

# FROM STIMULUS TO STARTUP: MY JOURNEY INTO THE VENDING BUSINESS

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## INTRODUCTION: THE DECISION

If you would've told me back in 2020 that a government stimulus check would spark my first real business venture, I probably would've laughed. At the time, I was just like a lot of folks, working hard, trying to stay afloat, and making sure my family was good.

But when those COVID stimulus checks hit, my wife Robbyn and I saw a chance to do something different. Not blow it. Not just stash it. But build something with it.

I had always been the type to look around for opportunities. One day, while browsing YouTube, I saw people setting vending machines up in barbershops, small offices, and auto repair shops, making steady side income. That stuck with me. I started digging deeper, and the more I learned, the more it made sense.

With Robbyn's full support and belief in my ability to connect with people, we decided to use our stimulus money to buy vending machines and launch what would become Proactive Vending.

What started with late night research and Marketplace searches turned into a full business journey. We didn't have all the answers, but we had drive, each other, and a willingness to figure things out along the way.

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## **CHAPTER 1: THE FIRST HUSTLE AND LEARNING THE MARKET**

I'll be honest, at the beginning, I didn't know much about vending machines. But once the idea was in my head, I was all in. I knew I didn't have thousands of dollars to waste, so I had to learn fast, and I had to learn smart.

Every night after work, I jumped online and started searching through Facebook Marketplace, Craigslist, Offer Up, anywhere people sold used equipment. I quickly learned that the vending world has a mix of opportunity and landmines. You'll find some good machines, but you'll also find a lot of junk. Machines with missing keys, no bill validators, or stuck compressors. Machines that look good in pictures but don't even power on in person.

That's when I realized, you've got to ask the right questions. You can't be afraid to slow the seller down and really look at what you're buying.

One day, I came across a listing from a guy in Fredericksburg. The machine he had was a Royal Vendors 650 drink vending machine, and it was located at an outdoor motel. His prices were reasonable, and the machine looked clean in the photos.

When I got to the location, I was a little worried at first because the machine was stationed outside of an old motel, though it was covered. But after looking it over and getting all of my questions answered, I decided to move forward with the purchase. Everything worked, and we got our hands on this machine for under a thousand dollars.

I wasn't taking any chances, so I asked one of my guys from work, Sean, to ride with me. These machines aren't light, and I wanted to make sure I had plenty of muscle to load them up safely. That Royal Vendors 650 is big and heavy. As a first timer, moving it was a challenge. But with an appliance dolly, ratchet straps, and some muscle, I made it happen.

In the weeks before that trip, I had been doing a lot of research, especially on YouTube. Watching other vending operators walk through their machines, explain how they stocked them, or break down their profits. All this valuable information gave me a clearer picture of what I was getting myself into. That kind of real world insight was gold. It helped me ask smarter questions and avoid beginner mistakes.

What made all this even more possible was the support I had at home. From day one, Robbyn was fully on board with the idea of turning our stimulus checks into a vending business. She recognized my natural ability to connect with people, a skill she'd seen me sharpen during my years at my old soda company and believed it was the perfect fit for vending. Her confidence in my ability to strike up a conversation and turn strangers into long term relationships played a huge role in solidifying our decision.

Robbyn didn't just support the idea. She helped build the foundation. She spent hours looking for vending machines on Marketplace, sending me leads during work, on weekends, and at night. Together, we brainstormed the name "Proactive Vending," a name that reflected our mindset of always staying ahead and putting our best foot forward.

She also helped design the business logo, create our website, and produce business cards and machine stickers. With her organizational skills, she helped me with setting up the business bank account, tracking our receipts, filing our paperwork for taxes, and handling the paperwork and phone calls required for setting up our NAYAX card readers.

Robbyn made sure we looked and operated like a real business from the start. Although she preferred to work behind the scenes, she always stepped up when I needed her. When I was feeling overwhelmed, she was there. She had a way of knowing exactly when to jump in, and I can't stress enough how much that meant.

I also must mention we were trying to figure all of this out while also dealing with a newborn, my little gummy bear at the time, Ryleigh (she didn't have teeth yet, lol). Robbyn's continued positive attitude, her eye for detail, and her desire to support this venture in every way possibly made her an irreplaceable part of the business.

## **Small Business Insights: Behind Every Hustler is a Real One Holding It Down**

- **Don't Underestimate the Power of Support:** Surround yourself with people who see your potential and keep you focused on your "why."
- **Delegation is Strategy, Not Weakness:** Identify tasks someone else can do better or faster, then trust them to handle it. That's real leadership.

