

BUSINESS

Entrepreneurship

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It's a Dirty Job (and These Entrepreneurs Are Doing It)

If you're willing to invest sweat equity, you can make a fortune.

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Uber. Apple. eBay. Google. Facebook. The media spotlight so often goes to the Silicon Valley-based businesses that it can be easy to forget that business successes happen all around the country—especially if you're willing to get your hands dirty.

In fact, if you want inspiration and [ideas for starting your own business](#), you don't even have to leave your house. Simply follow the example of these five entrepreneurs.



The Basement, Attic, Air Ducts

You can't get much grosser than mold and mildew, but Jeff Dudan, 49, discovered that he could really clean up by cleaning it up.

In 1992, Dudan was helping a friend remove debris after Hurricane Andrew ravaged southern Florida. After spending a few weeks in some of the worst messes imaginable, Dudan saw the potential for a business.

His company, [AdvantaClean](#), headquartered in Huntersville, North Carolina, is now the nation's largest light environmental franchise, an operation that rakes in \$50 million annually and has 225 franchise territories in 32 states. AdvantaClean works with homeowners, businesses, the government—anyone with a building that needs mold removal, air duct cleaning, emergency water removal and other related tasks most people wouldn't dare take on.

Dudan says that the rewards go far beyond the money. "[Empathy comes into play](#) a lot in this job," Dudan says. "When you're dealing with water in the basement or moisture in a crawl space, you're really thinking, *How can I help these people recover?*"

These days, Dudan spends most of his time overseeing the business, and thanks to technological advances, his franchise owners and their employees generally don't get too covered in filth either. But that wasn't always the case. "I've cleaned up bodies and crime scenes where people were shot. I've worked on jobs where the sewage came up through the toilet, drains and showers. Our franchise owners don't see nearly the things I saw early on," he says.



The Swimming Pool

Cleaning pools doesn't sound like a fun job, and it isn't. That's why Stewart Vernon's business has fared so well.

In 2002, shortly after graduating college, Vernon, now 37, met the owner of a small pool maintenance and repair business in Macon, Georgia, who was looking to retire. Vernon took over the man's customers and changed the name—All Seasons Pool & Spa—to something that suggested a company with ambition: [America's Swimming Pool Company](#).

Today, ASP Franchising, LLC, generates \$46 million a year with 100 owners operating 254 franchise locations in 20 states.

Vernon always knew he wanted to [be an entrepreneur](#). He had his own car washing business as a high-schooler. "Business, to me, was more fun than sports at the time," he says.

In ASP's early days, Vernon often waded into algae-infested swimming pools. That is no longer part of his job description, but his franchise owners' employees still encounter unpleasant tasks. "In Arizona, dust storms sometimes drop hundreds of pounds of dust and sand into the pools," he says. "Another time, there was a traffic accident, and a vehicle ended up in the swimming pool."

Stewart [loves what he does](#), but he acknowledges one downside. "My close friends still call me 'the pool boy,'" he says.



The House

Ron Holt, 43, is the CEO of [Two Maids & A Mop](#), founded in 2003. Headquartered in Birmingham, Alabama, the company has locations in 46 markets. If all goes as planned, 20 to 25 new stores will open annually for the next five years.

Holt was a chemist in a physical testing lab, supervising scientists. He wanted to be his own boss, however, and so for seven years, he shoveled most of his paycheck into a bank account and didn't touch it—with the goal of saving up \$150,000 to invest in a business. Nights and weekends, Holt worked odd jobs, mostly at fast-food restaurants.

Holt landed in the cleaning business because he wanted to do something in customer service and felt that the maid service industry was lacking. At first, he was one of the two maids with the mop, but he quickly realized he needed to work on running the business from the office rather than spending his time cleaning toilets.

But cleaning toilets gave him a lot of empathy for his franchise owners and their scrubbing soldiers. "I put my hands onto surfaces that I never thought I would," Holt says. "As a former lab director, to find yourself on a bathroom floor, cleaning up somebody's [mess]—it's not where you thought you'd be in life."



The Backyard

Money may not grow on trees, but Josh Skolnick, 34, has found [you can make a lot of it](#) by removing them.

When Skolnick graduated high school, he had a landscaping and snow removal business that had 100 contracted clients, three full-time employees and an extensive inventory of equipment. Skolnick sold his business in 2007, and the following year, he was looking for something else to do when he was asked by a former client to remove a tree.

Let's just say that the experience went well enough that Skolnick was able to branch out. Today, he owns [Monster Tree Service](#), a tree care and removal franchise with 29 units so far. He also has made a lot of the green stuff: \$11 million in system-wide annual revenue.

Expensive equipment like cranes allows Skolnick's franchise owners and employees to generally avoid climbing into trees. Still, Skolnick concedes that it's a dirty business. "You're sweating out there, and when you're using a tree chipper and grinding stumps, you're creating a lot of dust," he says.



The Garage

If you go to your garage, you won't find Barbara Moran-Goodrich. But she hopes you'll take your car to hers.

Moran-Goodrich, 51, grew up watching her father run Moran Industries, which focused on automotive resale and wholesale. She became the company's president and CEO in 1999 and bought the business in 2010. She soon changed the company's focus—and the name. After all, [Moran Family of Brands](#) oversees three franchises: Mr. Transmission, specializing in transmission and clutch repair; Alta Mere The Automotive Outfitters, an aftermarket parts business; and Milex Complete Auto Care, a full-service auto repair store.

"Vehicles aren't mechanical any longer. We no longer call our mechanics 'mechanics.' We call them technicians," she says, of some of the changes she has seen in the industry. That car engines are more computerized and complex than they used to be has only fueled her company's success since homeowners are even less equipped to do car maintenance. But that's also made it harder to find [skilled millennials](#) to hire. "Fewer people are going into the trades," Moran-Goodrich says.

But one thing hasn't changed: Fixing cars is still a dirty job. Moran-Goodrich saw that up close in her early 20s when she worked for her father in a re-manufacturing facility with 50 guys, building transmissions. "The thing I had to get used to was the smell," she says. "Oil was everywhere. The smell wasn't at the same level as a skunk, but it was pretty close."