

How One Scrappy, Serial Entrepreneur Is Making a **Big Impact** in our Community

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You can find Michelle Coffino in one of two places. Styling hair at the salon she's owned for thirty years or running a scrap metal salvage yard she bought out of bankruptcy – where she is changing lives. Mickey, as she's known to most, is a self-proclaimed serial entrepreneur who's hell-bent on changing the way people think about hiring employees.

DIVERSIFYING

What does a hard-working, hair stylist and single mom of triplets know about running a salvage yard? She knew one thing for sure. Reluctant to rely on her salon business as her sole source of income, she needed an additional revenue stream to remain financially independent.

“A client was closing his scrap business, and I bought it out of bankruptcy because I knew that I had the hustle factor to make it work,” says Mickey, who started Queen City Metal & Recycling Center in 2013. “I’m an environmentalist at heart, and I looked at it as a way of giving back to the community to recycle metal and recycle lives.”

During Mickey's first week at the scrap yard, she saw a woman and three children, who were all living in their hot car during a summer heat wave, driving in and dropping off scrap metal as a way to feed her children. She saw people in this urban set-

ting living on the street and the poverty that ensued. She also met a man named James Russell, who came in for an interview expecting questions about his prison record and instead met the woman who would give him a second chance – no questions asked.

“My eyes were wide open to the population of people struggling to make ends meet in our city, many of them straight out of prison,” says Mickey. “I knew I had to do something, so I began hiring, mentoring and educating people coming out of incarceration.”

SECOND CHANCES

Mickey believes in taking men and women who've had run-ins with the law and giving them a skill set, a trade and an employment opportunity. This belief was the impetus for launching her Second Chance program, a 501c3 organization designed to help and hire people incarcerated or coming out of prison who need a hand up.

“I want to change the mindset for business owners about the benefits of hiring men and women coming out of incarceration,” says Mickey. “I knew I needed partners in this effort, so I started calling companies to connect and hire.”

She talked to her colleagues at the Institute of Recycling Industries, representing 3,500 scrap dealers across the country, along with Unicor who already had a prison program, believing that it takes entrepreneurs to be able to change the conversation.

“One of the biggest changes in order to have a successful re-entry into society is to have men and women gain an education and start the process while incarcerated,” says Mickey.

EDUCATION IS KEY

Mickey knows that to be able to get back in the game you have to be able to sell yourself, present yourself, and learn to take rejection. This is a giant leap for some, and a gap in the system leading to employment. Along with that, is a common hurdle of using

technology to access education, ultimately leading to employment.

One of the companies she reached out to was Cardone Enterprises, the most popular online sales training university in the world today. It was the backing that Elena Cardone provided in supporting women entrepreneurs that started the ball rolling. Now, together, they are bringing the missing education and employment piece through Cardone University to the platform that Mickey's created.

Grant Cardone, owner and founder of Cardone Enterprises and Cardone University, recalls a time in his life when he was literally unemployable. “With my background and history, the only job I could get was selling... and it changed my life forever,” he says. “My hope is that the strategies that inmates will learn from my University will equip them to not only survive once they re-enter the workforce, it will allow them to thrive.”

Statistics support that the time is ripe for employers to be more open to hiring those with a criminal history, and Coffino's partnership with Cardone University intends to propel this population. According to the Society of Human Resource Management, more than 7.8 million jobs need to be filled in 2020, with 650,000 people being released from jail and prison every year.

Today, Mickey is in the process of putting together

a platform inside institutions, working with the Federal Bureau of Prisons as well as GTL, a leader in transformative corrections technology that improves outcomes for inmates. “The Bureau of Prisons has 102 institutions where I feel Cardone University can play a major role in educating men and women to be re-entry ready, not recidivism ready,” she says.

MOVING MOUNTAINS

While there are heaps of buses, cars, copper and kitchen appliances stacked on the 4.5 acres that make up Queen City Metal and Recycling, the mountains of metal she moves every day is nothing in comparison to the lives she's impacting.

Coffino was named North Carolina Small Business Person of the Year in 2017 for her economic impact and employment opportunities for people coming out of incarceration. She was also recently selected by Wells Fargo as a National Small Business success story, kicking off their Town Hall in Charlotte.

But, what drives Mickey most is the success stories of people who have

worked for her – the women who now own their own businesses, and those who have reunited with their families after years in prison.

“At the end of the day people will remember how you treat them.”



Owner and stylist at MC3 Salon & Spa for 25 years



Mickey Coffino recently appeared with Grant Cardone of Cardone University. “We are very honored to announce our partnership to take on prison reform and revolutionize an exit strategy for men and women in employment, education and housing,” she said.



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