



# Get Out of The Way” and Five Other Leadership Lessons

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February 27, 2019*

Hauling away other people's junk, 1-800-GOT-JUNK founder Brian Scudamore has seen it all: a mountain of escargot shells, a naked man and \$400,000 in cash hidden under the floorboards. A lifelong entrepreneur, he's also seen what it takes to succeed in business — and how failing is vital to learning how to get things right.

Today, the company pulls in \$370 million annually in revenue and boasts 250 franchises around the world.

“We wouldn't have gotten there if we didn't fail,” Scudamore said. “We would never have gotten to where we are today if we didn't continue to have the courage to make mistakes, and then learn from every one of those.”

One early mistake? “I realized that I was a terrible leader.”

At RBCDisruptors, our monthly conversation on innovation and technology, Scudamore talked about being willing to fail and the leadership lessons he's learned along the way.

Here are some of his insights:

## 1. Ask Questions

When Scudamore set his sights on franchising, he went out and talked to 12 people. All 12 of them told him not to do it, that the junk removal business wasn't franchise-able. He took the opportunity to ask questions, make changes, and tweak the model to make sense as a national business. Entrepreneurs need to have the boldness and the brashness to stand up and ask.

## 2. Paint a Clear Picture

Focus on what the future looks like, write it down, and share it with everyone. When Scudamore decided to scale 1-800-GOT-JUNK, he told his team the goal was to be in the top 30 metros. The naysayers left. Those who stuck with the company understood the goal, believed in it — and helped him to pull it off.

## 3. Make Tough Calls

Scudamore says the toughest thing he ever had to do was fire best friend, the company's Chief Operating Officer. Together, they made rash decisions and almost bankrupted the business. “The right decision is usually a hard one.”

## 4. Be Out Front

Scudamore didn't always know how to mentor. “I was hiding in my private office, not spending time with my team,” he said. “I didn't want to. I was afraid of them, afraid of conflict.” He learned to put himself out there, and realized that leadership isn't just about growing a business — it's about helping people to grow.

## 5. Hire People You'd Want to Have a Beer With

“I learned how to build a team and culture through failure,” he said. Five years into the business, he had 11 employees — and 9 of them were “bad apples.” The workplace became toxic. He called a meeting, apologized — and let everyone go. He rebuilt by finding the right employees, hiring people who wanted to be friends with — who shared his passion for growth, and would represent the company well.

## 6. Get Out of the Way

Scudamore committed to a bucket list goal on the company's vision board: be featured on the Oprah Winfrey show. It was clearly there for all to see, and an eager young employee took up the challenge, reaching out to the show and developing relationships until the call came in: there was an opportunity for 1-800-GOT-JUNK to be featured. “I did nothing to make that happen,” Scudamore said. “Tyler got out there and did all the work to pull it together.” You know you've gotten leadership right when your team can handle the execution.

Every entrepreneur makes mistakes, but you can't beat yourself up when things go sideways, Scudamore said. Take a breath, and ask yourself what's the one positive thing that can happen from this seemingly challenging situation. He finds the list is often longer than you'd think.

"Failure should be your friend," Scudamore said. "Every single mistake we made we had to make to get to the next level".