

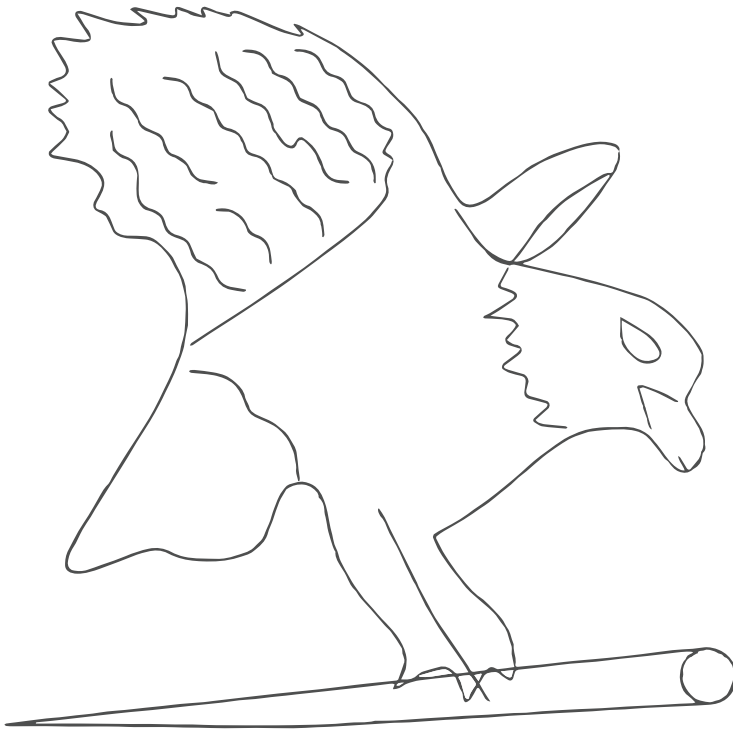
LIVING THE AMERICAN DREAM

The HawkSoft Story



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Living the American Dream: The HawkSoft Story

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*To our past and present employees,
clients, and community partners who have
contributed to HawkSoft's success.*

– Paul & Carol Hawkins

– Sean & MyLiege Hawkins

– Jason & Heather Hansen

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Prologue

“Welcome to the HawkSoft Family!” These words greet every person who comes to HawkSoft, Inc. in Canby, Oregon. Twenty-five years ago, the company started in a rented two-bedroom apartment shared by Paul and Carol Hawkins, their daughter, Heather, and son-in-law, Jason Hansen.

Today, HawkSoft employs more than a hundred people in a 15,000-square-foot brick building it owns at 1230 Southeast Third Avenue, with a second office located in New Bern, North Carolina.



HawkSoft Headquarters in Canby, Oregon.

HawkSoft started with the AppWriter program in 1995, which helped overworked insurance agents type information for policies and print them out rather than filling in forms by hand. HawkSoft ended its first year with seven customers. Joined by Paul's son, Sean, they soon developed the Client Management System to assist independent insurance agencies in creating effective workflows.

We are proud to be a family-owned business in a family-centric industry that protects American families and businesses.

– *Paul Hawkins*

Today, it provides computer software to thousands of insurance agencies in forty-nine states. But HawkSoft is much more than a computer software company catering to insurance agencies. It's a family-owned business with employees and customers who are treated like family.

Paul's story, in his own words, demonstrates what HawkSoft means to its customers and its workers. At the HawkSoft User Group's National Conference in 2019, Paul stood after the flag ceremony and told more than four hundred people in attendance, "Because of all the wonderful people the good Lord has surrounded me with, going to work is fun every day for me."

At an insurance industry conference, this one in Charlotte, North Carolina, Paul described what was different about HawkSoft. Following a competitor who boasted about everything he and his large company could do for agents, Paul took the stage. He said,



Paul Hawkins, HawkSoft CEO and co-founder.

“We [referring to his competitors] pretty much do all of the same stuff. We do the same technical stuff, but that’s not who HawkSoft is. We are proud to be a family-owned business in a family-centric industry that protects American families and businesses.

“I came up the same way you did. I was a captive insurance agent and then went to the independent side. So, what are some of your struggles?” He asked and he listened.

When he left the stage, he received a standing ovation. “I love this industry—the insurance industry,” Paul said.

Paul frequently attends big industry and carriers’ conferences where people work together to establish and enhance insurance standards. Sometimes he presents at the conferences, serving on panels to discuss concerns in the industry.

Twenty-five years ago, if someone had suggested that he’d speak at national insurance industry conferences, Paul would have laughed. His earlier jobs had included well driller, truck driver, and warehouse manager. But today, he is a national leader in the insurance industry. He agrees, “Paul Hawkins had to change a lot.”

When HawkSoft started, Paul, Carol, Jason, and Sean each wore multiple hats. Paul worked at an agency, Insurance Express, and programmed software in his spare time. Carol did the bookkeeping and worked outside the home to help pay bills. Heather worked full time so Jason could devote himself to the company which provided very little pay. Sean joined the team full time in 1997.

In the early days, when Sean or Jason answered a customer service call, and agents made requests for the software, the two would ask for more details. “We’re pulling the code up and making the change while they’re telling us,” Sean said. By the time the phone call ended, Sean or Jason would say the coding had been done, and the next version would contain those upgrades.

Sometimes a client would call complaining about a function of the software. Jason said that in conversation, he or Sean would decide they didn’t like it either. They would decide, “Let’s change that right now so we don’t have to take that call again.”

“That’s the part I miss about getting bigger,” Jason said. “It’s harder and harder to be as direct and make changes like that. It used to be a lot of fun when someone would say, ‘Hey I’ve got this great idea; what do you guys think?’ and I could literally drop

everything, spend an afternoon or a day coding it.” Then they’d spend a week or two testing it to make sure it wouldn’t cause other problems.

Today, it’s different and it needs to be. “The processes are there to make sure we don’t have any meltdowns,” Jason said.

Sean pointed out that when they were smaller, if their software contained bugs, fewer people were affected. “If we send out a bug now, I have 18,000 users who will see that bug immediately and the call center upstairs will blow up,” Sean said. “So, it’s important that we are more process oriented today, but I sure do miss those days when we could be more cowboy and make changes on the fly.”

HawkSoft was established by deeply held values, though they weren’t put into words until 2012. (The last two attributes were added later.) These core values guide the three founders, the board of directors, the executive team, and every employee in their interactions at HawkSoft, and hopefully, in other aspects of their lives.

HAWKSOFT CORE VALUES

Sense of Community
Deliver an Exceptional Experience
For the Good of All
Do the Right Thing
Work to Live, Don’t Live to Work
Continuous Innovation
Pursue Growth and Learning
Attitude of Gratitude

The founders of HawkSoft believe that their success is based on satisfaction of two important stakeholders: the customers and the employees. In working with people, Paul believes the one-on-one is vital. Rephrasing television host Fred Rogers, Paul said, “The most important thing you’re doing now is talking to who you’re talking to, and they have to feel that.”

Paul believes in rewarding and giving credit to employees for their hard work. He believes he never could have achieved success alone. He also believes in giving credit to God.

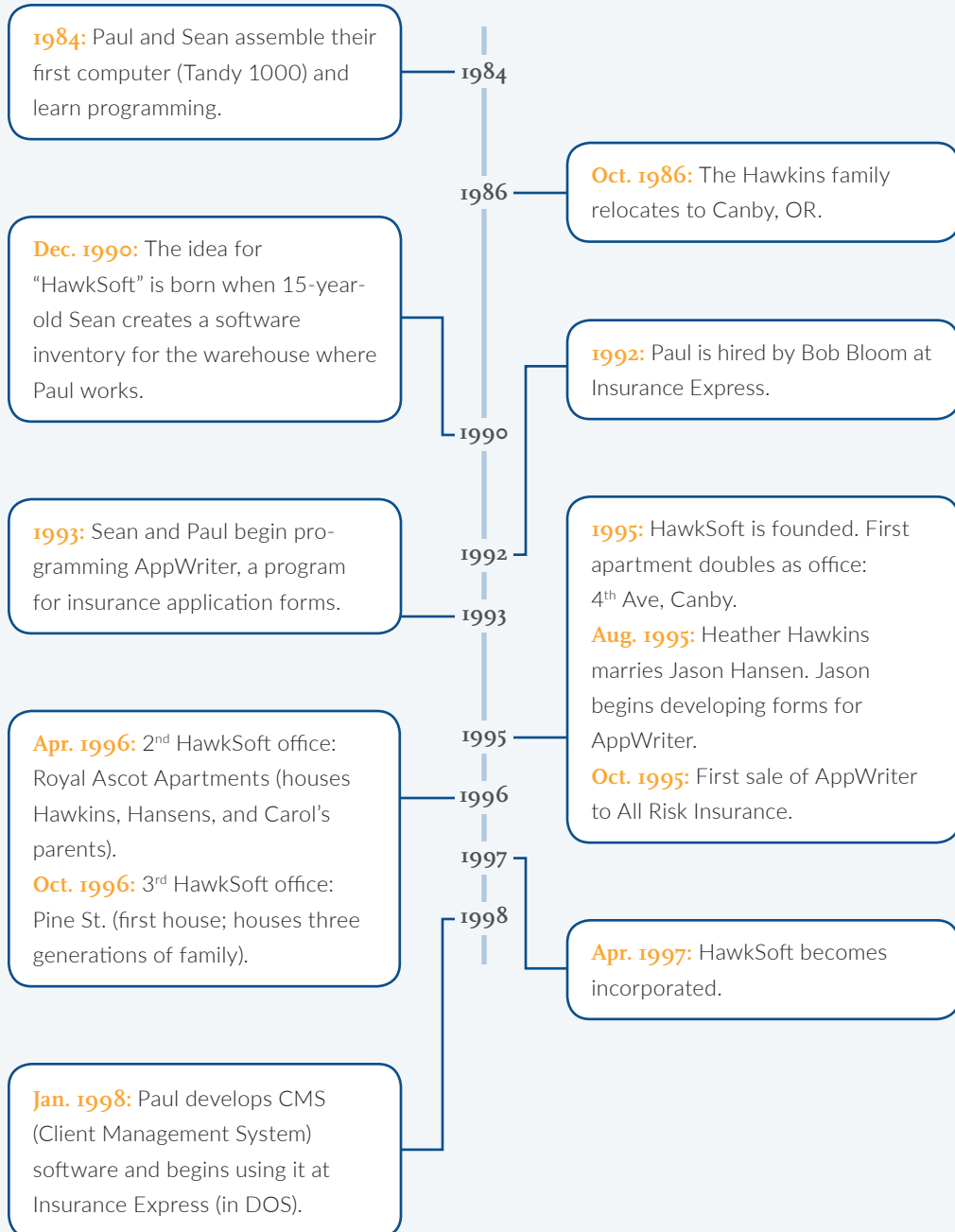
We at HawkSoft
are living the
American dream.

