shouldn't be emailing this particular client because of this small little issue that they have.

Now, if you're solopreneur, sure, you're going to have to do that. But in a business partner relationship, there were things that I really needed to be doing that I just kind of kept that busy work going.

"Oh, no, no, no, I need to do this. I need to answer that. I need to ..." And so, really, I think people, entrepreneurs kind of focus on the immediate. I know there's that whole grid thing that they, you know, people say, I forgot who [does it 00:37:08] where you put issues in certain grids.

Andy: Yeah.

Chris: Yeah. It's really hard because I can say that now, and again, I have 14 employees, I have people doing stuff for me. I can say that now but looking back, I think that if I would have just pushed on that concept a little bit more, even though, yes, it would have been perfect, I wouldn't have been like waking up everyday go, "Hey, let's work on my business rather than [inaudible 00:37:33]."

Andy: Yeah.

Chris: But at least if I'm pushing that concept more, it gets you ... hopefully into that better spot to where you can step back and say, "Oh, should I be going on this path?" You know?

Andy: Yeah.

Chris: Rather than going on a path then be way down and then looking up going "Crap! This is not where I want to be. I need to be over there." Yeah, it may not be feasible at the beginning for most entrepreneurs but just constantly keeping out in your head and just kind of looking up sometimes out of the trenches and go on. Where are we going with this?

I think that's what kind of drove me like you asked earlier about ... early years. Just kind of looking up going, "Hey, one of these days,

I'm going to be a P.E. I'm going to be a Professional Engineer. I'm going to be able to design my own system. I'm going to be able to get into commercial." It was me looking up from the trenches and going "That's where we're going." Even though I was still working in the business, I kind of had that long term view. I think that's one of the major things.

Andy: It's beautiful.

Chris: Again, if I was a time machine and I went back to my former self, I can just hear myself going, "Yeah man, you need to be working on your business," and my former self would be going, "But I can't. I have no time. I have no time." That's true but I just think that you just push and do as much as you can to be working on the business instead of in it and do what you can. I think that's the big thing for entrepreneur just starting out is try to take a long term view as much as you can.

Andy: I think it's so important to have that North Star.

Chris: Yes.

Andy: That guiding principle that like that's where, that's where you're headed no matter what.

Chris: Yup. At the beginning, it may just be throwing up this supposed North Star.

Andy: Yeah.

Chris: Even though it may not be the actually North Star but just go and, hey, there is something past this first initial stage that I'm working towards.

Andy: Yup.

Chris: As you're doing it, you're also accruing a lot of experience to where ... Once you get to that next little level you can go, okay, now, I can tweak this. I can pivot this and I can go in this different direction. But, without these lessons I learned over this past year of being in that trench, I wouldn't be able to know that I need the pivot. It is just kind of working, putting your nose down but also picking your head up and kind of looking down the line. I

think that's ... the major lesson for us is, we always have something larger on the horizon that we want to accomplish with it.

We still do. We have a lot of things and then we ... I'm excited, we have a couple of things that we're going to be starting this winter that I think is going to really help us and push us through even that next echelon.

Andy: Cool.

Chris: So yeah. That's the main lesson, I think, for entrepreneurs for my experience.

Andy: Chris, thanks so much for coming on and just being so open with everything. It's so cool to see how you've grown and how much effort that you put in in the early stage and how you guys are really reaping the benefits of it now.

Chris: Absolutely.

Andy: Where can people find you? What else can they know about you?

Chris: Sure. Yeah. The web address is easy as watercash.com. They can see our main line business there. We do a lot of social media stuff. I do a lot of tweeting and Facebooking. Just all that stuff. All those channels are available on our main website. And then coming up, we're unveiling a program. Basically it's installation or a rainwater business training program. We've accrued over these years a ton of intellectual knowledge I guess, you can call it and a lot of systems and everything. As you know, there's a technical side of business but there's also a business side to business.

Andy: Yeah.

Chris: We've really had to learn that business side of it and so we're putting this program, going to be putting this program out. The website we have there is called rainingprofits.com. That's going to be our first product is going to be ... So, it's going to be geared towards contractors, right? Gutter installers, landscape installers; people who can easily add this as another service line.

Andy: Yeah.

Chris: But also, if there's people, entrepreneurs out there who go, "Man, this whole water conservation thing, this is ... I love it." The system is going to be geared towards just an entrepreneur like we were back in the day had no construction experience but we just kind of start it.

Andy: Yeah.

Chris: This program, I think, is going to provide all those base resources so that people can get over those first years like we did where we got negative profit towards getting them to the next step. So we're really excited about that and I think that's going to provide a lot of benefit to a lot of contractors and a lot of other entrepreneurs hopefully.

Yeah, rainingprofits.com. We just have a kind of a coming soon thing up there now but ...

Andy: Cool.

Chris: Yeah, that's what we're planning on doing. And then, of course, with our main line business, just branching out. Yeah, watercash.com

Andy: Beautiful man. Thank you again. Thank you so much for coming on the show and everyone I'll ... I'll have all these in the show notes so if you go to thefoundationpodcast.com, you'll be able to check that out in the action guide that Chris will be building for you. Chris, thank you so much man.

Chris: Andy, this was a pleasure. It's my first interview, podcast thing. This was amazing. You're a great interviewer and I love being able to open up. Hopefully, it will teach a lot of people a lot of things.

Andy: I think it will man. Thank you so much.

Chris: Awesome. Thanks Andy.

Speaker 1: Thank you for joining us. We've taken this interview and created a custom action guide so you know exactly what action steps to take to grow your business. Just head over to

thefoundationpodcast.com to download it for free. Thanks for listening and we'll see you next week.