While most students who finish graduate school hope to continue their careers with a better job, Todd Hopkins, CBSE, decided to create his own opportunity. “While completing my MBA at Butler University, I had a classmate who was in one of my study groups. She had a small cleaning business and wanted out,” said Hopkins, founder and CEO of Office Pride Commercial Cleaning Services in Franklin, Ind. “She had one customer, seven vacuums and a bunch of oddly sized trash bags. I bought it all for $800. Then I decided to learn everything I could about the industry and the business.”

This opportunity has now blossomed into an internationally known commercial cleaning franchise system serving thousands of facilities through the United States, with more than 100 franchise locations across 17 states. Read on to see how Hopkins fulfilled his career aspirations, as well as what he thinks some of the industry’s challenges are today.

Office Pride Commercial Cleaning Services was born out of your MBA program research project. What prompted you to take the business you acquired a step further?

My research validated that this was a great industry that would reward me for my hard work. I wasn’t afraid to work hard to achieve my dream of building a franchise company, so I moved forward with passion and determination.
What do you think is the most important thing entrepreneurs should consider when starting their own business?

They first need to clearly define what they want life to look like in five or 10 years and then determine if the business they are considering can help them get there. They also should make sure they have the full support of their spouse, if they are married.

You’ve authored and co-authored three books. Why did you decide to write?

I dreamed of writing and publishing a book for as long as I can remember. I want to help people and add value to their lives. Writing has been a great way to do that. It is very rewarding.

What lessons do you highlight in these books?

The first book, “Five Wisdoms for Entrepreneur Survival,” focused on how to survive as an entrepreneur. It covers how we can have a biblical perspective on business and apply God’s word to our everyday business decisions. The second book, “The Janitor,” is a business parable about how to experience our personal, business and professional life to the fullest. The third book, “The Carrot Chaser,” is another parable that teaches how we can live out our faith in the marketplace.

What are some things you are excited about in the industry?

This is a great industry with tremendous opportunity. Many businesses and industries are no longer a formula for success. But the building service industry continues to grow. There have been a lot of advances in technology that make this business easier and more efficient, especially in areas of software and equipment.

What are some of the challenges you’ve seen in the industry, and how is Office Pride addressing those challenges?

The unpredictability of our government’s decisions is the biggest challenge. We choose to stay focused on what we can control and try not to worry about what we can’t control. The other big challenge is the competitive pricing that exists today. We have found ways to become more
efficient, and at the same time, create systems to help our franchisees communicate our value, which helps customers feel confident to invest a little more in a good quality brand and service.

What is your personal approach to business innovation?

I like to ask myself the question: “Does it have to be this way? What needs to happen for it to not be this way?” From there, I pull out a big sheet of blank paper and pray for wisdom. Another good approach is to listen to the vendors and franchisees and not be afraid to try new things. We are always seeking the best for our franchisees, and many of the best new ideas have come from them!

What do you believe makes for a good working relationship with customers?

Crystal clear and upfront communication! Our customers do not expect perfection, but they do want consistency, professionalism and good communication.

How would you describe your management style?

Always learning and trying to get better. I don’t like to manage; I like to lead. This is what has been so great about being a franchisor. I get to lead. I can keep learning and teach our franchisees everything I can. It creates exponential benefit.

What book are you reading right now?

“The Speed of Trust” by Stephen M.R. Covey. This is a powerful book about establishing creditability and building trust. It is probably one of the most useful books I have ever read.

What is the best piece of advice you’ve received in your career?

Outside of my dad teaching me to always be honest, I would have to say it was from my former pastor who did a teaching on decision making and explained the importance of “playing the tape forward” and considering all the possible outcomes that could result from a certain decision. This has caused me to be more cautious and strategic with my decisions.