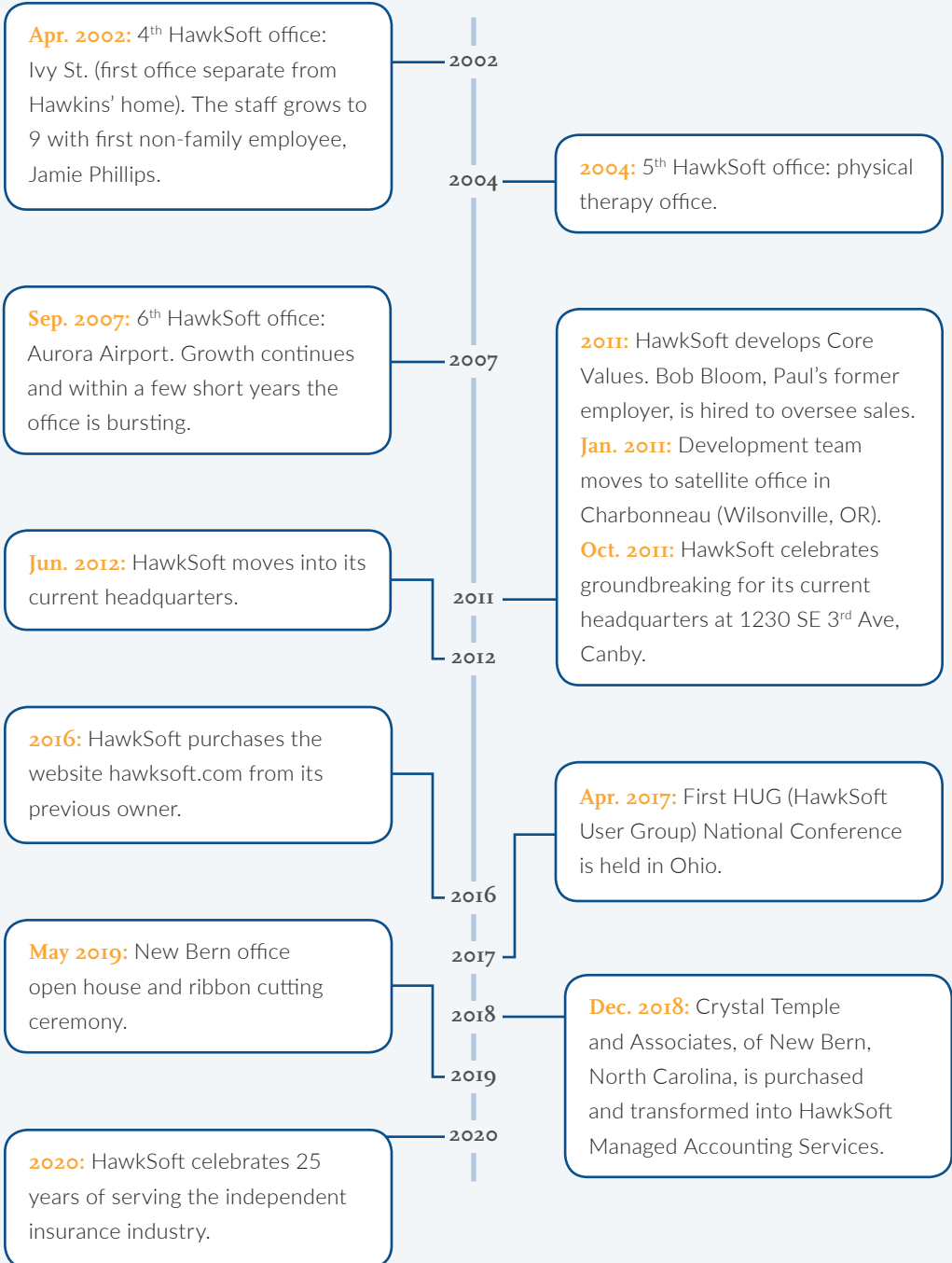
– *Paul Hawkins*

The success is about relationships. Paul said, “That’s the way we run our business. Even our competitors are some of our best friends, because they trust us, because we’re not underhanded and we’re doing things the right way. That’s the premise that I’ve built this company on.”

Growing from seven customers to thousands in twenty-five years, starting in a two-bedroom apartment and expanding to service people across the United States, HawkSoft exemplifies achievement and success, all while retaining its family-friendly culture built on core values. Paul knows it, and he tells others, “We at HawkSoft are living the American dream.”

HawkSoft Milestones





LIVING THE AMERICAN DREAM

The HawkSoft Story



Sean Hawkins with his 5th grade teacher, Dick Fanazick. Dick's influence on his young student began a journey that led to the formation of HawkSoft. In 2018, Dick was honored by HawkSoft for his impact on Sean and the company.



Chapter 1

Planting Seeds

When the phone rang one day in 1984, Paul and Carol Hawkins had no idea how much that call would change their lives and their family's future. It was their fifth-grade son's teacher, Dick Fanazick, at Liberty Elementary School in Spangle, Washington, south of Spokane. "Mr. Hawkins," he said. "We've got a problem with your son."

"What did he do now?" Paul Hawkins responded.

"Oh, nothing wrong. He didn't do anything bad. Just come in and talk to me." They did.

"I caught him doing something kind of unusual in class the other day," Mr. Fanazick told him. "He was doing his work upside down, left-handed. I think he might be bored, and that just scares me. That's the easiest way to lose our brightest kids, through boredom."

Mr. Fanazick suggested that Paul and his wife, Carol, purchase a computer for their son, Sean. Paul was interested in computers, too. The teacher told him, "Don't buy any software, just the computer."

"I'm not sure how my parents managed to pay for that computer back then," said Sean's sister, Heather Hansen. "We didn't have money for extras, or even essentials at times." In fact, Paul and Carol Hawkins borrowed money to buy the hardware. They stopped at Radio Shack, putting two hundred dollars down on the \$1000 1984 Tandy 1000. After putting it together at home, Paul

flipped on the power switch. Nothing happened. He waited, thinking it needed more time to warm up. Still nothing.

Paul began to pull out the boxes to haul the hardware back to Radio Shack and tell them it didn't work, but Heather piped up. "Daddy, you might want to plug it in." He did, and that was the start of Paul and Sean's experience learning how to program computers.

"He didn't give me any games or software," Sean said. "He gave me a programming book and said I could have any game I wanted as long as I programmed it myself."

As soon as Sean walked in the door from school each day, he sat in front of that beige keyboard and heavy box monitor. "I would read through this book and learn to program," Sean said. When Paul arrived home from his job as a well driller, Sean would show his father what he'd created. After Sean crawled into bed, Paul



The Hawkins family's first computer – a 1984 Tandy 1000.

himself sat in front of the equipment to see what he could do. “He would learn a bunch more stuff late at night, and the next day he showed me what he learned,” Sean said.

Paul recalled, “For a while we worked together, and he showed me what he learned, and I’d learn something, and we bought books and more books and more books.”

First, Sean wrote a little Hangman program. They played it four or five times, and then shifted to creating something new. “It was the doing it that was fun for us,” Paul said.

When Carol mentioned her desire for a recipe program, they created one. Then they built her a check register to track spending with a spreadsheet of sorts. “We were always looking for a project to build,” Paul said.

Learn by Doing

For the CEO of a multimillion-dollar tech company, Paul Hawkins never studied engineering or computer science at college. He and Sean both learned by doing, just as Paul had done most of his life.

As the baby of the Hawkins family, with three older brothers and a sister, Paul found himself bereft when his mother died when he was only two years old. His father couldn’t work and care for the children at the same time, so they lived with members of his mother’s large family.

“When he lost his mom, he not only lost her, he lost his whole family,” said his wife, Carol. “He lost his siblings, and he lost his dad. Various family relatives went to the funeral, and they basically all went home with a child. They split up the whole family.”

His oldest brother, Tom, grew up in Iowa, while his sister and another brother lived with an aunt in Chicago. His brother Michael later entered foster care. An aunt and uncle whose youngest

daughter had just graduated from high school raised Paul in Halder, Wisconsin. Leo and Frances Baur Sr. wanted to adopt Paul, but his father refused.

“They had older children who were having families, and those children had kids who were basically about two years younger than Paul,” Carol said. “So, he was mostly raised with his second cousins.” One of those cousins lived in Mosinee, Wisconsin, next door to Earl and Barbara Bavlnka and their two daughters, Carol and Mary. The two sisters would play with Paul and his cousins in the snow.

“I was five, and he was six when we first met,” Carol recalled. “I can remember my mom calling me in for lunch, and I did not want to go. Every time he would come to visit, I would watch for him, and he would watch for me,” Carol said. They began dating in high school. “Paul flunked penmanship in grade school,” Carol recalled. “When we were in high school, I’d send love notes back to him to have him translate, because I really could not read his handwriting.”

After they graduated from Mosinee High School, Paul and Carol left for separate colleges. Carol attended the College of Menominee Nation, where she earned the equivalent of an associate degree, while Paul studied at the University of Wisconsin at La Crosse. They married March 4, 1972, in Menomonie, Wisconsin, while they were both still attending college.

Paul dropped out to work as an industrial painter and welder in Mosinee, spray-painting the inside of tanks and welding the outside. Unfortunately, he felt the company failed to comply with safety regulations established by the Occupational Health and Safety Administration and treated its employees poorly. “He would come home at night breathing paint fumes,” Carol said.

Paul worked his way up to warehouse manager, but then he was asked to lay off employees on Christmas Eve, 1976. Paul

explained, “I worked for a horrible guy who fired seventeen people on Christmas Eve, because he thought those were the seventeen people most likely to start a union.”

Paul had a fantastic crew; he didn’t want to fire anyone. When his boss continued to insist that he fire someone, to keep employees on edge and fearful, Paul knew he was in the wrong company.

Paul started a union, then he called on the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to investigate the company. Shortly afterwards, he left for a vacation with Carol to visit her sister, Mary, who had married Darrell Alvis, a man in the Air Force previously stationed in Spokane. After leaving the Air Force, the couple had moved to Cheney, Washington. (Mary later married Frank Lacey.) “Paul knew that we were not going back, because of what he had started at work,” Carol said. “Eventually, OSHA did take that company to the cleaners, because they had treated their employees so badly.”

While in Cheney, they met her sister’s friend who was selling land. “We said we would like to buy it, but Paul needed a job,” Carol explained. “Because Paul was a welder, that real estate guy introduced us to a water well driller.”

After Paul was hired as a well driller, the couple returned to Wisconsin, put their house on the market, and packed their belongings. They moved to Washington and lived in several apartments while looking for a place to buy. They put down money on some land shown to them by the real estate agent. It had a beautiful meadow and gorgeous trees, but before the paperwork went through, Paul was laid off.

While disheartening at the time, the loss of the land proved a huge blessing, because the following spring, water flooded the land. “We had figured out where we would put a house. After the flood, we realized you could have put a canoe right through the

middle of where we wanted the house,” Carol said. “They weren’t able to get electricity and telephone and everything back in there for years.”

Paul found a job with Ponderosa Drilling in Spokane, drilling municipal and irrigation wells throughout Eastern Washington, including the Tri-Cities. He also did exploratory drilling around Mount Rainier. “He loved the work,” Carol said. “And he was good at it.”

Initially, while working in Spokane, Paul would be home each night. But when his employer negotiated a contract to dig irrigation lines in the Tri-Cities, Paul would be gone ten days at a time, home four, and gone again. By then, Paul and Carol had two children, Heather and Sean. It was tough on the whole family to have Paul gone for such long stretches of time.

