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5 HVAC Contractors Share Their Stories

CertainPath makes businesses more profitable and lives more enjoyable with field-proven technology and expertise that puts contractors on the path to success.

The contracting world can be tough. It's not often others in your trade are willing to offer advice, let alone actually sit down and talk about their experience, including what's working and what's not. Whether that's because they view you as their competition, or perhaps like most contractors, they're too busy worrying and working.

CertainPath comes with a community of thousands of contractors who've walked in their shoes before them, our HVAC contractors know they know they'll never feel alone in the process.

Check out these 5 stories from HVAC contractors just like you!

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John Gilmore is Enjoying Retirement while His Son Darrin Runs the Highly Profitable \$14 Million Business That's Continued to Grow 20% to 25% Each Year for the Last 5 Years. He was Also Able to Achieve His Dream of Owning a Highly Successful Restaurant!



While all of these stories are different, they all share one common bond— all five contractors found success with CertainPath's comprehensive business solution that is built by contractors, for contractors.

Story of Dramatic Growth

From \$4.2 Million to Projected \$10 Million in Four Years at a Hefty Net Profit

Mike Kirchmeier and Jim Niebuhr Have Built Black Hills Heating & Air Conditioning Thanks to Help from CertainPath and a Commitment to Always “Do the Right Thing”



Black Hills Heating & Air Conditioning in Olympia, WA, employs a team who prides themselves in service for the customer. “They have strong character, high morals, and good values,” co-owner and Vice President Jim Niebuhr said. “Everybody knows our culture. We empower our employees to do the right thing.”

Black Hills’ growth has been explosive. Three years ago, it generated \$4.2 Million in annual sales; two years ago, \$6.1 Million, a 31% jump; and last year, \$7.6 Million, a 20% jump.

The company hasn’t always enjoyed such remarkable success. For a long time, Jim and fellow co-owner and President Mike Kirchmeier questioned their future. Looking for answers, they joined CertainPath. Since then, they’ve made hugely critical changes that have altered their success, including:

Shelve a Core Part of Their Business

Mike, Jim, and Office Manager Darlene Jorgenson immersed themselves in the CertainPath program. They soon made the hard decision to eliminate the construction side of their business.

Mission Accomplished

Black Hills had a CertainPath business coach visit their office regularly to evaluate their operations and assist with planning and implementation. Jim said it gave them the kick in the pants they needed to get over their fear of change and to move forward.

Market Like Mad

Black Hills still uses CertainPath’s “Frustrated Contractor” letter among other pieces. It wasn’t until they signed up with The Brand Guys, a CertainPath Partner Network vendor, that phone calls began pouring in. Jim explained they spent between 10% to 12% of total revenue in marketing—but based upon results, it’s been worth every penny.

Find the Right People

Black Hills began implementing job fairs. If a person catches their eye at a fair, Jim explained that he will interview that person twice more—with each interview lasting as long as two hours. “I’m looking for someone who remains excited throughout the process,” he said. “I’d rather use my time interviewing than putting a person in the field who isn’t going to work.”

Promote from Within

Black Hills hires people green to the industry. They start as a parts-runner or duct-cleaner—then, if they prove themselves, they can climb to maintenance, service, and maybe even a selling technician. Along the way, they're groomed with regular ride-alongs and training.

Cultivate Culture

Every month, the entire Black Hills team assembles for breakfast. It's a great time to fraternize and build relationships within the different teams of the company. Mike, Jim, and Darlene always present to the team and they make it clear how much they appreciate how hard everyone works.

Black Hills has big goals for the future. At the time of this interview, they expected to hit \$10 Million in this new year. "More than numbers, we're committed to excellence," Jim insisted. "Being a great company means more than being big. If we can grow while being excellent, then the sky's the limit."



We have a fantastic culture and we are very protective of it...I won't just hire anyone. Our customers and people deserve better. Our culture is built on the foundation of personal accountability. I expect it from them. They deserve it from me. We learned the true value of Culture through CertainPath.