- **Brand Starts at Home:** Let your brand reflect your values, your journey, and the people who shaped it.
- **Hustling With a Family is a Different Type of Grind:** Family obligations don't have to be a setback. They can make you sharper, more focused, and more intentional.
- **Behind the Scenes Doesn't Mean Unseen:** Recognize and value the quiet contributors. Their steady hands help carry the load and keep things from falling apart.
- **Build a Business Like It's Real from Day One:** Even if it's a side hustle, treat it like a full company. That mindset will shape how others see your business and how it grows.

## Small Business Insights: How to Hunt for Machines and Avoid Getting Burned

- **Where to Find Machines:** Check Facebook Marketplace, Craigslist, Offer Up, and local vending forums. Be consistent in your searches.
  - **Know What to Ask:** Always ask about keys, coin mechs, bill validators, and if the machine is powered on. Don't assume the seller has tested it.
  - **Inspect Before You Buy:** When meeting the seller, power on the machine, check each button, ensure lights and coils work, and listen for unusual noises.
  - **Look Past the Surface:** A machine can look clean in pictures but be full of issues in person. Be ready to walk away if it doesn't feel right.
  - **Bring Backup:** Always bring help when picking up a machine. They're heavy, and having someone with you makes loading and decision making easier.
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## CHAPTER 2: THE FIRST PLACEMENT, USING A LOCATOR SERVICE

When I was ready to take the leap and place my first vending machine, I knew I needed help. That's when I discovered locator services, people whose job is to find vending locations for operators like me.

I found one through a Facebook group called Vending Nation, where vendors share tips, resources, and connections. I figured if I was going to give this business a real shot, I needed a location to get started. I paid for the locator service, and within a short time, they landed me a lead at a hotel in Glen Allen, just outside Richmond.

This hotel mostly served construction workers and travelers who needed a quick rest stop. When I first spoke with the manager, I could tell they weren't happy with their current vending setup, it was unreliable, half stocked, and barely functioning.

Working with the hotel manager, I offered a solution: I'd bring in a machine that was clean, reliable, and regularly stocked. But first, I had to get the current vendor removed. I took the initiative to call that vendor directly, explain the situation, and work out a peaceful removal of

their equipment. Once they agreed to pull out, I carefully moved their machine to a secure spot behind the hotel for them to pick up.

I moved in one of the FSI combo machines I had purchased from Ray, the kind where the snack side holds the main motherboard and can operate independently. That size unit was a perfect setup because of the layout of the hotel's vending area.

Before stocking, I gave the machine a deep clean inside and out. I also took the time to think through the product selection, things that would move well with a blue collar crowd. I stocked the machine with honey buns, chips, candy bars, sodas, and energy drinks.

Within the first week, the machine was doing numbers. Between the hotel staff and guests, it saw steady action. The hotel technically became my first public facing location, but my actual first machine placement was in the warehouse where I worked. That location gave me the training ground I needed, and by the time I got into the hotel, I already had some reps under my belt.

### **Small Business Insight: Get In Where You Fit In**

- **Vending Locator Services:** They cost money, but for beginners without connections, they can open doors faster than cold calls.
  - **Address Existing Pain Points:** Replacing poor service can be your way in. Find businesses that are ready for change.
  - **One Win Can Spark It All:** Focus on getting that first success under your belt. It builds your confidence and your credibility.
  - **Take Initiative:** Don't wait for someone to make room for you. Be willing to step up and solve problems others ignore.
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## **CHAPTER 3: HUSTLE MEETS STRUCTURE, STARTING WITH HOME BASE**

Before I even landed my first public location, I had what I considered my true first placement. The Royal Vendors 650 I picked up in Fredericksburg with Sean.

My original plan was to just get my hands on the machine and move it to my garage and let it sit there for a couple of weeks while I figure out the settings and then eventually find a home for it. After getting the machine loaded into the U-Haul, I had an idea. Why not place it at my job's warehouse?

I figured it could serve both the office staff and the warehouse personnel I worked with, while also giving me the chance to get real world experience. I had to think quick on my feet and while Sean would be getting ready to jump back into the U-Haul, and expecting me to have the next

move in what we would be doing with the machine figured out, I told him to give me a few minutes while I made a quick phone call, and without even a second thought, I brought up the idea of having a vending machine in the warehouse and the purpose the machine would serve up to my boss at the time.