“Paul would come home on weekends, and the kids just weren’t connecting with him at all,” Carol recalled. Paul didn’t like being away from his family so many days at a time. While driving down the road in the Tri-Cities, Harry Chapin’s song “Cat’s in the Cradle” played on the radio, with lyrics talking about a young boy growing up just like his dad, a man who sacrificed time with his kids to work all the time. “I could hardly see the road because of the tears,” Paul recalled. It hit too close to home.

He prayed all that weekend. “In the end, the Lord answers prayers in mighty ways, and I realized that I had to put my family first.” Paul said. “He not only gave me a way out of it, but He also taught me some things in the process.”

His first employer in Spokane, Pat Coffee, needed someone to take over his well-drilling business before he lost it. Pat contacted Paul. “Paul, if you can salvage this, it’s yours,” he said. Paul took the opportunity and, while he couldn’t save the company, he learned a lot about business, and it brought him home and off the road.



Paul and Carol Hawkins, with their children Sean and Heather, 1983.

Years later, just before Sean left on his two-year mission for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Paul received a reward for answering God's call when his son turned to him from the pulpit and said, "Dad, thanks for coming home."

A month into the well-drilling venture, Paul suffered "a little heart quirk," as Carol called it. They decided to abandon the business. "It took Paul about three years to get back to feeling normal again, health-wise," she said.

He worked several temporary jobs and began building agricultural equipment for Barber Engineering. Demand increased, so the company operated around the clock with three shifts. When the economy slowed, the company cut back the latest shift to four days a week and eventually had to lay off employees. As one of the last hired, Paul was among the first to go. The company continued to provide their laid-off employees with a Christmas bonus and a card for two years. "They cared," Carol said.

THE DICK FANAZICK AWARD

In December 2018, HawkSoft created the Dick Fanazick Award to honor the fifth-grade teacher who cared enough about his bright young student, Sean Hawkins, to encourage his parents to buy a computer.

Paul Hawkins, his daughter, Heather, and her husband, Jason Hansen, worked together to surprise Sean on December 18, 2018, with a visit from his fifth-grade teacher. HawkSoft flew Dick and Denise Fanazick to Canby, Oregon, from their home in Spokane, Washington. Their daughter drove down from Seattle to be part of the surprise.

“Jason, who is also one of the three cofounders of HawkSoft, found a 1984 Tandy 1000 computer on eBay like the one my dad first bought Sean,” Heather said. “We surprised Sean with that, too, on the same day that Mr. Fanazick visited.”

While introducing his former teacher to the HawkSoft family, Sean said, “I just personally want to say thank you, because all of this is possible because of you. I just want to say how much teachers make a difference in our lives, and Mr. Fanazick is the teacher that made a huge impact in my life. Each of us has had similar circumstances happen in our lives.”

Paul said, “We each have different pivotal points in our lives. As we look back at the decisions we made, we can see how they have changed

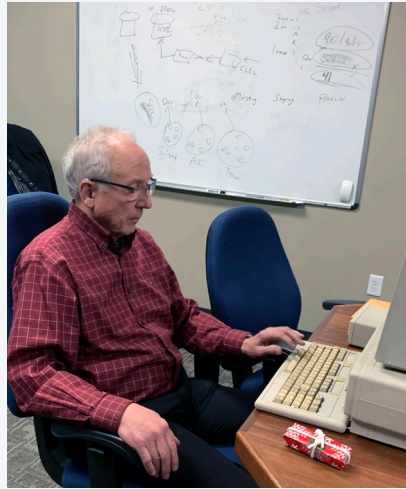
Once again, Paul found himself out of work. Time and again, he lost his job or changed it, and the trend continued seven times in a row over the next nine years they lived in Spokane: well drilling, heavy truck maintenance, agricultural equipment. But whatever work he was doing, he worked hard at it.

Then, in 1986, his church bishop suggested Paul go into the business of selling insurance. “Insurance?” Paul asked. He’d never considered it. He signed with A.L. Williams, but when he lost that job, a non-compete clause prohibited him from working for another insurance company in Washington state for three years.

the course of where we are today versus where we could have been. Usually, there is somebody that has influenced or impacted that change. We owe it to those individuals to thank them for the influence they have had on our lives.”

Dick Fanazick was moved by the award. He said, “Your family’s vision, perseverance, and sacrifice are a testimony to the definition of success. That ripple effect has and will impact the lives of your workforce and of those you serve.”

Since then, the Dick Fanazick Award has been used to “honor individuals who have had a profound impact on a member of our HawkSoft family’s life. The award serves as a platform where you can recognize that special teacher or mentor and say, ‘Thank you; you made a difference in my life.’”



Dick Fanazick with Tandy 1000 computer.

Just as ripples spread out when a single pebble is dropped into water, the actions of individuals can have far-reaching effects.

– Dalai Lama

Moving to Oregon

Paul's high school friend, Dave Olson, offered him a job in Oregon. Dave was a junior partner in a company that, among other things, imported cheese from all around the world. They stored the cheese on pallets stacked six high in a 20,000-square-foot cooler.

In 1986, Paul and Carol packed their belongings—including the Tandy 1000—and moved south to Portland. They settled temporarily into a two-bedroom apartment on Fourth Street in Canby. Heather slept in an upstairs bedroom; Sean on a hide-a-bed in the living room.

Paul started driving trucks for Eurobest Food Industries in Tualatin, Oregon, and later became warehouse manager.

“We would bring in twenty pallets of Brie at a time,” Paul recalled, describing it as a soft ripened unpasteurized cheese with a very short shelf life. “Every once in a while, one of those pallets wouldn't be used in the proper order, and it would go bad. And when Brie goes bad, it really reeks. It stinks.”

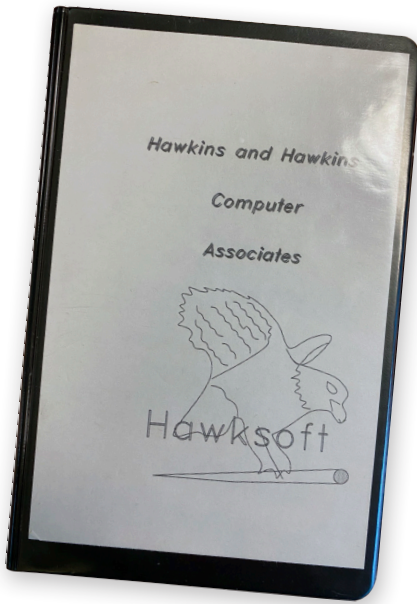
Worse, though, the loss proved expensive. “So, I went back to my home and I said, ‘Sean, I've got a project we can do.’” Paul explained the problem and the need to track it.

“Oh, yeah, Dad!” Sean responded enthusiastically. He burst with ideas to solve the problem and began working on a software program to track the imports. Since Paul worked long hours at the warehouse, his son created most of the software.

When Paul presented the final program to Dave's partner, Mark Dahm, the response was unexpected. “Paul,” Mark said, “I've just gone out to get a quote to have this software written, and it was too much money. We couldn't do it—not in the budget. But what you guys have done is actually better than what we were going to have done.” At that point, Mark gave them a sizeable check. “I remember taking that home to Sean who was now in ninth grade,



The Hawkins family, circa 1990, around the time Sean dreamed up the name “HawkSoft.”



Dad, someday, you and I are going to have our own business. We're going to be partners in our own company, and we're going to call it HawkSoft.

– Sean Hawkins, 9th grade

Teenager Sean drew HawkSoft's first logo, before the company had formed.

and I remember his eyes,” Paul said, gesturing with his hands. “That big.”

It was during this time that Sean told Paul, “Dad, someday, you and I are going to have our own business. We’re going to be partners in our own company, and we’re going call it HawkSoft.”

Mark then suggested other programs he’d find helpful, and Paul and Sean created those, too. “We wrote some more software,” Paul said, recalling that they named one program “PC Client” and used it to track and process sales.

Money for the family of four continued to be tight. To earn extra, Paul and Carol cleaned buildings. “We had a janitorial service at the same time, and that was partly to send Sean on a mission and put Heather through college,” Paul said.

When Sean was in high school, Paul returned to the insurance industry. During Sean’s senior year, he wrote software for a laser printer company in Portland. The company used hardware to print

out forms with the data overlaying on top of the form. Several months in, Sean went to his boss and told him he could do everything with software that they were doing with hardware.

“In fact,” Sean recalls telling his boss, “my dad is an insurance agent and he could use this technology in his agency.” Sean’s boss replied, “I’m a hardware guy, not a software guy. If you want to do that with your dad, go for it.” So, over the next several months, Sean taught Paul what he had learned regarding printing forms on laser printers and how they could do that for the agency Paul worked at.

Sean graduated from Canby High School in 1993, then left to serve a two-year mission in El Salvador the following year. Meanwhile, Heather had graduated from Canby High School in 1990, and then attended Ricks College, now Brigham Young University—Idaho, in Rexburg. She met Jason Hansen in 1991 and they started dating in March 1993.

Jason was raised in Maryland and Pennsylvania. During his first semester at college, Jason’s parents moved to Huntsville, Alabama. “I would go visit there during summers, but I’m not really from Huntsville,” Jason said.

In November, Jason flew from Alabama to Portland to meet and spend Thanksgiving week with his girlfriend’s family. As he watched Sean and Paul working on the computer, he expressed an interest in computer programming. “At the end of the week, Paul handed me the old compiler they had developed programs with and the manuals for it—I really wouldn’t call those programming books; they’re manuals for how to use the tool,” Jason said. He was impressed that Paul would gift him these items.

He had done a bit of programming but had never known how to build an executable before. “Then Heather got me a programming book for Christmas that year, and I spent the next couple of years just diving in and trying to learn all that I could,” Jason said.



In 1991, Paul decided to try selling insurance again.

The Insurance Industry Beckons, Again

After five years working long hours at Eurobest, Paul found himself again out of work. He hadn't gotten along well with one of his bosses, and they decided to part ways.

In April 1991, his friend Dick Payne, who had arrived in Canby, Oregon, from Pocatello, Idaho, encouraged him to sell insurance. Paul didn't see any other job opportunities, so he studied for his insurance license and once again joined the insurance industry, as an agent with Country Companies.

During their marriage, Paul had held so many different occupations—industrial painter, welder, warehouse manager, truck driver, water well driller, and insurance agent—that at one point, Carol asked herself, “Who am I married to?”

Paul wasn't enthusiastic about insurance work. In fact, he sold only one life insurance policy with Country Companies—and that was to his best friend, Vern Sallee.

Although he worked hard, Paul wasn't producing results, so once again he found himself without a job. He had started with a salary, but it was intended to decrease as his commissions increased ... but they never materialized at all. “Paul was out of work again,” Carol said.

A year later, Bob Bloom hired Paul to work as a customer service representative for Insurance Express, which had several offices, including one in San Diego, a small one in Portland that sold non-standard auto insurance, and others.

One of Bob's insurance company representatives had recommended hiring Paul and described him as a “brilliant, bright guy, who has an insurance license, and he's pretty smart with computers.” Needing someone skilled with computers didn't cross Bob's mind as something he needed at the time, except that if his computer broke, his new hire could fix it.