— Jim Niebuhr, Black Hills Heating & Air Conditioning
Member since 2006



Story of Market Domination

How CM Heating Has Grown from \$4M to \$20+M in 5 Years, While on Target to Hit \$30M Next Year

James Garner and John Giacomini Have Grown a Booming, Highly Profitable Business, while Creating a Culture that Changes Their Team Members' Lives.

CM Heating has been on a rocket-like trajectory since 2017. The Everett, Washington, based business was a solid, but not spectacular company back then, generating roughly \$3.5M in sales. Last year, CM Heating surpassed \$20M, only five years later. This year, they are on target to clear more than \$30M—at an exceptional profit.

Those sales are certainly exciting; however, they're not what's most important to owners James Garner and John Giacomini. They are much more eager to talk with you about how the business has been able to affect the people within the company.

James and John have implemented countless measures geared toward improving their employee experience: Four-day workweeks, a robust benefits package, and industry-best pay. James and John put an emphasis on bringing everyone together as a team. They've rented out movie theaters and taken the entire company to sporting events. Recently, James and John purchased a vacation home for employees and their families to enjoy as thanks for their hard work.

"We have made the company a much more culture-forward place to work with the expectation that we're providing this because the company must also win. So, we're getting elite-level performance out of everyone," John said.

Not long ago, James and John didn't feel as positively about CM Heating's culture. "Not at all. We were burning people up until they produced sufficient profit for us. They'd leave to make a dollar an hour more."

They joined CertainPath in 2017 looking for a playbook to follow. "We wanted the tried-and-true best practices being used nationwide. Follow the recipe," John said. "I soon found myself in a room full of 50 other contractors just like me. We were all trying to become more successful. It was a breath of fresh air. We weren't alone."

New Service Department Mindset

James and John learned to turn their service department in an ethical, lead generating machine for replacement opportunities. "That really changed so much for us," John said. "We told our service manager that was service's primary focus—feed install." They implemented a compensation structure to reward their service techs for leads set.



Eliminating Seasonality

James and John have taken a new approach to their club membership program that's greatly eliminated the peaks and valleys of seasons. "We've changed how we communicate to our customers why we need to service them during our slow months. It was a process, but it's been hugely beneficial to them and us."

Train, Train, Train Some More

James and John have completely transformed how they train each department. They are firm believers of CertainPath's sales class. "That class, the CertainPath sales process, is worth our entire membership and more. We've made millions of dollars from it alone. Whenever we hire a new salesperson, we immediately send them."

Refined Recruiting Process

CertainPath helped James and John completely revamp how they recruit. Rather than hiring the first person to fill a position, they look at each individual as a part of their greater team. Will this person fit their culture? Every step of their process has evolved and improves; now, they have a steady stream of talent coming into CM Heating.



We wanted to build a company that truly improves people's lives. James has spent his whole life in pursuit of bettering people. When he and I met up, we said, 'We don't want to do this if we can't be happy doing it. CertainPath has helped us create that incredible user experience for our coworkers. It's led from us growing \$3.5M not long ago to pushing \$30M this year.'

— John Giacomini, CM Heating
Member since 2017

Maximize Performance

"We got from CertainPath the book, The One Minute Manager. It talks about setting clear expectations and giving immediate feedback. Depending on the department, we have a straightforward compensation structure with a straightforward understanding of why somebody is making what they're making. It's changed everything." John said.

These are just a few of the core changes James and John implemented since joining CertainPath. Sales immediately responded, more than doubling in that first year. The sales continue to climb, as CM Heating has become one of the biggest companies in their market. "We used to struggle to find people," John said. "Now they come to us. I think it's because we've made this such a fun and rewarding place to work."