I figured he would've been out fishing on a nice early Saturday morning, so I felt I only had about a minute or less to give my best pitch and get "Big Al" (The nickname we gave him back at the branch) on board. Kind of casually, and it caught me off guard a little, but he was open to it without hesitation. That quick green light became my first unofficial vending pitch, and my first real "yes."

Once I had my boss's approval, Sean and I brought the machine to the warehouse. This time, we had a big advantage, we used one of our company forklifts to move it from the U-Haul to its new home. That was a whole lot easier than a dolly and muscle.

After unloading the machine that morning, I later got with Robbyn to put together a list of what we needed for the drink machine based on the number of slots and how much product it could hold. We also decided to start a membership with Sam's Club so we could buy in bulk, a move that would pay for itself over time through the business.

I picked up the drinks and brought them back to the warehouse, filled the machine, and spent even more time learning the settings, everything from pricing to setting the right coil spins to ensure the products dropped properly.

That night, Robbyn and I took Ryleigh to the warehouse, and the three of us stocked the machine together. Ryleigh was still just a baby, but she had the biggest smile in the picture we took in front of that machine. It was our first family vending photo, and that memory still gives me a sense of pride.

That warehouse location became a testing ground. I used it to experiment with products, test coin mechs, and learn service routines without the pressure of a public facing customer. Later on, I placed one of the FSI combo machines from Ray in that same warehouse. Eventually, I'd move that combo unit to a tire shop location, another location that would eventually turn into another long term placement.

But it all started with that first warehouse placement. That one "yes" from my job gave me the confidence to keep building, keep learning, and treat this vending thing like more than just a side hustle.

## **Mentor Gold Mine: Ray & The Art of the Combo**

**"Sometimes the real jackpot isn't the machine you buy, it's the person who shows you why it matters."**

### **Finding Ray, My Biggest Breakthrough**

My biggest breakthrough in the beginning didn't come from Marketplace or Craigslist. It came from a real connection, Ray, a local vendor who changed everything.

I discovered him through a Google search while looking for local vending machine suppliers. One link led me directly to Ray's contact information, and I reached out immediately. Ray wasn't just interested in making a sale, he genuinely wanted to help. He patiently explained how combo machines worked: "The snack side holds the main motherboard and can run independently, while the drink side must connect to it."

That seemingly small detail was a game changer. It allowed me to place units into tight areas, like back offices and small lobbies, without any trouble.

### **First Visit, A Warehouse of Potential**

When I first visited Ray's warehouse in Richmond, I didn't know what to expect. Ray greeted me in a very professional manner and gave off the immediate impression of a businessman who took the game very seriously. He even had his own small team of young associates working for him, one guy was bringing in several cases of drink product while another guy was on standby and rotating the new inventory in with current product that was already there and waiting to go out, and there was a third associate swapping parts from one machine to the other. All three of the associates seem to have had a nice flow going and they all seemed as if they had worked with Ray for a while, and they were even wearing shirts with his company logo on it.

Within a couple of minutes, I realized I'd found my new connect. His warehouse was packed wall to wall with vending machines in various states of repair, each one a potential gold mine.

On my initial trip, Ray sold me an older FSI combo for \$900 and generously threw in a spare coil motor. He demonstrated how to swap pricing labels and even showed me how to test bill validators and coin mechanisms with a small power box. He advised, "Always keep a spare bill validator and coin mech in your car. If one fails midweek, you're losing money until it's fixed." It was practical advice that proved invaluable.

Ray also demonstrated how to go into the machine's settings and adjust key functions, like pricing, product test drops, and spin cycles. For example, if I wanted to swap out a 12oz can of Coke for a 20oz bottle, I had to reprogram the spin setting so the larger bottle would vend correctly. Getting this wrong could mean products getting stuck or, worse, multiple items dropping at once, costly mistakes for a new operator.

He gave me more than just equipment, he equipped me with essential knowledge:

- **Smart Pricing:** "Price your top selling items at whole numbers and the rest at odd cents to keep sales consistent."
- **Essential Spare Parts:** "Always keep spare coin mechanisms, bill validators, and drink spacers on hand."
- **Operational Setup Tips:** "Learn to navigate machine settings, adjust coil cycles based on product size, and keep spare parts ready."

- **Solo Transport Tactics:** "Use tilt techniques, wedges, and bracing straps so you don't damage machines or your back."