In 1992, Bob Bloom hired Paul to work with his insurance agency. Years later, Bob became an important part of the HawkSoft family.

“I could tell immediately that Paul was beyond nice, just a really decent individual,” said Bob, who later retired to Eagle Crest outside of Redmond, Oregon, after working nearly four decades in the insurance industry. “You don’t have to be around Paul very long to know the quality of individual that he is, and I was also thrilled to take on somebody who had a little bit of insurance experience.”

“The office was all paper piles,” Paul recalled. “They didn’t have any automation. He hired me, because they needed somebody who knew the technology.” Paul knew it, and he put it to work for Bob.

“We used to write everything by hand, and it was a very labor-intensive process,” Bob said. “We thought we were really advanced because, as an independent agent, we had a little program where you could enter some of the characteristics of an individual—male or female, date of birth, traffic violations—and it would spit out the rates for a bunch of different companies.”

Then, if the person wanted to sign up, the agent would fill out an application by hand for the company the client wanted. As Paul filled out the forms by hand, he found it painful to write neatly. He was sure he could figure out a better way. In fact, it was his own poor penmanship that prompted the creation of the program AppWriter.

“Paul roughly described to me what he had in mind, but I trusted he probably knew what he was talking about, and it wasn’t taking away from the rest of what we were doing,” Bob said. “I said, ‘Sure, that sounds good.’ I know he ended up doing a lot of it in his off time.”

When Paul arrived home from work, he spoke to Sean about the problem. Together, they worked on software to simplify the application process. The final product was a digital version of each company’s application. When a person picked a company, rather than filling out the application by hand, agents could pull up the typed profile and fill it out on the computer. Once they were done, they could print the application and the data directly on a blank sheet of paper.

“As you can imagine, that was almost revolutionary,” Bob said. “The insurance companies started coming to us saying, ‘What in the heck are you doing?’” Previously, many applications had been almost undecipherable, because many people, like Paul, had poor penmanship. “All of a sudden, these companies start getting in these applications that are just perfect,” Bob said.

Paul offered to sell his new AppWriter software to Insurance Express, but rather than take ownership of it, Bob told him to market it himself. Bob appreciated Paul's work for Insurance Express and his skills in developing software Bob was able to use in his business. "I never thought I was being generous," Bob said. "I just thought, 'Boy, this guy is really doing something. He should be the one doing this. First of all, he understands it, and he's got a passion for it.' Paul asked if he could go part time. I said, 'Sure, we can make that work,' because he's the kind of guy that's valuable to have around."

Paul looked for ways to market the software, because he saw its value for agents. According to Bob, Paul wasn't a natural salesperson. "But he had such a passion for what he was doing, believed in it so much, that he would walk in and all of a sudden he became a good salesperson," Bob said. "It was a great product."

One day, Harold Anderson, president of the Kenneth I. Tobey Inc. insurance company in Seattle, visited their office and talked to Bob Bloom. He asked about the digitized applications arriving from Bloom's company, which were better than his own applications. "It's always complete," he said. "How are you guys doing this? This is amazing!"

After Bob introduced him to Paul, Harold said, "Paul, this is an amazing product. I want to introduce you to a bunch of our agents in our next meeting in two weeks, because they need this product."

In June 1995, Paul and Carol visited Heather, then living in Provo, Utah. Paul asked both Jason and Heather to develop the electronic forms for AppWriter, purchasing a HP LaserJet 4L to print out the forms. By August, Heather decided to return to Oregon. Jason, missing his girlfriend, proposed to Heather over the phone with plans to join her in Oregon. Jason married Heather ten days later, on August 26, 1995, in Provo, Utah.



Heather Hawkins married Jason Hansen on August 26, 1995.



First HawkSoft Headquarters. This compact two-bedroom apartment, where Paul, Carol, Heather, and Jason lived, served as the company's first office.

While the newlyweds were looking for work and an apartment, Paul came up with a different plan. He said to his brand-new son-in-law, “Jason, we have an opportunity. I think we’ve got something we can sell. Do you want to join me and start a little business?”

Jason responded positively. “Paul asked if I would work solely on HawkSoft. It felt odd, but I agreed and started spending 100 percent of my time on HawkSoft.” Heather worked full time so Jason could devote himself to the company. Paul still worked for Bob while developing the new business in his spare time. Working in the insurance industry also provided insights into the specific needs that could be met through computer software, such as a management system, which they later built.

To save money, Jason and Heather moved into the family's two-bedroom, two-bathroom apartment. (Sean had left for a two-year church mission, so there was a "little" more room.) "That took some faith," Paul said, laughing.

Dropping out of college before earning his bachelor's degree didn't sit well with Jason's family. "My uncle was very upset about the whole thing, saying, 'No, no, no, you've got to go finish school.' He would tell me I was making bad mistakes. I think it has turned out okay."

As HawkSoft started, Paul held onto his friend and employer's early words of wisdom. Bob had taught him, "The most important thing you're going to do is surround yourself with good people."

The most important
thing you're going to
do is surround yourself
with good people.

– *Bob Bloom*

That's just what Paul did over the next twenty-five years as the company grew from three people to more than a hundred. "We've surrounded ourselves with good people," Paul said.

"Paul loves to give me credit for telling him that when he was starting this out," Bob said. "Then it turns out he's got a son who's brilliant and a daughter drags one home just like him. Between Jason and Sean, you couldn't start out with a much better pair than that to build this kind of a business."



Early HawkSoft booth at an industry conference.



Chapter 2

Launching HawkSoft

“We told Heather and Jason that they could live with us until we got this business off the ground,” Carol said. “Because there was no money, there really wasn’t.” Living together in tight quarters took a lot of patience and prayer, but it worked. Along with Heather’s and Carol’s jobs, Paul continued to bring in a paycheck from Insurance Express. Jason worked full time for the new company, but it provided very little revenue initially.

“A lot of computer companies say they got their start in a garage, and we didn’t even have a garage,” Paul said. “In the morning, Jason would slide out of bed into his chair and start programming.” “His commute to work was two or three steps,” Carol said of her son-in-law.

The four of them pitched in to make HawkSoft a success. “Paul was kind of full-time in how many hours he was putting in to HawkSoft,” Jason said. Heather worked full time at Home Depot. Carol worked in community education at Eastham School, part of the Oregon City School District. In the early morning hours or late at night, family members would clean various office buildings in their community. Cleaning buildings led to some amusing incidents. One night, Jason and Heather decided to clean the dental office at 10 pm. Jason went outside to dump the trash and heard someone shout, “Freeze!” A police officer had seen lights on

inside and didn't know who was in the building late at night. Jason explained they were cleaning the building. After the police officer confirmed the story, he left. Jason and Heather were relieved they hadn't been arrested.

"I would come home from work and help Paul build forms," Carol said, explaining that she typed the information they needed to overlay onto the forms. "I must have been doing a fair amount, because Paul got me an ergonomic keyboard."

While Jason brought his computer with him when he moved to Canby, Paul needed a better computer to continue developing software. At the time he didn't have the extra money to buy a new personal computer, large monitor, and scanner, so he borrowed six thousand dollars from a friend, Daryl Harris. They repaid the loan, with interest, in three years. "The loan got us going," Jason said.

Jason jokes that the company's first computer network was born in September 1995. Paul and Jason each had a computer in their separate bedrooms. "We ran a long crossover cable from one PC to another and the first HawkSoft network was born," Jason said. "We were using Windows 3.11 for workgroups, and Windows 95 had just come out in August, so I took some of my savings and purchased Windows 95 plus sixteen megabytes of memory to upgrade my machine. I was excited about getting sixteen megabytes of memory for only five hundred dollars. Seems crazy now, but that was a good price at the time."

Windows 95 cost about one hundred dollars. Computers are fairly inexpensive today, but they weren't then. "It was personal money I had to pay just to get my machine up to where I thought we would need it to be," Jason said.

In October, HawkSoft landed its first customer when Paul sold AppWriter to All Risk Insurance in Vancouver, Washington. "If I remember right, the price was thirty dollars per month, and it was

to be billed quarterly,” Jason said. “A whopping ninety dollars was in our hands, and HawkSoft was off and running.”

“Washington was basically our first sales area,” Carol said.

They split that first check five ways—Paul, Jason, and Sean each received 20 percent, or eighteen dollars, and they invested the remaining thirty-six dollars back into the business. (Even though Sean was serving a mission, he still received a percentage of the earnings.)

“When Paul started selling the stuff, he basically brought QuickBooks home to me and said, ‘Learn it,’” Carol recalled. “I was doing all the bookkeeping.”

With its first customers, HawkSoft had to figure out how to provide software updates. Jason built a system using an old dot matrix printer with mailing labels. The LaserJet printer would print disk labels. “I had a spreadsheet I would use to print all the labels and wrote a small program to copy the files to the three-and-a-half-inch disks,” Jason said. “Each disk was unique as there was a subscription date written to the disk. There was no bulk batch writing of disks.”

He built each update individually on his computer, plugged it in, copied it to a floppy disk, and then printed disk labels and mailing labels. He tucked each floppy disk into a little cardboard box, slapped on a mailing label, and carried them all to the post office.

“Every one of those disks, when we built them, was customized to the agency it was going to,” Jason said. “It had the agency name printed on it, it had a custom date built into it and also when it was going to expire based on their subscription.”

Jason did that every time they updated the software, including every time they fixed a bug or created new forms. The process took three or four hours. “We did that one morning, and as soon as we got back from the post office, we got a phone call, and realized, ‘Oh

crap, there's a bug in the software we just wrote.” Jason said they had to repeat the process that afternoon and ship another batch. “That was no fun,” he said. “I don't miss having to do that.”

During one of their early sales trips, in November 1995, Paul and Jason visited Eric Wagner Insurance in Everett, Washington. Heather joined them and the three rose early to drive four hours from Canby to Everett, about 225 miles. Their appointment was scheduled for nine in the morning.

“When we got there, Paul decided to do this one alone at first,” Jason recalled. “He went in and asked for Eric Wagner.” The three or four people in the office started talking about Wagner, describing him as a horrible person, saying he never staggered into the office that early in the day. Paul said he had a few things to do and returned to his car.

“He sat out there for five minutes, not sure if he even wanted to talk to the guy,” Jason said. “Five full minutes later, one of the people from the office came knocking on the window of the car and said, ‘By the way, I am Eric Wagner.’” They had been joking with Paul.

Wagner started using HawkSoft's AppWriter and became a long-term customer. “Eric became one of our first three customers and remained with us for roughly twenty years as a customer,” Jason said. “The only reason that he is no longer a customer is that he decided to retire and sell his agency.” When he finally sold his business, Eric called Paul, Jason, and Sean individually to thank them for being part of his career.

Sean Returns Home

After completing his two-year church mission to El Salvador, Sean returned home briefly. Paul was working four days a week at Bob Bloom's Insurance Express agency. He was in a corner office when his son walked in.

“Dad, look!” Sean said. “Look back that way. Look at all the computers. They all have HawkSoft on them. That’s amazing.” At the time, the agency had fifteen computers with screens all running their software program.

After his visit, Sean left to attend Brigham Young University in Provo. One day, he received a call from his dad. “At the end of my second year, my dad called me up and wanted me to come home and work for the family business,” Sean said. His dad said the company was growing too fast. If Sean wanted, he could finish his degree, but he’d have to give up his partnership in HawkSoft.

