

ENTREPRENEUR: 101

Protect assets while serving customers well

Jay Johnson/SantosHuman

By Gigi Wood

He's learned a lot about managing employees.

"Never underestimate how well they can perform and how badly they can behave," says Jay Johnson, CEO of SantosHuman, the commercial side of the Virtual Soldier Research Program at the University of Iowa. "Sometimes it's hard to see the risk associated with how we do business and that process of protecting corporate assets can never be underestimated."

Mr. Johnson has worked for several companies, helping many of them increase sales. His first major endeavor was running microfilm company Crest Information Technologies from 1981 to 1999, when he sold it. It grew from three employees to 400 producing a million documents daily.

About a year ago he was put in contact with the Entrepreneurial Development Center in Cedar Rapids, which eventually recommended him for the top job at SantosHuman.

"We are in the process of finalizing our license with the University of Iowa Research Foundation for our software," he says.

He expects the company to roll out its services by the end of the year, making the simulation software used in the Virtual Soldier program available commercially.

"(It's) a human model that can per-



SANTOSHUMAN

fectly and naturally replicate what actually happens with human movement in any environment," Mr. Johnson says. "There are other models out there, they're more static."

New entrepreneurs need to be extremely cautious with their assets and make sure they are prepared for the worst.

"Crazy things happen every day and an ounce of prevention is worth a lot more than years of hassle," he says. "It could be as simple as making sure passwords are updated on a computer because one day information on a computer may be lost and to recover it could

take years of litigation. So the things that you take for granted, the things you never ever think will happen, happen every single day."

He also suggested leveraging company assets to increase profitability by looking at every aspect of the business to identify additional marketable products.

"Leverage your assets as frequently as you can," he says.

Starting a new business takes backbone, but is easier than changing a company once it's operational.

"It takes tremendous courage and tremendous faith to launch a business," he

THE CORRIDOR BUSINESS JOURNAL'S

ENTREPRENEUR: 101

says. "Stopping anything requires twice as much courage and twice as much fortitude in overturning one's pride."

Those who are in business need to be careful about who they choose as partners.

"For example, when you're beginning to look for a banker, even for a small loan, if the banker doesn't at least say, 'I'd like to come visit your operation,' then you haven't found the right banker at the right time nor temperament to be the talent that you'll need going forward," he says.

But most importantly, entrepreneurs need to focus on their customers and provide quality services and products.

"I went to an ice cream store last week in Iowa City and it was the worst ice

cream I had tasted ever," Mr. Johnson says. "It tasted like it had been there since last summer. It was almost bad. I have never, ever in my entire life had bad ice cream, but I almost did yesterday. So it's interesting how easy you can lose focus and not care about your product."

He spoke of a company with great focus.

"I met these coffee company owners who realized they were creating the finest espresso moment," he says. "So they made sure the coffee cup was perfect, they made sure the machine roasting the coffee was perfect, they made sure the bean they chose was the finest bean roasted. Every aspect of that was covered and

they made it into one of the most profitable companies in the coffee industry.

Mr. Johnson says SantosHuman is working to reach that level of success.

"We're working very hard on creating our espresso moment," he says.

The company is working to apply its technology for use with manufacturing companies, the military and other industries to simulate human interactions with new products in a three-dimensional environment. The company recently received a \$150,000 grant from the Iowa Department of Economic Development to aid with its launch.