Ray even gave me tips on how to properly load machines onto a trailer, especially when working alone. He showed me how to brace the base, use proper tilt angles, and secure machines without straining my back or damaging the unit. It's little things like that, practical advice from someone who's been there, that saved me from rookie mistakes early on.

Ray wasn't just my vending supplier, he became a mentor and friend who saved me countless headaches. His wisdom provided the foundation for my success. Whenever someone asks how I scaled so quickly, I tell them, "Find your Ray, and soak up every bit of knowledge they offer."

### **Small Business Insights: Build From Where You Stand**

- **Your First "Yes" Can Be Closer Than You Think:** Don't overlook places you already have access to. Your job, your church, a family owned business, these can be perfect starting points.
- **Test Before You Expand:** Having a low pressure environment like a warehouse lets you learn the ropes without risking a major relationship.
- **Treat Every Move as a Lesson:** Moving machines, stocking, cleaning, each step builds your skills. Don't rush the process.
- **Invest in Bulk Early:** Memberships like Sam's Club or Costco may seem small, but they save time and money over the long haul.
- **Include the Family in the Wins:** That first stocked machine with your loved ones is more than a milestone, it's the start of your business culture.
- **Relationships Over Transactions:** Find the connectors in your industry. Building genuine relationships with them ensures opportunities continue to flow.

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## **CHAPTER 4: MAKING IT OFFICIAL, FROM HOBBY TO LEGIT BUSINESS**

By the time we had our machines running and some decent momentum behind us, I knew it was time to make things official. We weren't just playing around anymore, this was becoming something real. That meant we had to treat it like a real business.

The first major step we took was forming an LLC. I went with LegalZoom because I didn't have time to mess with all the paperwork on my own. The process was simple, they only needed some basic information, and from there, they handled the rest. What really sealed the deal for me was the convenience of their app. They kept all my documents stored in what they called a "Vault," which made everything easy to access and kept things organized. I liked having a digital paper trail and not having to keep a bunch of physical folders.

The name "Proactive Vending" came from a brainstorming session between Robbyn and me. We didn't want something too flashy or common. I wanted something that would best represent myself and work ethic. That's where the name came from, being ahead, staying consistent, and always delivering quality. That name became more than just a label, it represented our mission.

Next, we opened a business bank account with Bank of America. I had to learn quickly how important it was to separate business funds from personal ones. At first, I was swiping my personal card for Sam's Club runs or grabbing supplies and thinking I'd just "sort it out later." That got messy really quick. Once we had the business account, everything became cleaner. I could track income, record expenses, and Robbyn could handle taxes with way less stress.

We also invested in our presentation. Robbyn helped design the Proactive Vending logo and created our business cards and stickers. These weren't just nice to have, they made the business feel more legitimate. When a customer saw a card reader with a branded sticker and contact info, it showed them we were professional and dependable. That's what helped us stand out from folks who were just winging it.

Running a real business meant changing how I thought. I started tracking sales more seriously, logging service dates, and keeping receipts in an organized system. Robbyn was a huge part of this. Her ability to stay on top of the back office stuff let me focus on learning the machines and expanding locations. We weren't just vending anymore. We were running a company.

## Small Business Insights: Build the Foundation Right

- **Forming an LLC Doesn't Have to Be Hard:** Services like LegalZoom make it easier, especially when time is limited.
- **Separate Business from Personal Early:** It'll save you confusion, help you grow faster, and make taxes easier.
- **Name Your Brand with Purpose:** Choose a name that reflects your values, not just what's catchy.
- **Track Every Dollar:** A clear view of your income and expenses lets you make smarter business moves.
- **Professional Presentation Matters:** A logo, business cards, and branded stickers may seem small, but they show people you take your business seriously.

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## CHAPTER 5: RUNNING ROUTES AND FINDING RHYTHM

### The 12:18 P.M. Test

At 12:18 p.m. on a Thursday, the hotel called: floors were being stripped and the machine needed to move, today.

I grabbed an appliance dolly, two short straps, and a couple of cases that always sell after a shutdown. By 12:55, the machine was powered down and rolling, by 1:20, it was leveled and back online.

That's when it clicked: the real job wasn't "vending machines," it was time and routes. The hub made that save possible. The rhythm kept everything else profitable.

## **Building the System**

By 2022, the business had settled into something more steady. The hotel and tire company placements were already secured, and the machines at my company's facility (the warehouse), my hub, gave me a strong starting point each day.

