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SIMPSON SMOOTHS OUT ALL THE GUESSWORK IN MOVING HER CLIENTS.

[MAKING IT]

MOVING ON UP

Entrepreneur gives seniors and employees a fresh start

MOST BUSINESS OWNERS MEASURE SUCCESS BY REVENUES and profits. But for Adrienne Simpson, owner of Smooth Mooove Senior Relocation Services in Stone Mountain, Georgia, success has more to do with the number of people she can help, whether it's seniors relocating to retirement communities or young people with less-than-stellar employment histories looking for work. "Business has to be about more than the money," says Simpson.

In 2002, Simpson took her money—\$20,000 in startup capital from savings and credit card loans—and put that principle into practice. And her risk has paid off. In 2007, the company generated \$550,000 in revenues. This year, Simpson expects to bring in \$750,000 because of plans to expand nationally. Of course, none of this would have happened had Simpson not decided to lend a hand.

When her 72-year-old mother, Shirley Funderburg, decided to relocate from Georgia to Michigan, Simpson knew helping her out was a no-brainer. However, sorting through, disposing, and packing Funderburg's possessions plus tending to all the other tasks involved proved more harrowing than she'd anticipated. "By the time all was said and done, Mom or I would have been working with six different companies," Simpson recalls.

Not wanting to put her mother or herself through the hassle of working with so many different services, Simpson took on the herculean task herself and in the process found a business niche.

"Seniors don't move because they want to; they move because they have to," says the 52-year-old. The job might entail having antiques appraised, selling an estate, and having medical equipment transported—all services that Smooth Mooove offers in

Once she recognized that all seniors had special moving needs, Simpson purchased a truck and hired movers to service her first customers—whom she found by word of mouth. The early days were largely spent learning the industry and what services seniors ultimately needed. But finding the right employees for her 10-person firm was particularly challenging, largely because Smooth Mooove clients often have acute emotional needs. "It's not unusual for us to show up on moving day and find the senior in the house crying," she says. Some prospective employees aren't comfortable with that and Simpson admits that she initially experienced a high turnover rate, but she's since adjusted her interviewing strategy. "One of the questions I ask is, 'Do you still have a grandparent in your life?' or 'Talk to me about your relationship with your grandparents,'" she says. "It's the inner person I'm trying to get at."

Seniors aren't the only ones Simpson helps. She worked with the state labor department to hire young African Americans struggling to get jobs because of minor criminal infractions or credit blemishes. "It was a conscious effort to try to change their situation," she says.

And with a list of 1,200 people worldwide who have expressed interest, Simpson plans to franchise Smooth Mooove by 2009.

Though she's known for years that she would follow the path of entrepreneurship, Simpson had no idea her efforts would help so many get a fresh start. "The business is taking on community dimensions that I never even thought of when I first started."

—Tamara E. Holmes

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