Story of Finally Being Able to Get Out of the Truck

Michael Hirsh & Josh Campbell Learned Quickly the Value of Working ON the Business Not IN the Business

Rescue Air Has Grown From \$0 to \$3.2 Million in Less than 3 Years at 24% Net Profitability Thanks to Their Team's Commitment to Service

It feels just like yesterday that Rescue Air in Richardson, Texas, opened for business by the uncle-nephew duo of Michael Hirsh and Josh Campbell. It didn't take the men long to get out of the field and into the office.

The true startup has gone from zero dollars and zero clients to \$3.2 Million in less than three years at 24% net. They've done that while only spending 6% of revenue on advertising. Michael and Josh are quick to credit their team. "We are always exceeding customers' expectations. Our guys look to go the extra mile," Michael said. "Are the attic stairs loose? Tighten them up. Does a door handle jiggle? Fix it."

"We have people with great integrity," Josh said. Their customers agree. "78% of our business is previous customers or referrals. We grew 100% from last year this way." After spending many years in the HVAC industry, both Michael and Josh were familiar with the systems CertainPath provided. When they went out on their own, they knew they wanted to be a member.

Here's what they did since joining:



Understand the Basics

Both Michael and Josh had sales backgrounds. They wanted the operational insight CertainPath offered. They learned how to properly answer phones and manage their books. "CertainPath's Executive Perspective was a great experience for us," Josh said. "I've since gone back."

Find Talented People to Hire

Michael and Josh carefully hire, targeting people with no technical experience and training them. Josh will give a business card to a kid at an oil change shop and ask him to call if he's looking for an opportunity. The most important traits for the two owners are a strong personality and work ethic.

Home Grow Your Technicians

New technicians begin by riding along with experienced service techs and helping with installs. Once they've proven their worth, Michael and Josh will send them to a one-month technical school. Ride alongs continue once they return until they're ready for a truck. Using CertainPath's New Hire Onboarding Tools, they know their new technicians will not only know who Rescue Air is as a company, but they will also know what is expected of them as a team member.

Expectations to Generate Results

Trainings are on Tuesdays. They utilize the training created by CertainPath's Learning Alliance which releases new training every week. They also utilize the hundreds of catalogued training available to them within CertainPath's HUB. Tuesdays are also when everyone's numbers are discussed. Michael and Josh run contests often to motivate sales—usually, those contests revolve around the most positive reviews generated.

Build a Real Culture

Michael and Josh read, *The Dream Manager*, by Matthew Kelly, and implemented the program at Rescue Air. They're helping their people accomplish their life goals. Recently, Josh helped a technician create a plan to rebuild his credit so he could realize his dream of buying a home.



We try to take really good care of our people. Being as profitable as we are now, we can do that. CertainPath has made a direct impact on helping us understand that profitability component.

— Josh Campbell, Rescue Air
Member since 2015



Michael and Josh talk with their team members constantly about opportunity and career growth, and for good reason. Rescue Air is growing fast and they need leaders to grow with it.

“At Executive Perspective, we set a Big, Hairly, Audacious Goal (BHAG) of \$10 Million in 5 years at 20% net,” Josh said. “I thought it was nuts at the time.” Now, it seems very attainable given our current trajectory.

Story of Earning Real Money

From 30 Years of Struggles in New Construction to Making the Leap to Residential Service, Repair, & Replacement & Finally Finding Real Profits!

Gary Ward Grew His Company to a Very Profitable \$3.2 Million & Completely Eliminated His Profit-Draining Construction Business in His First Year with CertainPath.

Gary Ward had always been in new-construction HVAC and yet it was causing him to lose thousands of dollars. Over his more than 30 years of owning and operating Gary's Heating & Air Conditioning, Gary gradually exposed himself to the residential service and replacement industry—he saw its benefits. Now, he needed to make the wholesale change.