The early hustle of finding machines and landing locations had shifted into the next challenge: figuring out how to actually run the business on a consistent schedule while balancing my job and family. What made this work was the hub. Having that warehouse machine in the middle of my other placements gave me a central point to move from. I could stock it quickly if needed, or just use it as my launch pad for the rest of the day's route.

The location made it possible to be flexible, which turned out to be one of the most important parts of keeping customers happy. If a machine went down or sold out unexpectedly, I could usually reach it the same day.

I started to fall into a rhythm with the routes. The hotel machine became a Thursday priority, because that's when I could get it ready for the weekend rush. Weekends always meant more traffic at that spot, and I learned quickly that if I stocked it late in the week, I could maximize sales. Most of the time I'd go during my lunch break, it was close enough to make the trip without disrupting my workday too much.

The waste facility machines worked on a different schedule. Since it was along the same route I took to and from work, I'd usually stop there in the mornings before work, or as my last stop on the way home. That way I didn't have to make a special trip, and it kept the machine stocked without adding too much time to my day.

## **Strategic Shopping**

Shopping became a routine too. Most of the time I went to Sam's Club, since it carried the bulk products I needed at the right price. I'd mix in Kroger, Food Lion, or BJ's when I needed something specific or to catch a deal.

One standout product was Monster Energy's 16oz cans, especially the green original flavor. I'd buy the 24 packs from Sam's Club for around \$38. These sold for \$3.50 each and moved fast. Another consistent seller was Duchess Honey Buns. These were affordable in bulk, and customers bought them steadily week after week.

Over time I could almost predict which shelves at Sam's would be cleared out and which items would run low, which meant I learned to buy extra when I could.

## **Flexibility & Discipline**

Even with a rhythm, unexpected things happened. One time the hotel needed to strip and redo their floors, which meant the machine had to be moved. I couldn't wait until the weekend, so I took my lunch break that day to get it done. Situations like that showed me how important it was to be available, not just to stock machines, but to solve problems when they came up. That flexibility was part of what helped me keep those long term relationships.

Through all this, I often thought back to the advice Ray had given me early on. He told me that managing a vending business wasn't just about the machines, it was about managing time and resources. At first, I didn't realize how true that was. But by the second and third years, I could see it clearly.

His pointers on planning routes from a central hub, keeping a buffer of product on hand, and staying ahead of problems instead of reacting to them gave me a system to lean on. It made me more confident and disciplined. Instead of scrambling, I started to plan my routes like a professional, thinking not just about today's sales, but about how each stop fit into the bigger picture of keeping all locations running smoothly.

By then, the grind wasn't just about filling machines. It was about building a rhythm and developing the discipline that kept the business stable. Those years taught me that vending is less about quick wins and more about consistency, and that lesson carried me further than any single sale or location ever could.

## **The "Move Kit" Checklist**

### **For same day saves & quick repositioning**

#### **Component Items:**

##### **Core Gear:**

- Appliance/industry dolly (with strap hooks)
- 2× short straps (WLL ≥ 500 to 1,000 lb)
- Moving blankets/edge protectors
- Door wedges
- Gloves with grip + closed toe shoes

##### **Consumables:**

- Painter's tape (temporary door/cable management)
- Zip ties
- Alcohol wipes (bill validator / reader cleanup)

### Quick Procedure (Flat Ground):

1. **Power down & secure:** Unplug, lock the door, remove loose product if crossing bumps.
2. **Load to dolly:** Tip slightly, center under CG (Center of Gravity), pad contact points.
3. **Strap it:** Wrap a short strap around the dolly + machine at mid height, cinch tight.
4. **Route prep:** Wedges in doors, floor protection over thresholds.
5. **Roll & reset:** Controlled tilt, re-level, plug in, quick test vend.

### Small Business Insights: Route Rhythm That Pays

- **Use a central hub.** Stage overflow, cut travel, and enable same day saves.
  - **Schedule by location rhythm.** Hotels want Thu pre-weekend, industrial sites work best AM or end of day.
  - **Shop pattern smart.** Bulk at Sam's, plug gaps with Kroger/Food Lion/BJ's so routes don't slip.
  - **Flex earns trust.** A fast off-cycle move or refill buys years of goodwill.
  - **Plan routes like a pro.** Hub → high velocity stop → slower stop, with a 15 to 20% time buffer for surprises.
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## BONUS CHAPTERS: THE LESSONS THEY DON'T TEACH

### BONUS CHAPTER 1: THE PLAYBOOK YOU CAN'T GOOGLE

Most people want a vending business because they think it's passive. They want the money without the miles. They want the freedom, without the sacrifice. They want the payoff without ever paying the price.

