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After heeding advice from a counselor at SCORE, Jeffrey Braun saw revenues for his furniture business quadruple in the last year.



PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRISTOPHER CUMMING

[SCORE]

Sitting On Profits

Jeffrey Braun's collaboration with SCORE counselor Ed Milan helped the furniture designer build a sturdy foundation.

In November 2006, Tacoma-based furniture designer Jeffrey Braun was just about ready to give up on the struggle of developing his own furniture company.

"I was at a low point in terms of sales and self-esteem," says Braun, who opened his one-man operation in 2002. "I decided to give myself six months to turn my business around or I was out."

While attending a seminar on bookkeeping at the Seattle chapter office of the Small Business

Administration, Braun dropped by the offices of SCORE and happened to meet a counselor named Ed Milan. The two scheduled an appointment, and Braun laid out his main business concern—the need to increase company revenues.

Milan, an expert in finance and contract negotiations, gave Braun advice on negotiating better terms with manufacturers and finding a representative to get his products into more stores. Milan's involvement also made Braun feel re-

sponsible for following through on the plans the two had discussed.

"I'm a small-business owner," Braun explains. "I work for myself, and I'm the only one in my office. With Ed involved, it was great to have accountability with him—to show up to our meetings and be accountable for the action items we came up with."

Braun recalls being in the middle of a large negotiation with a manufacturer and calling Ed for advice. "It's great to get an outside, objective viewpoint in these decisions," Braun says. "He's not as emotionally attached to the company as I am."

Today, Braun's furniture can be

ordered through local designers and is found in a number of specialty furniture stores, including Schoenfeld's in Bellevue, Home Site in Seattle and Dana's Showcase on Bainbridge Island.

In 2007, Braun didn't just meet his goals. He blew them away. And Braun gives a considerable amount of the credit to his collaboration with Milan.

"Ed was a sounding board for my ideas and helped prioritize what needed to be done," Braun says of Milan's guidance. "My revenues during the last year have quadrupled. I attribute a great deal of that to working with SCORE and Ed." —T.M.