Jason recalls, “What I remember is, I had gone to Paul and said, ‘It’s one way or the other. Sean either has to be all in or all out.’” Other conversations took place. Sean had been earning as much as Jason did, but they needed help in the office rather than consultation from afar. Sean said, “They never said that to me, but I was actually mad. I did not want to come home. I wanted to finish school. I was dating a gal at the time and it was a serious relationship.”

As a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Sean listened to his father’s argument, and then fasted, prayed and attended the temple: *Tell me, Heavenly Father, I’m right and my parents are wrong. Will you please confirm to me that I’m right, that I need to get my education, that I need to stay here and that my parents are wrong?*

“I left the temple that day with the absolute knowledge that I needed to come home,” Sean recalled. “There was no question. I came home to work for the family business, and within two months, I met my future wife, MyLiege Wilcox.”

Both mothers love to say they arranged the marriage, because they both served on the state board for American Mothers and worked closely together on the national convention and at fundraising events. They talked about their children, Sean and MyLiege, and decided their kids needed to meet.

“The reality of it is that our mothers knew each other,” Sean said. MyLiege’s mother, Leslee Wilcox, kept telling her daughter what a nice boy Sean was, and MyLiege told her mother to leave her alone. Sean’s former roommate, Tom Farnsworth, invited MyLiege on a day-long trip to Hood River. Though interested in going, MyLiege wanted it to be more than a single date. “Can we make it a double date?” she asked. She invited a friend, and Tom invited Sean.

Before MyLiege left for the double date, she jokingly told her mother, “I’m going with Sean Hawkins so get off my back.” The two started dating, then married on August 22, 1998, in Portland.

When Sean returned home from BYU, Jason was working full time for HawkSoft, and Paul was working four days a week for the insurance company and the rest of the week on HawkSoft. Jason was doing programming and phone support, the last he didn’t enjoy, being a natural introvert.

“It was not fun,” Jason said. “We only had one phone line, for the home and for the business, so when you answered you didn’t know what you were going to get.” Paul worked externally, selling AppWriter, while Jason worked inside that little two-bedroom (later three-bedroom) apartment.

“We probably had five or ten customers by the end of the first year,” Jason said.

“At first, my dad and Jason were wearing multiple hats,” Sean said. “When Jason was the full-time employee, he was the customer service person; he was the salesperson. Paul was the install team; he was the sales team. Jason and Paul were both the programming team. My mom was the accounting and the billing team.”

Though the company has boomed in the last twenty-five years, HawkSoft today only has two more departments than they had at that time. “It’s just that they were all shared by two people before,” Sean said. “We’ve had to redefine ourselves over and over again.”



Sean Hawkins married MyLiege Wilcox on August 22, 1998.

Paul enjoys working with his sons every day—Sean, his biological son, and Jason, his son-in-law, whom he considers a son. When he first started calling Jason his son, his daughter, Heather, asked, “What am I, chopped liver?” With a laugh, Paul told her, “Sweetheart, you screw this up, you’re out; he’s in.”

We’re always going to be a family. I don’t care how many people work here.

– Paul Hawkins

Paul described the relationship among the three men—him, Sean, and Jason—as what a father dreams of in terms of interconnectedness. “I can miss a meeting, and Sean can miss a meeting, and Jason’s the one there, and we know that the decisions he makes in that meeting are going to be right in line with what we feel, because we are one, and that’s a tremendous feeling,” Paul said.

He credits The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints with teaching him how to operate a business. He developed leadership skills through his work in the Church. “We do things the Lord’s way,” Paul said.

He said everybody in the HawkSoft building is important—the janitor, the programmers, the founders—just as important as anyone else. The company has tried to encourage service leadership among employees. “We’re always going to be a family,” Paul said. “I don’t care how many people work here.”



HawkSoft's first trio: Jason, Sean, and Paul.



Top: HawkSoft's second office. When Sean returned from his mission, and Carol's parents moved to Canby, the family needed more space and rented two apartments in another Canby complex. Bottom: HawkSoft's Third Office. With the family living in a house, HawkSoft finally had a room of its own.



Chapter 3

A Growing Company

In January 1996, Carol's father, Earl, fell ill, and he moved from Wisconsin to the crowded two-bedroom apartment, sleeping on a daybed in the living room. Earl was suffering from about five illnesses, including side effects from thyroid medication. He had lost weight and an infection set in. He was so weak he couldn't even say Carol's name.

The family searched the neighborhood for larger quarters and, in April 1996, moved into the brand-new Royal Ascott Apartments. "We were the first ones in," Carol said. "We were able to get into those apartments, because the landlady from our apartments was also managing those."

They rented two apartments adjacent to each other, a two-bedroom and a three-bedroom unit. Paul and Carol, Heather and Jason lived in the three-bedroom unit, along with Earl. Sean, who had returned from his mission, stayed in the smaller apartment with his grandmother (Barbara had sold their home in Wisconsin to move to Canby).

Carol realized it was ridiculous to rent two apartments when they could be making a house payment instead. "The reason we were able to move into the house on Pine Street was because of Mom and Dad," Carol said. They needed a house with a bedroom on the main floor for Carol's parents, and with three generations under

one roof, larger bedrooms. Most homes had the master upstairs and small bedrooms.

“I think we wore out our real estate agent,” Carol said. “In addition to Canby, we looked in Molalla. We looked in Colton. We looked in Oregon City. We looked in Tualatin. I told Paul that if I didn’t find a house for sale that week that I would start looking in Vancouver, Washington. We knew we needed to do something.”

Then new houses on Canby’s South Pine Street were listed on the market. Carol and her mother walked around the neighborhood and Barbara found one she liked. Carol wasn’t sure it would work. But after they called the real estate agent, they ventured inside the four-bedroom house.

“It had a master bedroom on the main floor,” Carol said. “And all of the bedrooms upstairs you could get a king-size bed in.” The house also had a tall entranceway, with an office just off the front door. “We turned that into Mom’s music room, so she was in seventh heaven,” Carol said. The room held her mother’s piano and her organ.

They had hoped to buy a place on the north side of Canby; however, the South Pine Street house fit their needs best. When fiber optic cables brought internet to town, HawkSoft was able to participate in a beta high speed service, at a time when the only other option was dialup. “We were one of the first streets in Canby to have the internet,” Carol said, while the north side of Canby didn’t receive high-speed internet until much later. “We could not have built the business from our home if we were living on the north side of Canby.”

God knew better where they needed to live. “We were really watched over,” Carol said. “I can look back on it now and laugh. Going through it, it was hard.” In October 1996, South Pine Street became HawkSoft’s new headquarters, with its office upstairs.



Carol Hawkins served as the company's first financial manager.

In 1998, Heather and Jason moved into their own apartment. Their first child, James, arrived in 2000. Carol took care of her father downstairs, did the bookkeeping upstairs in the offices, and babysat her grandson.

“I didn’t have to have a caregiver come and stay with dad because I could,” she said. “The Lord has helped us every step of the way.” She packed her father into the car with her when she ran to the post office to mail invoices or pick up checks. While Carol worked on the books upstairs, her father and her grandson would watch children’s television programs together. “That was just our regular afternoon routine,” she said.

Downstairs, Carol’s mom, Barbara, taught music lessons, as she had in Wisconsin. As for the financial arrangements, Carol’s parents paid half the utilities, while Carol and Paul paid the other half. They also shared the cost for groceries.

Paul continued to work at Insurance Express in sales and customer service, initially four days a week, and then he dropped down to three days, and finally two days and then one day. He did better selling auto insurance than life insurance. Carol said. “They left him at the same salary, because he was maintaining their equipment.”

Bob Bloom appreciated Paul’s work at Insurance Express. “He’d built this AppWriter which was just swell, and then he said, ‘You know, I could actually do the customer management thing, so that every individual will be insured.’ I just couldn’t envision that,” Bob said. But Paul could.

“It was a collaborative effort, but it was Paul’s baby,” Bob said. “He was using us for a guinea pig, and we were getting the benefit of his expertise.” Bob said clients would ask how the client management system worked, and he’d ask Paul to explain.

When he wasn’t programming a computer, Paul enjoyed working on wood projects in the garage, spewing sawdust everywhere.

And when they needed a break, Sean and Jason played ping pong in the garage. “It was amazing what ten or fifteen minutes away from our desks could do to improve productivity during the afternoon,” Jason said.

They earned those breaks, too, as their hard work was paying off and the company was flourishing. It grew between 20 percent and 35 percent every year.

One of the early customers was LeDoux Insurance Agency, run by Bob LeDoux. One day Bob called, very frustrated because he kept receiving an error message when trying to print from the HawkSoft AppWriter. Jason said, “I asked him what the error was, and he said it kept going away too fast for him to read it. I looked in the code to figure out what could be going on. The only thing I could find was that when you would go to print, there was a box that would come up and say, ‘Please wait... Printing in Progress.’”

“Bob strode to his printer and discovered he had printed a ream of paper. It was our fault as the box that came up was red,” Jason said. “In our defense, in DOS we only had about sixteen colors we could use.”

While living on Pine Street, the HawkSoft founders hired their first outside salesperson.

“Unfortunately, we realized he was not doing the job; he wasn’t selling,” Carol said. “Paul had to make the decision to let him go, and that was hard. It was right around Christmastime, and he wasn’t going to let him go then, because of what Paul had gone through previously. It ended up being a blessing, because in January, the guy quit.”

From the beginning, Paul enjoyed spending time in the field with insurance agents and wondered if it might be a bit selfish to become so involved. “They’re really smart people full of knowledge, and I really felt like being around them,” Paul said. “I was doing all of this traveling, and I didn’t know that it was actually good for the company until later on.”

The traveling to Boston, Atlanta, Vegas, and other locations—at first exciting—soon grew routine for Paul as he sometimes spent three months straight on the road. “That’s one of my favorite things to do—not the travel, but the people I see when I travel,” Paul said. “Again, it’s all about relationships, building those relationships.” His connections in the industry translated into clients and publicity, and the company flourished.

Before Carol’s parents’ health declined, the three would travel with Paul at times, such as when he attended a convention in Vancouver, British Columbia; visited his brother in California; and took a trip to Colorado. Carol and her parents went sightseeing while Paul attended the conventions or met with clients. “It was fun for them,” Carol said.

Creating HawkSoft Stock

By 1997, HawkSoft had grown so much, the founders decided to incorporate. They worked with local attorney Craig Mikkelsen to create shares of stock and distribute them to the three founders and their spouses. The company was incorporated April 1, 1997, and became HawkSoft, Inc. “We all had equal shares, including spouses,” Jason said. “Everybody had one thousand, spouses included, so there were six thousand shares created. The reason was to make sure the spouses were always taken care of, too.”

Seven or eight years later, though, they consolidated the shares back to the three founders for simplification, because whenever they wanted to add a shareholders’ resolution to the corporate books, they needed everybody’s signature. “If they weren’t here, it was a hassle,” Jason said. “We just consolidated that, because it really doesn’t matter in the end.”

