

Go Big, or Go to the Beach?

Coach Kevin helps Nigel Bennett tackle a weighty decision and reignite Aqua-Guard's success

Nigel Bennett was about to pull his hair out. After enjoying several years of business success, Bennett stopped having fun. Frustrated and feeling burdened and drained, he was ready to walk away and go sell T-shirts on the beach - literally.

Bennett is co-founder of Aqua-Guard Spill Response Inc., a firm that designs, manufactures and supplies a comprehensive range of oil spill response equipment including leading edge skimmer systems, containment booms and deployment systems. With more than 35 years of experience in the industry, the company was founded on a legacy of expertise. In the 1970s, Bennett worked in Brazil with his father, an environmental engineering consultant responsible for creating emergency response plans for countries including Venezuela and Thailand. In 1992, after witnessing the impact and aftermath of the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill, Aqua-Guard was established with long-time friend and associate Lawrence Pertile, when the team discovered there was a considerable market opportunity to provide solutions to recover oil after a spill.

The company grew quickly in the 1990s and early 2000s, adding new products, technologies, and solutions. With extensive connections around the world, Aqua-Guard naturally extended its global reach with sales of oil spill containment and recovery systems across Asia, South America, the Middle East and the USA to major petroleum companies, Port Authorities and independent spill response contractors.

In 2004, Aqua-Guard's extensive international exposure, while giving the company a considerable platform for early expansion, set the foundation for Bennett's challenges. Competitors began manufacturing offshore in Asia, giving them a sizeable price advantage over Aqua-Guard which manufactured its products in Canada. Simultaneously, the Canadian

dollar appreciated rapidly against foreign currencies, essentially wiping out the huge foreign currency gains that Aqua-Guard enjoyed in earlier years. Additionally, factors such as the Asian stock market crash and political instability in countries like Venezuela created market pressures and uncertainty for Aqua-Guard. As a result, the company struggled, sales decreased, and Bennett became overwhelmed and frustrated.

TO SELL, OR NOT TO SELL?

To help him figure out what to do with the company, Bennett turned to his long-time friend and accountant for help. Given the complexity of the issue, his accountant referred him to Kevin Lawrence, a business coach that specializes in helping successful entrepreneurs and business leaders get what they really want in business and in life by using breakthrough strategies to overcome obstacles, deal with tough decisions and capitalize on new opportunities. According to Coach Kevin, "Entrepreneurs are driven by a passion to make a difference and create results and they often reach a point where they are very frustrated and need to overcome a big obstacle, or throw in the towel, or worse ride it down."

From his first conversation with Coach Kevin, Bennett knew it would be a good fit. "Kevin makes you see things that you don't realize and gives you the strategies to turn things around and get back on a better path. He's very savvy on so many different things," says Nigel Bennett. Their first meeting worked perfectly with Bennett's style, out of the boardroom and around the picturesque Vancouver seawall, where they walked, pulled everything apart and dissected every aspect of the business; ideas and plans were put to paper in cafés along the way. By the end of the first meeting, Coach Kevin realized that Bennett still had the drive and entrepreneurial spirit to work through his challenges and take his company to the next level.

COACH Kevin

GET WHAT YOU REALLY WANT. **NOW.**

He also realized that it just wasn't set up in a way that was inspirational or fun for Bennett. The company was not going to be sold, and Bennett wasn't going to be selling T-shirts on the beach.

CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT FOR A LEADER TO THRIVE

Coach Kevin and Bennett could have focused on many different problems from lagging sales to research and development; but, the key factor causing Bennett to lose interest was that his environment wasn't set up in a way that worked for his style.

"If an entrepreneur's environment isn't set up in a way that helps them thrive, they lose interest, shut down and look for something else to focus their interests on. As a result, everyone in the entrepreneur's business and personal life suffers, not just them," says Coach Kevin.

As a result, the pair set out to structure the environment in a way that was congruent with Bennett's leadership style and personality. As an idea's guy, Bennett should have been setting the big picture vision and strategy – the role of a CEO, and the role he's best at – and driving the business ahead. Instead, he was more like a chief operating officer, involved in the day-to-day operations, buried in details, stressed out and not having fun.

WHY TOLERATE LESS THAN A PLAYERS?