But the truth is this: **Vending doesn't start in comfort. It starts in the hours nobody sees.**

I didn't learn this business from a mentor. I didn't learn from a training course or a YouTube channel. I learned from the late nights when I stayed up researching how to fix machines I hadn't even bought yet. I learned from the Saturdays where I drove hours to look at used equipment. I learned from getting stuck, making mistakes, and figuring it out on my own.

I never moved machines before work in the morning. I didn't start there. I wasn't at the point where I could do this casually or squeeze it into a lunch break. I did my learning when the day was already over and everyone else was relaxing or asleep.

Most people don't talk about the nights when you're standing in front of a machine with the back panel open, trying to understand why it won't accept bills. They don't talk about drilling into steel doors to mount a card reader. They don't talk about adjusting vend motors or changing prices coil by coil. They don't talk about struggling alone with a machine in your garage, learning by trial and error.

**That's the part you can't Google. That's the grind that separates entrepreneurs from spectators.**

There were days I spent my Saturdays traveling to different cities just to see machines for sale. Some were junk. Some were perfect. Some needed cleaning and testing. Some were projects. But I always knew this business wasn't going to build itself.

Most of the lessons that built me weren't technical. They were personal: Commitment. Patience. Problem-solving. Grit.

The kind of lessons you learn when nobody is watching and no one is teaching. The kind you learn when you have to push through the fear that you might be making the wrong move. The kind you learn when you're too far in to quit, so the only option is to figure it out.

That's why vending changed me. Not because of the machines, or the money, or the locations, but because of what it demanded.

**The vending business is built in the late nights and early mornings, not the other way around.**

No one can show you how to navigate every problem. No mentor can predict every mistake. No video can teach you how to care about your business. But your habits can.

That's what this chapter is about, not just the "how," but the who you become while you're learning the hard way.

Because the playbook that matters most in vending isn't online: **It's the one you build when you're willing to keep going when most people would stop.**

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## **BONUS CHAPTER 2: THE SOLO OPERATOR RULE**

When I got into vending, I wasn't alone. I had support, real support. I had Ray, who knew machines better than I did. I had Robbyn, who helped with the business side and was always ready when I needed an extra set of hands. I even had a silent partner. But even with all of that, something became clear early on:

**This was my operation. The responsibility was mine.**

I didn't want to burn every problem on someone else. I didn't want to run to Ray every time a machine jammed. I didn't want to hand every small issue to Robbyn, and I wasn't going to call for help every time there was a setback or a surprise. And I didn't save every minor issue for my silent partner either. I wanted them in the right role at the right moment, not as a crutch or primary resource.

So even though I had people I could rely on, I kept that "help card" on standby for the moments where it mattered most. Not for every little issue, but for the situations where their strength or expertise needed to play its rightful role.

And that's what most people don't understand about vending, or business in general:

**Ownership comes before assistance.**

There were a lot of problems I had to face head-on:

- diagnosing machines
- adjusting coils
- clearing jams
- figuring out card reader installs
- moving machines
- dealing with location challenges

I didn't avoid challenges because I had backup. I embraced them because I had to lead first. That's where the growth happened.

And when I did call for help, it wasn't because I was stuck, it was because it was the right time to bring someone in.

**That's what being a real operator is.**

**The Real Lesson:**

Having support doesn't excuse you from responsibility. It doesn't mean someone else fixes your problems.

It means:

- you lead the solution,
- you carry the weight,
- you take the first swing at the problem.

Then you bring others in when their role is needed.

**That's the Solo Operator Rule: Even with a team behind you, the business moves when you move. And the business grows when you take the lead.**

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## BONUS CHAPTER 3: MEASURE EVERYTHING TWICE

One of the biggest mistakes I made early on didn't come from a machine breaking down. It didn't come from a location changing their mind. It didn't come from a technical problem I couldn't solve.

### **It came from excitement.**

This particular situation was at one of my two detail shops. The plan was to place a Seaga HY900 right in the lobby area. I spent about three weeks going back and forth with the manager, talking through the idea, sending pictures of the machine, and getting the green light to bring it in. Once I had the "yes," I went and purchased the machine, brought it home, and spent time in my garage making minor tweaks and getting it ready for its new home.

In my mind, everything was locked in.

I finally secured the location, loaded up the machine, backed the trailer into position, unloaded, strapped up, and was ready to roll in like a professional vending operator.