Client Management System (CMS)

When Sean returned from college, Paul had written and started using the Client Management System (CMS) software at his insurance office; however, he was frustrated with it and contemplating throwing it out. “He could not put a lot of time into it, and it needed a lot of love,” Sean said. In January 1998, he approached Paul and said, “Dad, I think we’ve got something there. Let me take the CMS and build it out.” He took it over and continued to improve it.

At the time, Jason focused on upgrades to AppWriter, the original program that helped agents fill out the digitized company forms. It was selling well to agencies and had improved so that agencies no longer had to pull out separate forms for each insurance carrier. They could instead type in the information and print out the form on blank paper. Jason continued focusing on AppWriter until 2008 or 2009. As the internet grew, though, demand for AppWriter died.

But the management system built initially by Paul filled a need for agencies, or it would once the kinks were worked out. Sean worked on the management system, which they began selling later in 1998.

Entering the Internet Age

By the end of 1999, the HawkSoft founders decided they needed an online presence, so they purchased a domain name—hawksoft-inc.com—and created a website. “Unfortunately, hawksoft.com had already been taken two years earlier,” Jason said. In the mid-2010s, the company purchased hawksoft.com from its previous owner. Today, both addresses point to the company’s main landing page.

In the early years, when HawkSoft sold their product, they primarily visited agencies that only had a few computers on their desks. The computers usually weren’t networked or connected to the internet.

“We were often times having to teach them or help them set up their networks from the get-go and get them on the internet,” Sean said. Although the internet was available, he said, many agencies still used paper. “Very few people had a website. Insurance agencies did not have websites.” But while building their own website, the HawkSoft founders decided to build a way to electronically distribute their software to customers.

The dawn of the twenty-first century brought major changes to the operating systems used by HawkSoft, specifically when it transitioned from a DOS system to Windows 2000. It wasn’t easy. “We transitioned the reporting piece of our software first and then slowly tried to get every other piece over as quickly as we could,” Jason said. “That was a big effort for two guys, because I don’t think Paul ever did any Windows development, so it was really just Sean and me.”

Jason built templates for Sean to hook up and make work. It was like building the visual interface.



Sean's oldest child, Djeryd (pronounced "Jared"), visiting his dad at work.



Chapter 4

Sailing through the Dot.com Bubble Burst

People might say the Hawkins family launched their software company at the right time in the right place, given that the years 1994 through 2000 saw historic investment in technology startups during a bull stock market.

But not every startup succeeded. In fact, most of the people who invested in the technology companies lost money when the dot.com bubble burst in 2001 and 2002, and many technology companies went bust. Yet HawkSoft not only survived the dot.com bubble burst but flourished.

Paul credits the company's financial well-being to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its teachings on self-reliance and avoidance of debt. "Self-reliance was always big for us," Paul said. He didn't want to borrow money if he could help it. "We did what we needed to do, and cinched up and said, 'No, we're going to do this paycheck to paycheck to paycheck' and just built it one step at a time. Bootstrap, they called it." They saw other software companies seek capital investments, erect huge buildings, and expand, only to topple during the early 2000s.

Amazon was one of the few that survived, in large part because, when they started, workers used desks made of a door on filing cabinets. "They had to make do with what they had, and that's what we did," Paul said. "We just took it one step at a time. We didn't try

to grow super-fast. And, through self-reliance and hard work, we were able to do it.”

When the dot.com bubble burst and the economy spiraled downward, HawkSoft’s focus on the relationships they had developed proved beneficial. “People were loyal to us because of the relationships that we built,” Paul said. The company had built a reputation of working with its clients, tinkering with the software to solve problems, and providing upgrades frequently to improve the AppWriter and Client Management System (CMS) software.

In 2002, the company began developing conversion programs to bring competitors’ data into the HawkSoft database, rather than require the client to key in their entire customer base by hand. It was and is an ongoing process as competitors’ software changes over time. Today, HawkSoft has an entire department dedicated to converting data from other systems into their software.

Initially, conversions were brought in one data table at a time and one client at a time. “Over the next five to eight years the developers created more streamlined processes which has evolved into one of the most efficient conversion processes in the industry,” Jason said.

First Office Building in 2002

As the business grew, they looked to hire their first non-family employee. The upstairs office in the Hawkins’ home was too cramped to work effectively. They looked for an office, finding a small 1100-square-foot house at 421 S. Ivy Street in Canby, moving there in 2002.

“This caused us to move out of the house where we had been since 1996,” Jason said. “We rented a small house closer in town that was zoned for business use and separated the business from our home for the first time.”



HawkSoft's first official office building at 421 S. Ivy, Canby, Oregon.

The place wasn't ideal. It was cold and drafty in the winter, and cats burrowed underneath the building, making the office smell of cat urine in the summer. "Oh, it was absolutely horrible, but it was all we could afford," Carol said.

Sean said moving into this office helped separate the personal from the business, which enabled them to continue to grow. "Though I miss working out of the house," he said, laughing. "One of the things that a lot of businesses struggle with, especially when they're starting out, is the separation between personal and business."

Jamie Phillips, the first non-family employee, joined the HawkSoft team April 15, 2002. He was initially hired to work with customers. Jamie had worked as a general manager for an insurance company, supervising about six agencies, before he arrived at HawkSoft. "Jamie brought a lot to the company, and was a fabulous asset," Paul said.

Fred McGrath, who joined the company in 2005, described Jamie as someone with great ideas and good instincts. "I think



Jamie Phillips was HawkSoft's first non-family employee, hired in 2002.

he is the one who really took HawkSoft to the next level,” Fred said. “Not everyone is gifted in all areas, but Jamie was one of those people. We used to call him Jamie-pedia. He would install. He would set things up. He would do some training. He did account training. He just knew this program inside and out, not only from a technical point of view but also from an agency point of view.”

Jamie progressed from customer service to other positions during his fifteen years with the company. His wife, Carla, also worked for the company for seven years.

When Jamie started, it was determined each employee would now receive a salary, including the three founders. “Salaries solved a problem,” Jason said. “If we needed to go get a loan on a car, we were no longer self-employed; we were employed by the corporation.”

The company’s first customers were in Washington and Oregon, and then they tried selling in California, Idaho, and Utah. “A lot of it was word of mouth,” Sean said.

“When we first tried opening in California, it was kind of a flop. Jamie went down there on a weekend to visit a bunch of agencies.” He was in Los Angeles and made appointments, but the individuals didn’t show up. He spent a week there and met with only one person out of twenty scheduled appointments. “Jamie came home and said, ‘You know, California can sink into the ocean for all I

care,” Sean recalled. “He was so mad.” But as word spread about the Client Management System (CMS) software, they received calls from agents in California, and eventually gathered clients in that state. Today, HawkSoft has more customers in California than in any other state.

Running to Keep Up with Sales

The mid-2000s brought many changes to the growing company, including more employees.

HawkSoft hired its first non-family developer, Todd Bevans. While at HawkSoft, Todd took the conversion programs and helped make as much of that into a common process as possible. “He did some cool things, as he had a different way of seeing the world than us,” Jason said.

Within a year, Todd decided he wanted to become an attorney, like his father and brother. “He would work for us during the day and then go to school at nights in Portland, at Lewis and Clark Law School, then drive home to Monmouth, Oregon,” Jason said. “This continued for four years.” It was a tight schedule for someone who had five kids at the time.

By 2005, it was time to hire a professional accountant. Carol had kept the books while the company grew in Washington, Idaho, and Oregon, but when they picked up business in California, the tax laws were much more complicated. “I told Paul that he needed to hire somebody, because I was limited in my knowledge. I couldn’t keep him out of jail, because I did not know the tax laws,” Carol said. “As long as we didn’t have a presence, a salesman, in California, we were okay for a while. But as soon as sales increased there, everything changed.”

Dave Olson, Paul’s childhood friend from Wisconsin and former boss at Eurobest in Portland, came on board as the company’s

accountant. Carol was happy to quit doing the bookkeeping, as she was still juggling her roles as caregiver for her parents and grandmother to James and Rachel Hansen, and to Djeryd (pronounced “Jared”) Hawkins.

Fun in the Workplace

The hiring of Fred McGrath on March 15, 2005 brought a greater culture of fun into the HawkSoft workplace. Fred had worked in retail twenty years in northern California before moving to Oregon, where his friends owned auto insurance offices. In 1990, he obtained his insurance license and opened an auto insurance office for his friend. It expanded to seven branches before he quit twelve years later. “That was my first induction to insurance,” Fred said.

During the mid-1990s, he met Paul Hawkins and discovered the HawkSoft AppWriter. “Our agency wrote hundreds of applications a month,” Fred said. “To handwrite everything was not easy. Plus, my wife accuses me of writing in Klingon, so no one could understand my handwriting.”

His group of offices was among the first five agencies to buy the product. “It was a wonderful idea,” he said. “We were on the ground floor, so probably within a year after they started making their product, we had it.”

Fred was working for Bilyeu Miller Insurance, and his wife was working for First Tech, which also used HawkSoft’s AppWriter. Jamie’s wife thought Fred might be interested in working at HawkSoft, so Jamie interviewed him.

Fred started in customer service, where he worked the first four years. Because he had used the software, he was able to answer questions and walk people through the process. Then he worked in the training department, helping clients install the program and training them on how to use it.



Wishing long-time employee, Fred McGrath, a fond farewell when he retired. From top left: Anisa Newkirk, Shannon Nye, Debby Neff, Cindy Frink, Carina Howrey, Angie Maddox, Christy Patterson. Front: Tiffany Brown, Fred McGrath, Jose Olvera.

Paul praised Fred for bringing fun into the company’s family-friendly environment.

“I think I’m a funny guy, and sometimes work is so serious,” Fred said. “I took our customers and all of that serious, but I have a funny bone and I don’t mind exercising it.”

For example, when HawkSoft built the current two-story office building, Fred’s desk was near the elevator. He would chat with Paul just before the boss entered the elevator. Then Fred would rush down the stairs and pose outside the elevator, chatting with someone as if he had been there for hours. Paul would exit, grin and shake his head at the silliness.

Fred also posted funny signs or sayings on his cubicle for people to read for a chuckle.

“I’d show up to meetings that I wasn’t scheduled for, just to find out if they had snacks,” Fred said, laughing. “I’d walk into a board meeting. They’d look at me like, why are you here? I’d say, ‘Do you guys have snacks?’ ‘No.’ Then I’d just leave. After a while, I’d just stick my hand in the door and they would all say in unison, ‘No snacks, Fred!’”

Our work environment was more like a bunch of friends who happened to work for the same company.

– *Fred McGrath*

If they had snacks, Fred would take a seat and eat. Actually, he voluntarily attended most meetings, whether he was scheduled or not. “I just really loved the people I worked with,” Fred said. “They were fun. Our work environment was more like a bunch of friends who happened to work for the same company.”

When Fred retired in 2018, the company named an upstairs hallway the Fred McGrath Memorial Highway, marked by a sign that Paul crafted. “Now, Fred’s still alive,” Paul said, chuckling. “One of the things about our culture is we want to have fun. We want people here to laugh. We want people to have fun here. And a lot of that is because of him.”

Fred has great respect for Paul. He said, “I remember when we were in our second building, the physical therapy building, we were doubling our business every year. I remember telling him

several times, “This is only the tip of the iceberg. Once this thing gets out it’s going to explode.” He told Paul he hoped that growth wouldn’t change the company’s focus on providing a great product and excellent customer service. It didn’t.