It very quickly became apparent that the style and strengths of Aqua-Guard's general manager – hired in earlier years – were not congruent with what Bennett needed to thrive and drive the business forward. He was a great guy and good for the way things worked previously, but Bennett needed someone who could innovate and build new technologies. If the company was going to make changes, behaviours would need to change too. After providing clear expectations for success, and giving his general manager the opportunity to rise to those expectations, Bennett decided the next step was to replace the general manager. Within a few months, Bennett hired a new general manager with extensive industry expertise,

and most importantly the perfect personality and skill set to free Bennett up to do what he does best.

"Why tolerate less than A players. An entrepreneur must set the vision, set the expectations for success and then find exactly the right people. Almost every organization has some people that are either not meeting expectations, or don't know what the expectations are as a result of poor communication. Entrepreneurs need to let employees know what's expected and then give them the opportunity to rise to their expectations," says Coach Kevin.

With Bennett freed up to assume the role of a CEO, he was able to develop strategies to overcome the other major challenges facing Aqua-Guard. For example, to address competition from offshore manufacturing, Bennett decided if you can't beat them, join them and he began manufacturing components offshore too. Initially, the idea was met with resistance from Aqua-Guard partners, but Coach Kevin challenged Bennett to pursue it if it was something he really believed in. Working with existing contacts in Asia, Bennett moved forward and set up offshore manufacturing operations.

HELD CAPTIVE BY WORK AND A BLACKBERRY

Working with Coach Kevin, Bennett also created an action plan to get more out of life with Kevin holding him accountable for action and results. Held captive previously by work and his Blackberry, Kevin gave Bennett some firm guidelines to reclaim his personal life. Bennett now takes vacations with his family, books and takes vacations with just his wife and eats breakfast and dinner every day with his wife and three kids. Bennett has even cooked dinner a few times, much to the delight of his wife!

Previously addicted to his Blackberry, going so far as to use it for three hours every morning when on family vacations in Tofino, British Columbia, Bennett realizes how intrusive his Blackberry was on his personal life and now keeps it turned off when he's at home in the evening and when he's on vacation. Taking this change seriously, Bennett openly states, "I'm not allowed to do that anymore, and I'm glad." His next goal is to take his family to a different place on vacation for at least a month every year, without the Blackberry of course.

COACH Kevin

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NEW LIFE, NEW COMPANY

Working closely with Coach Kevin, Aqua-Guard and Bennett have come a long way in the last year.

"You don't really realize how far you've come until you reflect on where you've been. I pulled out some of my original action plans, and I'm very pleased with where I'm at today," says Bennett.

Bennett is now focused on setting the vision, strategy and goals for the organization and has made a lot of tremendous decisions in the last year. Once struggling and considered a headache, Aqua-Guard is quickly turning around and Bennett is excited about the future with plans to triple sales, expand sales and distribution into new countries and strengthen the company's position in current markets.

Bennett has considerable respect for Coach Kevin's ability to hold him accountable.

"Business owners don't have to report to anyone - they don't have a boss - but with Kevin, he holds you accountable and it's exactly what I need," says Bennett. "With Kevin, I can talk about everything, all the issues going on in my life, and he'll share his experiences. He has a heck of lot of experience," Bennett adds.

Nigel Bennett is no longer pulling his hair out and he now enjoys new energy and optimism in his company and in his personal life. "Entrepreneurs can get to a point where they are frustrated, and like an airplane, they end up bumping along the ground. I help to reenergize them, keep them focused on their goals and belief in what's possible so that they can fly smoothly back up to fifty-thousand feet and breathe new energy into their companies and their lives," says Coach Kevin. Now instead of contemplating selling T-shirts on the beach, Bennett just takes his family to a different beach, in a different country every year.

About Coach Kevin

Kevin Lawrence is a business coach, speaker and agent of change, who is driven by a relentless passion for helping entrepreneurs and business leaders get what they really want, in business and life. He deeply believes that entrepreneurs can have tremendous business success along with an enriching, adventurous and fulfilling lifestyle, taking a 'have your cake and eat it too' mentality to an entirely new level.

With more than a decade of hands on experience as a business coach to hundreds of entrepreneurs and business leaders across Canada and the United States, Kevin is an expert at helping clients overcome major obstacles, deal with tough decisions and capitalize on new opportunities to achieve breakthrough results. His strategies, style and savvy approach have helped his clients increase revenue, profitability and productivity; build higher caliber teams; attract ideal (and eliminate headache) clients; and, reduce stress levels and hours worked so that they are freed up to live their personal version of outrageous quality of life.

For more information, visit www.CoachKevin.com or call 1-877-564-6224