### **And then the machine didn't fit.**

It was too wide for the front entrance. Too tight for any convenient side access. There was no clean way to get that Seaga HY900 from the trailer into the lobby.

I had pictures of the machine. I had approval from the manager. Everything on paper looked lined up.

But I made one simple mistake that could have saved that entire situation:

### **I didn't measure the pathway into the building.**

That's when I learned something vending will remind you of over and over again:

### **Success doesn't just happen at the destination. It happens in the preparation.**

Measuring isn't just about doorways. It's about thinking ahead. It's the difference between showing up and installing. It's the difference between a win and a setback.

### **How to Apply This Rule**

When I visit a new location now, I don't just look at where the machine will sit. I walk the entire route and measure:

- every entrance

- hallways and turns
- elevator sizes (if there are any)
- parking or loading distance
- flooring and obstacles (steps, thresholds, tight corners)

I visualize the entire move from trailer to final placement, not just the last step where the machine looks good in the lobby.

It becomes second nature:

- Before you commit, measure it.
- Before you move, confirm it.
- Before you assume, verify it.

**This is the Measure Everything Twice Rule: If you take 2 minutes to plan, you save 2 hours fixing a mistake.**

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## **BONUS CHAPTER 4: THE LATE NIGHTS & EARLY MORNINGS RULE**

I didn't build this business during regular hours. I wasn't moving machines before work or squeezing in installs during lunch breaks. My growth happened after everyone else was done for the day.

There were nights when I was in the garage with a machine open, trying to troubleshoot a validator or figure out why a coil was double-vending. There were weekends where I spent hours driving across cities just to look at used machines, test them, clean them, or move them into place.

**That's when the progress happens:**

- when you're tired,
- when you're not sure,
- when nobody else is around.

The vending business doesn't reward convenience. It rewards consistency.

**You don't build your business when it's easy. You build it when the rest of the world is done for the day.**

And that's the real takeaway:

Late nights and early mornings are where the mistakes turn into experience, and where experience turns into confidence. That's the part you can't shortcut.

**This business doesn't start with profit. It starts with sacrifice.**

**That's the Late Nights & Early Mornings Rule.**

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## **CHAPTER 6: LET'S TALK NUMBERS, THE MATH BEHIND THE MACHINE**

When I first started, I fell into a trap that catches a lot of new business owners. I'd go to Sam's Club, spend \$200 on snacks, fill the machines, and then a week later, I'd pull \$300 out of the bill validators. I'd look at that cash and think, "Man, I'm making money!"

But I wasn't really looking at the numbers. I was looking at cash flow, not profit. It took me a while to truly understand the difference between what I was spending and what I was actually making. I was just moving money around, buying products, selling it, and buying more, without knowing if I was actually building wealth or just breaking even.

I realized that if I wanted to scale, I couldn't just guess. I needed to know exactly how much of that \$1.00 bill was mine to keep, and how much belonged to Sam's Club.

### **The Real Cost of a Snack**

The mistake I was making was looking at the receipt total. I'd see a charge for \$11.98 and think of it as an "expense." But that's the wrong way to look at it.

You must break it down to the Cost Per Unit (CPU).

Take those Lance Variety Pack Crackers:

- **Case Price:** \$11.98
- **Units in Box:** 40
- **True Cost:** \$0.30 per pack

Once I saw that number, \$0.30, everything changed. Those thirty cents are the only number that matters. If I sell that pack for \$0.50, I'm making twenty cents. Is that enough? When you factor in gas, time, and the occasional expired bag, probably not.

I realized I had been underpricing some items simply because I didn't know the math. I was practically giving the product away because I was pricing with my "consumer brain" instead of my "business brain."

And that profit mattered. I don't need to brag about making thousands a month, but I will say this: Proactive Vending paid bills. It paid for groceries. It helped pay for my daughter's private school tuition. That wasn't just "extra cash," that was the business working for my family. But it only happened because I learned to count the cost.

## The Solution: Automating the Decision

I knew I couldn't stand in the aisle at Sam's Club doing long division on my phone for every single item. It wasted too much time, and honestly, it was stressful. I wanted to walk in, grab my inventory, and know exactly what to charge without thinking about it.

So, I built a system to do the heavy lifting for me.

I created a **Product Cheat Sheet**. The goal was simple: Save time and guarantee profit.

I listed every item I bought, like Lance Crackers, Honey Buns, and Monster Energy, and built a simple formula to tell me the ideal vend price. I stopped guessing.