“Every time someone new was hired, we would add them to the family,” Fred said. “I mean Jake Dunbar came about a year after I got here, and we’ve been best friends since.”

Praying for the Right Employees

Towards the end of 2005, Paul and Jamie Phillips discussed the need for a customer service team supervisor, as well as for a salesperson in California so Paul wouldn’t have to travel there every other week. That weekend, Paul and his family prayed for two employees to fill those needs.

“Three days later,” Paul said, his voice choking with emotion, “Jake Dunbar calls, and a week later, Chris LeJeune called.” Both Paul and Jamie had visited the agency in Logan, Utah, where Jake Dunbar worked and discussed the need for someone like Jake at HawkSoft. Jake worked for an insurance agency while attending Utah State University. He never envisioned he would enjoy selling insurance but discovered he loved it. “I loved the details,” Jake said. “I loved the relationships that you formed.”



Paul considered the hiring of Jake Dunbar (above) in 2005 as one answer to his prayer for finding the right employees.

The agency had previously used a competitor's software, but after Jake had worked there a couple years, it was decided a change was needed. In 2002, Jake served on the task force to find another solution and discovered HawkSoft. He fell in love with it. "I really appreciated the intuitiveness of it, and obviously the people as well," Jake said.

The agency owners and employees appreciated Paul from the get-go for his honesty and work ethic. "He would drive all the way down through snowy roads just to come and visit with us in Logan, all the way from up in Oregon," Jake said.

As one of HawkSoft's customers, Jake knew Jamie Philips. They enjoyed talking late into the night. While they were visiting together one October night in 2005, Jamie asked Jake about his future plans, following up with the question, "Would you ever consider coming up and working for HawkSoft?"

"The idea definitely intrigued my wife and me, although we were both very close to our families there in Utah," Jake said. They visited Oregon and "absolutely loved it. I received an offer that same visit and accepted before returning to Utah," Jake said. "Two months later, we were packing up in a horse trailer, traveling up here shortly after Christmas Day and never looked back." He became HawkSoft's fourteenth employee. He was hired to answer the phones and help customers, with the idea that he could grow into other aspects of the company.

Branching Out Beyond the Northwest

For the California salesperson, Paul had someone of high integrity in mind—Chris LeJeune. Chris, unhappy with what he considered unethical requests from his current employer, quit his job and decided to take Paul up on an earlier promise that HawkSoft would always have a place for him.

“When Chris called, I said, ‘You’re in,’” Paul said. “These are the pivotal moments that are the highlights of our history—it’s the people that we hired. The difference that HawkSoft made is the people that we surrounded ourselves with.” In December of 2005, HawkSoft added Chris LeJeune as Territory Sales Manager, based out of Thousand Oaks, California.

“Then we had a presence there and that’s when things really started to grow,” Jason said. LeJeune worked out of his home and visited the HawkSoft office about once a year. (He still works for the company but lives in Georgia.)

A Bigger Office

Sean described the company’s growth as organic, a “controlled, manageable growth.” As the number of employees expanded, so did the need for larger offices. In 2005, they moved into a former physical therapy office that the family had cleaned in the earlier years, located at 308 N. Ivy, in Canby.



As HawkSoft grew, more space was needed. The company moved to 308 N. Ivy, Canby, Oregon.



Paul at home in his workshop. Outside of work, Paul enjoys woodworking. He handcrafts a nameplate for each employee; he has also made many of the desks at the main office.

With the larger building, the company installed a new Inter-tel Phone System so it could hire more people. HawkSoft also brought on Mark Stevens as another developer during that time; he was another key employee that helped move the company forward.

When the company moved into their first separate office, the white house at 421 S. Ivy, they had bought beautiful cherry wood desks from Office Depot. Unfortunately, they didn't hold up and fell apart easily, because they were made of pressed wood. Only some survived the move to the physical therapy office. From that point, Paul decided to make the desks himself. Woodworking has been a longtime love of his, a great way for him to relax.

"I think Paul started building desks when we were at the physical therapy office, and at the next office he built them all," Jason said. Soon, Paul also began creating a handmade name plate for each employee. Even today, on the first day of each new employee,

Paul personally delivers a handmade wood nameplate he created himself. Paul explained, “What I tell every one of my new employees is ‘Welcome to the HawkSoft family. You are part of our family, and we’re going to treat you like family, because you are that important to us.’”

Customer Service

As a former customer, Jake Dunbar felt like he knew more about the software than some of the customer service employees. “I used it fairly deeply,” Jake said. “So, when I was hired, it was a fairly easy transition.”

“I wondered sometimes if they hired me because they got tired of me calling in as a customer, because I would call in and ask for specific information to be included in the database,” Jake said.

Today, customer service reps go through extensive training, using a collection of videos, articles, and hands-on learning for over a month before taking live calls to work with customers. Jake started helping customers within a few days on the job, although, he said, “My first task was to build my own chair.”

Jake laughed when he recalled his early days. “I didn’t have any training,” Jake said. “I just started taking phone calls. But I knew the product.” Initially, he worked with Fred McGrath and Katrina Gibb (another employee). Later, a few other customer service employees were hired. “Back then, it was a lot slower, and a lot more time in between customer phone calls,” Jake said. “Katrina would usually have a book that she would read, but I would get bored.”

The phone system alternated on which desk the phone would ring. “There was a function, and if I was fast enough, I could punch it into the phone and it would steal the call and I answered it on my phone,” Jake said. Fred would pick up the phone and nobody would be on the line, because Jake had stolen the call. “Of course, I was

continuing on with the phone call and happy to have something to do.” It didn’t fluster Fred.

“Jake just has a way about him that’s very easy,” Fred said. “He did training and he did customer service. He was also showing people how to use the accounting portion of our program. He’s got a calm mellow way of dealing with people.”

After Jake Dunbar arrived, Paul, who as company founder and principal had been wearing many hats, delegated some of that responsibility to his new hire. “Jake, take care of this,” Paul would say. “You’re the right guy. When you’ve got questions, come and see me. And return and report on a weekly basis.” Jake still walks into his office and says, “Paul, I’m here to return and report!”

Jake values his relationship with Paul, sharing a favorite story that illustrates Paul’s connection to his employees, treating each like a family member. “It’s a great story that obviously is near and dear to my heart, but highlights, I think, one of the core values of the company, which is work-life balance and the importance of families,” Jake said.

One day Jake was at his desk, working and answering phone calls. As he’s always done, Paul walked through the office and stopped to chat with people, asking about their lives and their families. He knew Jake and his wife were expecting their first child.

“My wife’s going to the first prenatal appointment and sonogram,” Jake told Paul. “Then why are you here?” Paul responded. Jake said he didn’t have any vacation time.

“Jake, you come and talk to me about that kind of stuff,” Paul said, gently chiding him. “Get out of here, go with your wife, and go to that prenatal appointment.”

Jake said that moment assured him that he had made the right choice in working for HawkSoft. “They really do practice what they preach, what they teach.”

Virtual Printer

Long before Microsoft had a pdf printer, HawkSoft introduced the virtual printer, a simple concept that allowed customers to take what they would have printed on paper and instead create a pdf.

They experienced a lot of failure before succeeding with the virtual printer. “I remember when we were first designing that solution, it took a lot of innovations,” Jake said. “It took a lot of different ideas, different technologies, and it took a long time until we had a very solid, stable solution.”

Some iterations looked like they would work well, but in the end, they weren't up to HawkSoft's standard and the development took much longer than expected. The company released only one version of the CMS software, because developers spent so much time polishing the virtual printer.

Along with a virtual printer, Fred decided the office needed a virtual animal. Fred said. “We came up with Blinky, the virtual cat.” He said employees would ask, “Have you seen Blinky? I know he was here earlier, but I don't know where he is now.” New employees would be confused about this cat until they figured out it was virtual. When asked, “How did it get the name Blinky?” Fred had a story. “Well, we were playing with a laser pointer one time and accidentally shot his eye...called him Blinky.”



*Members of HawkSoft's Development Team, charged with finding innovative ways to improve the client experience. **Top row:** Paul Hawkins, Sean Hawkins, Javier Torres, Wade Koehmstedt, Matt Aman, Brita Brodin. **Second row:** Nick Wills, Max MacEachern, Vince Harmon, Jim Kitson. **Third row:** Chris Peterson, Ed Lazor, James Kretschmer, Rene Barzaga, Ken Scheel, Richard Garrick. **Fourth row:** Alex Krotzer, Randy Thieme, Ryan Reese, Ashlyn Shatos, Ryan Dempsey, Brian Maguire.*



Chapter 5

Aurora Airport Office

The company hit a rough spot in the mid-2000s. Money grew tight and they needed to lay off workers. “It was only two people, but for our size, it was considerable,” Jason said. “Money wasn’t coming in at that point. We never liked to take out debt on the business.”

As they looked for possible candidates to lay off, it turned out there were two employees who were looking for an exit. Laying these employees off turned out to be a blessing in disguise for both individuals. One was a developer who was considering asking for a leave of absence due to health problems. “He was happy that Sean came to him, because he could focus on his health without feeling guilty about leaving,” Jason said. “The other was a lady who needed some time off. By being laid off, she could collect unemployment, which was needed for her family.”

“We got out of that rough patch,” Jason said. “That’s when we were doing a lot of custom coding for AAA out of California, which helped pay a lot of bills. I was the only one working on that. It meant long hours, which I got used to, but I’m glad we’re not doing that anymore.”

After surviving lean years, HawkSoft’s leadership heard more challenging news. The owners of the physical therapy building wanted to sell it, so HawkSoft was unable to renew its lease. The company had to scramble to find a new office.

It was a positive change as the space had grown too small. “I remember thinking to myself, it’s going to be forever and a day before we outgrow that building, that physical therapy office,” Jake said. “Gosh, I think it was only a couple of years, but that’s when we moved out to the airport.”

They found a building at the Aurora State Airport, signing a five-year lease. “We only had a couple of months’ notice to find somewhere,” Jason said. “It’s one that popped up on our radar, only five miles away.” He said the 3,600-square-foot modular building in two pieces offered a lot more usable space. And it was inexpensive.

The office did have its drawbacks. Because it was at the Aurora Airport, customers had to enter the airport gate to reach it. Jason added, “And planes would start up their propellers during the day and make a lot of noise.”

New Employees

With the continual growth in November of that year (2007), HawkSoft hired two regional salespeople and a billing person; all three became long-term employees.

The company had been growing in Ohio, Florida, and elsewhere, hearing from people interested in the HawkSoft software. Insurance agents were talking to HawkSoft customers who raved about the product. HawkSoft wasn’t even advertising in those areas. “It was very much word of mouth,” Sean said. “We didn’t do advertising. We tried a few times, and we never got anything out of it.”

“It was just word of mouth,” Jason agreed. “Suddenly we realized that we had a few key areas, Ohio being one of them, Florida being one of them, so we added sales people both in Ohio and in Florida, and suddenly just like in California once Chris started down there, it just blossomed. Ohio blossomed. Florida blossomed.”