He might not have known how much he was losing if he never contacted CertainPath for a consultation on his business. The discovery call and personalized solutions motivated him to commit to residential service and replacement. "One of the first things CertainPath had us do was set up our chart of accounts using their chart. We also separated our books into compartments: construction and add-on replacement," Gary shared. "It was then that we realized that new construction was not our life's blood. New construction actually was sucking our life's blood."

The harsh truth was too much to ignore. A difficult change was needed, and Gary never shied from change. Seemingly Gary could have made the wholesale change to residential service and replacement. However, one thing stood in his way: Over the years, Gary took on a minority business partner. And his partner stood steadfast in his desire to remain in new construction.

The two discussed the separation in early March, and by May 31st, Gary and Gary's Heating & Air Conditioning were free of new construction. "I've never regretted it for one moment," Gary stated with absolute certainty.

The remainder of that year, Gary worked to alleviate himself from his new construction obligations and reinvent his company. It was a costly transition, but ultimately, Gary hoped, well worth it.

Implementing the CertainPath Roadmap

Finally, Gary could launch his "CertainPath Roadmap." Technicians were being drug tested and background checked. They also were wearing nice uniforms and driving branded trucks, and CertainPath's StraightForward Pricing® was adopted.

Another key change was a newfound zest for training, role-playing, and regular training meetings. "Right after I bought out my partner, I built a really nice training room, which we use nearly every day," Gary said.



Offering “The Next Step”

In his first full year in service and replacement, Gary's generated \$3.2 Million. “It was a 44.9% growth,” Gary shined. “What's amazing is we grew and still ended up with a phenomenal double-digit net, before tax profit.” Gary used the success to introduce his “The Next Step” program. “We're challenging all of our people to come up with their own goals,” he said. “I'm trying to make this personal for them. We want our employees to have a great life away from work as well.”

Taking Their Own Next Step

To meet continued growth expectations, Gary and his wife Paula (who joined the business several years prior) recognize that their employees are not the only ones who need to strive to get better—they need to aspire to be better owners, too.

CertainPath's Profit Platoons, groups of similar-sized and goal aligned contracting business owners, have been hugely instrumental in their growth. It's kept the Ward's accountable and their focus sharp on their goals. Just as Gary empowered himself to make critical, even uncomfortable, changes in his business and life, he hopes to empower his employees. He wants to create an organization where his people have the knowledge and ability to manage Gary's Heating & Air Conditioning and run it successfully.



Finding CertainPath was the best thing that's ever happened to my business. I only wish I would have found them 30 years earlier. There's no telling where I'd be today. I've never had so much fun being in business!

— Gary Ward, Gary's Heating & Air Conditioning
Member since 2009



“There will come a time where we're going to want more free time. It's kind of funny. At this point in our lives, you would think that we would want more free time. But when we're off and enjoying our free time, we really want to get back to work,” Paula confessed. “We love what we do.”

Story of Claiming Freedom of Time

John Gilmore Is Enjoying Retirement while His Son Darrin Runs the Highly Profitable \$14 Million Business

John Has Been Affiliated with CertainPath Companies Since the 90s; He's Built a Great Company & Life for Himself. His Business Has Continued to Grow 20% to 25% in Each Year for the Last 5 Years.

"Get More with Gilmore." It's the catchphrase penned by founder and President John Gilmore when he opened Gilmore Heating and Air in 1979 in the small town of Placerville, California.

"That slogan has been a benchmark for us," John's son and GM Darrin Gilmore beamed. "We've also started using, 'Red-Carpet Care for Your Heating and Air.' Anytime we interact with a client, our team thinks, 'Am I delivering the absolute best, red-carpet-type service I can?'"



John knows the service-contracting game well and has always enjoyed success. He's long valued the input provided by being in best-practices groups. He was a member of Contractors Success Group, and Success Group International which were the preceding organizations to CertainPath. John became a member in 2001 and hasn't looked back.

This father-son duo quickly pointed out that their success can be traced to their hardworking team at Gilmore. "It really is our people," Darrin insisted. "We have an amazing team."