- **Honey Buns:** Cost \$0.57 → Vend Price: \$1.25 (Profit: \$0.68)
- **Monster Energy:** Cost \$1.58 → Vend Price: \$3.50 (Profit: \$1.92)

The cheat sheet became my bible. It bridged the gap between the bulk price on the shelf and the price sticker on the machine. It meant I could look at a box, look at my sheet, and instantly know, "Okay, this needs to be \$1.25 to make sense."

## Why This Tool Exists

I'm sharing this tool on ProactiveVending.com because I want to save you the months of confusion I went through. You shouldn't have to wonder if you're making money.

The Cheat Sheet is designed to help you:

- **See the True Cost:** It breaks down the case price into the single unit cost so you see the real numbers.
- **Set the Right Price:** It gives you the "Ideal Vend Price" to ensure you're hitting a healthy margin (usually doubling your money or better).
- **Scale Faster:** When you know your margins are safe, you can buy more inventory with confidence.

Vending is a numbers game. If you get the math right, the machines work for you. If you get it wrong, you're just working for the machine. This tool ensures you get it right every time.

## Small Business Insights: Know Your Numbers

- **Revenue vs. Profit:** Just because you have cash in hand doesn't mean you have profit. You need to know the difference.

- **Cost Per Unit is King:** Stop looking at the \$12 case price. Look at the \$0.30 unit cost. That's your baseline.
  - **Don't Guess, Calculate:** Pricing shouldn't be a feeling. It should be a formula. If you can't double your money (or get close to it), ask yourself if that item is worth the slot.
  - **Save Your Brain Power:** Use tools (like the Cheat Sheet) to make these decisions once. Don't waste mental energy recalculating margins every time you shop.
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## THE PROACTIVE PLAYBOOK: 4 RULES TO LIVE BY

### 1. The Tech Upgrade: Nayax Card Reader

In this business, if you are cash-only, you are leaving money on the table. A card reader isn't just an accessory, it is the lifeline of a modern vending operation.

#### Mandatory Benefits:

- **Modern Curb Appeal:** Customers expect tap-to-pay convenience
- **Inventory from the Couch:** Monitor stock levels remotely
- **Real-Time Revenue:** See sales as they happen
- **Machine Health Alerts:** Get notified of issues before they become problems

### 2. The Financial Backbone: A Reliable Silent Partner

Scaling takes capital. A silent partner supplies capital while trusting you to execute operations.

#### Keys to Success:

- **Transparency (The Same Page):** Regular updates build trust
- **Shared Work (More Than Just a Check):** Value their input and involvement
- **Speed (Opportunity Ready):** Capital on standby lets you move fast on deals

### 3. The Spare Part Rule (Two is One, One is None)

Always keep a "Go Bag" in your car with essentials like a spare coin mech and bill validator. If a machine goes down on a Friday night, you want to swap the part and leave, not wait three days for shipping while losing sales.

### 4. Don't Be Too Proud to Ask for Help

This business has a learning curve. Leverage community (like Vending Nation) and your personal circle. Real bosses ask questions.

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## CONCLUSION: THE 24-HOUR HUSTLE

When I started this journey with a stimulus check and a U-Haul rental, I didn't have a roadmap. I just had a supportive wife, a drive to build something, and the same 24 hours in a day that everyone else has.

That's the biggest lesson I want to leave you with. You don't need to quit your job to start. You don't need to sacrifice your family time to build. But you do need to be intentional.

Vending isn't a "get rich quick" scheme. It's a "get free gradually" system. It's about turning a Thursday lunch break into a restocking run so your Saturday morning is free. It's about building a hub at your job so your route makes sense. It's about doing the math so you know your time is being rewarded.

There were days when I was tired after a long day at work. There were weekends when moving a machine felt like the last thing I wanted to do. But then I would look around at the team I had at home. It was Robbyn asking me to send her the product list for a morning Sam's Club run to jumpstart the week. It was her making the weekly bank deposit runs for me after work or waking up early on Saturday mornings to beat the noon closing time. It was Ryleigh right there with me in the family room, making a game out of the coin machine while we rolled change together.

That was my motivation. That shared hustle and extra support was the fuel that kept me going week after week. We weren't just building a business, we were building a life.

If you are reading this and thinking about starting, start. Do your research. Buy that first machine. Learn the rhythm.

You have the time. You have the ability. And now, with this blueprint, you have the tools.

**Be Proactive.**