

First Reponse Disaster Team



When you look up 'serial entrepreneurs' on the Internet, there's no good reason that you wouldn't come upon Anne-Marie and Ken Poulin. Over the course of their years together, this wife and husband team has started and sold multiple businesses, most recently launching First Response Disaster Team in 2010.

First Response is an emergency restoration company that is focused primarily on clean up and remediation of flood, mold, fire and smoke damage. Their mission: "We help people through difficult times." Based in Edgewater, Florida, the business has grown to more than \$2 million in annual revenues and employs more than 10 people. And the company is easy to recognize out in the field, what with their sharply dressed technicians, all sporting distinctive bright red bow ties.



MEET KEN & ANNE-MARIE POULIN

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It is not the bow ties that set the Poulins and their company apart however. It is their entrepreneurial zeal to constantly look for better ways to run and grow their business. It was that drive to find new strategies to build their business that led the Poulins to the Florida SBDC at UCF and its Advisory Board Council (ABC) program.

The Advisory Board Council is a no-cost board of experts providing advice and counsel to help businesses grow. Each board is custom designed and assembled by the FSBDC at UCF's ABC program manager Jill Kaufman. The FSBDC acts as a matchmaker between established local businesses and area professionals who volunteer their expertise as members of an advisory board, with the volunteers selected to address the specific needs of the FSBDC client.

"Jill did such a great job for us," Ken Poulin remarked. "She and FSBDC handpicked people who had lots of good information about what we are trying to do. They were small business owners like us, folks who had built businesses and sold them. We had an accountant, a banker and even a guy who had been in restoration – our business! – for forty years."

"We met with our Advisory Board regularly over the course of about two years," continued Anne-Marie Poulin. "We had a team that we could ask questions of and they'd give us answers. We'll admit that sometimes those answers weren't what we wanted to hear. However, they were the answers we needed to hear and therefore all the more valuable. Our ABC meetings created a really significant level of accountability for us that helped us grow our business."

Working with their Advisory Board Council, the Poulins concentrated on strengthening the foundation of their business. They developed the policies, procedures, checklists and handbooks they needed to expand or "scale" their business, as they like to say. As a result, First Response was able to put processes in place that are driving revenue increases and earning them recognition as one of "Volusia's Best" businesses.

"The ABC was an amazing experience for us," concluded Ken Poulin. "We look back on the other businesses we've started and only wish we'd come to the FSBDC sooner. We're just really happy to have them assisting us now."

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The Florida SBDC at UCF is a member of the Florida SBDC Network, a statewide service network funded in part through cooperative agreements with the U.S. SBA, Defense Logistics Agency, State of Florida, and other private and public partners; hosted by the University of West Florida; and nationally accredited by the Association of SBDCs.

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