Home Grow Your Techs

John & Darrin prefer to hire people new to the trade. Attitude is what's most important. New hires do ride-alongs for a week, followed by two-weeks of training at the Ultimate Technical Academy, one of CertainPath's many Vendor Partners, and then three more weeks of ride-alongs. The individual graduates when he feels technically competent and can role-play a call in front of the entire team.

Culture of Training

Training at Gilmore is continuous. Their training center is called Gilmore University. Techs train every Tuesday and Thursday. "Our guys are in there all the time. They'll get here at six in the morning," Darrin said. "We have guys who will ask to ride-along with others. They've very self-aware and work to get better."

Red-Carpet-Care Experience

Every step of the customer experience is first-class. Six call takers collect the 'foundational pieces of information'. Then, two dispatchers carefully match the right tech to the right job using strategies taught in CertainPath's Dispatching for Profits class; they inform the homeowner the tech is an hour and 25 minutes away. Once the tech is in the home, they start with ASI's 85 Point Home Safety Inspection. "In everything we do, we keep the homeowner engaged," Darren explained. We're incredibly thorough. Homeowners often comment how 'no one has ever done this or shown me that before.' All proposed repairs are then broken down into three categories, and it's up to the homeowner to decide how to move forward, giving them control of their home.

Accountability at All Levels

At every level of the business, John and Darrin have checks and balances in place to assist employees in performing their tasks. "We believe in checklists. These are the things you must do to be successful," Darrin emphasized. CertainPath has developed six checklists outlining 188 tasks that must be completed to achieve the top and bottom-line growth contractor business owners need and desire.

Their install and service teams have checklists. Darrin carefully monitors daily core numbers like club conversions and conversion rates on older units. Any negative "Happy Call" is handled immediately.

"We ask customers to rate their experience on a 1 to 10 scale. If someone says an 8, there's a reason."



You must be operationally excellent. It's more important to us, to make sure we're taking care of our customers than growing at all costs. I learned that long ago, and continue being a part of the CertainPath best-practices group because of it.

— John Gilmore, Gilmore Services
Member since 2001



The present and future look bright for Gilmore. "We're budgeted to hit \$14 Million. We've been seeing about 20- to 25-percent growth per year over the last five years.

"I think we can continue at a similar pace," John said. "Darrin is running the day-to-day now. I'm able to enjoy my time as I please. It helped getting with the right organization, CertainPath, who could provide guidance and support over the years as we grew and transitioned to our next goal."

This is just 5 out of our 1,000s of HVAC contractor success stories from our over our 20 years of helping contractors better their businesses. We've seen all types of HVAC business owners looking to get a little something different from the CertainPath systems.

Regardless of where they start or what they want to focus on improving, CertainPath puts every next goal in reach to make businesses more profitable and lives more enjoyable.



“ You can achieve a level of success in contracting you once thought unreachable. You can do it by using the same strategies and systems we've used to grow our company.

— Gus Antos, CertainPath Member since 2004

Success Made Certain.

CertainPath provides a comprehensive business solution that is built by contractors, for contractors. We understand what you need for your business to be a success because we've built it before. Our combination of professional coaching and technology solutions is tailor-made to meet the everyday business needs of contractors and make the challenge of running a business less of a challenge. That means building an office around a comprehensive system, advising workers on everything from the moment the phone rings to the day the truck rolls.

- Delivering better sales and profitability, not just better workflow.
- Find peace of mind and a sense of security in knowing your business is on the right path.
- A support system of contractors who have been in your shoes ensures you never feel alone in the process of change.
- Enjoy a greater work-life balance knowing your business is in good hands, even when you're away.
- Technology designed to simplify and solve the challenges facing your business, not just move them online.

Schedule a no-obligation call now with a CertainPath Business Advisor.

Discover what CertainPath can do specifically for your business. (866) 362-3455