One of the new regional sales representatives, Glen Phillips, was the father of Jamie Phillips, who had been an insurance agent. The other, Linda Anderson, was an Ohio HawkSoft customer. Linda was resistant to sales at first. When she told Paul she'd love to work for HawkSoft, he responded, "That's amazing, because I need a salesperson in Ohio."

"No, no, no, no, no! I'm not a salesperson!" Linda insisted. "I don't want that kind of job. I'm thinking customer service or something like that." "Well, could you meet with agencies and find out what their needs are and what their problems are, and then show them how HawkSoft would help them?" Paul suggested. "Yeah! I can do that!" "Well, in our company, we call those salespeople," Paul said, laughing.

Todd Bos was hired to assist Dave Olson with billing and collections. Todd remained until about 2017 when he decided to return to teaching. "Everybody loved Todd," Jason said. "He was awesome." Within months after leaving, Todd brought his students to HawkSoft for a field trip.

Like the rest of the business, the development team began to expand. Up to this point, those on the team had worn many hats in addition to development. "However, as their roles evolved, it became necessary to find other talent to fill development roles," said Sean, who still oversees development today.

One such evolution came when Eric Stalker, who began in Customer Service, was transitioned to testing. In the early days, the development team sent out features largely untested and relied on customer feedback to refine them. Once Eric was dedicated to testing, HawkSoft saw a huge difference in the quality of its newly-released software.

When Todd Bevans graduated from law school, he informed HawkSoft he would be leaving. "Suddenly, we were in need of a

database programmer who we knew we could trust, as they would have access to sensitive data,” Sean said.

About that time, Sean’s mother-in-law, Leslee Wilcox, happened to be looking for work. She had worked as a database programmer for years and had been trying to get Sean to hire her ever since he had married her daughter. “It was a no-brainer,” Sean recalls. “She understood data and could be completely trusted.” Leslee began work on December 29, 2008, as HawkSoft’s twentieth employee.

In 2008 and 2009, HawkSoft also brought on two talented developers: Wade Koehmstedt and Brian Maguire. “I would meet with them individually,” Sean said, “explain what we wanted to build, and they would go back to their desk and start developing. I would get back from lunch and they would be lined up at my desk with questions.”

Development Team Moves to Charbonneau

When HawkSoft moved into the airport building, they needed only half of the space. Sean remembers thinking they would never use the entire space. However, within a couple years, the quarters were becoming cramped. “We started shopping for space,” Jason said. “Fortunately, we found through a Craigslist listing just enough space for our development staff in a location that was just three miles from the main office.”

In 2010, the development team of six moved to a golf course in Charbonneau. Sean drove between both offices, but he was based at the Charbonneau office, while Jason and Paul were in the main office at the airport. “Meetings were a pain,” Jason said. “It was a three-mile drive which wasn’t that bad. It’s just every time you would go over to the other office, you would realize, ‘I forgot to bring this!’” Meetings were held at both locations.

“We knew we wouldn’t last very long in the two locations,” Leslee Wilcox said. “I missed being around everyone else, but we got to make ‘field trips’ now and then to the Airport Office.”

One summer day, the development team hosted an open house at the Charbonneau location for the rest of the company. “It was so everyone else could see where we worked,” Leslee said. “We created a trivia game for them to play, and we had screen shots of each major release of HawkSoft on the wall so we could all see how HawkSoft progressed from a DOS-based system to a Windows-based system. (We are now moving into cloud-based.)”

Scrum

Throughout the company’s existence, the “development team” has always looked for ways to improve or tweak the latest HawkSoft product. First with AppWriter, then with the Client Management System, the developers seek for ways to make it easier for the agents who use their system. Some things that seem commonplace today were cutting edge at the time they were rolled out.

One major improvement came shortly after they hired a new project manager in 2012, Brita Brodin. She introduced the idea of Scrum and became instrumental in revolutionizing the productivity and efficiency of the development team.

When she started, her first two questions were: “Who writes your specifications? Can I talk to your project management team?” Sean stared at her blankly. He finally said, “That’s me.”

At the time, there was no standard development process. “Sean was a one-man machine,” Brita said. “He would do everything from writing requirements and coding to managing releases, and the developers lined up outside his door every day to get assignments from him. It was time for the company to put some processes in place!” She looked to Scrum, a development methodology that

references rugby, where all the team members figuratively link arms and work together toward a common goal. This was a perfect fit with HawkSoft's culture of collaboration and teamwork.

After Brita asked Sean and Paul if the team could try implementing Scrum, she was shocked when they readily agreed. In her experience, management was usually averse to changing processes, but HawkSoft welcomed the change and started implementing Scrum within the week. "They were very supportive of change and contributed greatly to the process," said Brita.

Scrum is based around units of time, typically periods of two weeks, called sprints. Each one begins with a sprint planning meeting where the customer's needs are considered and the project vision is agreed upon, and it ends with a sprint review where the development team shows their progress to the rest of the organization.

"Scrum helps us to constantly innovate and improve not only our product, but our processes," Sean said. "We invite people from all departments to join us at sprint reviews and give feedback. This is probably the most expensive meeting in the whole company besides our quarterly all-hands meetings, but it's worth it for us to gather feedback from across the company and iterate on it in future sprints."

He added, "We also have a sprint retrospective where the Scrum team reflects on what we did well during the last sprint and what we can improve upon. Based on this feedback, processes are tweaked to better fit the team and make things more efficient." HawkSoft continues to use and improve on this model today.

Adopting the Scrum model helped the development team greatly speed up the release cycle, allowing them to release major versions every three months (before, major releases had been every nine or even twelve months). This has been crucial as the user base has scaled from a few hundred to nearly 20,000 users.

Along with the Scrum implementation, the department has adopted other ways to better serve HawkSoft's mission. Over the years, the development team has built a product management team, created an effective process for producing quality end-user documentation, and implemented a sustainable release process. "Everything from roadmap to release now has a process," said Brita. Today the development team is twenty strong, with twelve developers, five Product Owners, two QA Analysts, one Scrum Master, and Sean still leading the way.

A Stronger Evolving Product

Today, the development team continues to listen to and implement feature suggestions from the ever-growing customer base. This feedback is received through Customer Service, emails sent directly to Product Development, focus groups, and the HawkSoft Community online forum that allows customers to add and vote on suggestions. Jake Dunbar admires Sean and the development department. "There wasn't really, in my mind, one big significant change that really outshines the rest," Jake said. "It is really just a constant stream."

"We didn't always used to be this good, but still, as a customer, that was the perception," Jake Dunbar said. "As a company, HawkSoft has always been working on the product. We've never settled. We always find different things that we can add to it or change it up or tweak to make it even better."

Fred McGrath shared some of the big software improvements he noticed during his time. "One big thing that happened was 'drag and drop,'" Fred said. "Now, it's no big deal for a program to include 'drag and drop.'" But at the time the feature was almost revolutionary, and it made it much easier for clients to work with the software. Another improvement was the availability of online

updates, with Jason no longer needing to make constant trips to the post office, mailing individualized disks to clients. “Today, there’s no such thing as a management system without downloads, but yeah, it was just one thing after the other; as things came along, the programmers tried to stay on top of it,” Fred said. “Those geekazoids just know so much!”

The program has evolved by leaps and bounds. Noteworthy enhancements to the CMS include a texting feature, an online portal where clients can download Certificates of Insurance, and integration capabilities with third-party vendors. The company now sets its sights on adding a fully cloud-based product. HawkSoft continues to evolve alongside the agents who use it.

Conversions Department

As more agencies adopted management systems, HawkSoft devoted additional resources to helping new HawkSoft customers switch easily from a competitor’s product. The conversions team



During a team-building exercise in 2019, HawkSoft’s Conversion Team won their escape room challenge. From left, Eric Andresen, Ruben Hurse, Jonathon Ivey, Leslee Wilcox, Joshua Mainer.



HawkSoft's leaders value their employees. For example, when employees retire, such as Conversion Department Head Leslee Wilcox in 2019, they receive a warm sendoff.

worked closely with the Customer Service and Professional Services departments, where employees interacted closely with customers.

“A couple of years after we were in the new building, we became a new department and added Jim Kitson, Eric Andresen, and Larry Beck to our ranks,” Leslee recalled. “It has changed and evolved since then with the Conversion Department becoming the Database Management Department, as we now do more than just conversions.” According to Sean, “Leslee truly revolutionized the conversion department.”

Customer Service Becomes a Competitive Advantage

While at the airport, HawkSoft's Customer Service Department soon grew to more than twenty employees. Jake Dunbar hired many of those people, including some who rose to other positions. At one point, he looked around and realized that he had been involved in hiring nearly half the company's employees. "Except for developers, in every department I think there is someone who I hired. I take great pride and excitement in that."

He echoed Paul's winning secret to success, "to surround yourself with great people. I've tried to follow that and find great people to come work with us," Jake said.

Jake gives HawkSoft kudos for hiring from within; however, it does have some drawbacks. Frequently after he trained and developed promising new people for the customer service team, they would be snatched up by another department. He said, "There's great pride in that, but it's like a hamster wheel." He would have to begin again with new hires.

It is a constant challenge keeping up with the need for experienced employees. When there are a lot of rookies on the floor still learning the skills to respond to customers, Jake said, the customer experience can suffer. "It can take a lot of extra time to field phone calls and help them," Jake said. "So, it's always been a struggle in that department to get to a point where we can focus on anything other than just getting new hires up to speed."

From the beginning, HawkSoft's customer service is what has set the company apart. "For a while there, we were saying HawkSoft was a customer service company, not a development company," Jason said. A few years ago, at an insurance agent convention in the South, Sean took the stage and told the audience, "You know, 80% of the capabilities across management systems are the same. We

all pretty much do the same things. The other 20 percent is what's important. What sets HawkSoft apart is our customer service and how we treat our customers.”

When people call for support and leave a message, most companies promise to respond within twenty-four hours. “Our goal is two-minute answer time,” Jason said. “You’re on the phone with somebody live in two minutes. That’s our goal. We make it most days. However, we take whatever time is needed with each customer to solve their individual problem. Some situations take longer than others. It may be ten or fifteen minutes, and sometimes even an hour. We’ll take whatever time is needed to make sure our customer is satisfied.”

Paul recalled the words of the president of HawkSoft’s user group who praised the company’s customer service. “I called at seven p.m., and I knew it was right at the end of your day. When that person answered the phone, I felt like it was the first phone call they took of the day. They were happy. They were smiling. You could hear they were smiling.”

Taking Care of Employees

The one thing Paul and his leadership team has emphasized through the years is taking care of both customers and employees. Paul believes that happy employees translate into happy customers. “I think he realizes how lucky he has been to have all of this,” Fred said. “He’s very concerned, and he always has been, about his employees.”

“If our employees aren’t happy, we’re missing the boat somewhere,” Fred added. “Paul is behind his people 100 percent. Now he’s got one hundred people instead of just nine, and I think he handles it very well. But his attitude about all of them hasn’t changed, and that’s really important.”

“We try to do our best for our employees, and we really try to make HawkSoft a great place,” Jason said. “One thing we wanted early on was to just do 100 percent healthcare for employees and families forever.” Even though the health insurance agent advised against it, HawkSoft held true to what it believed in. Over the years, with increases in healthcare costs, the number of employees, and the need to offer employees competitive pay, HawkSoft was forced to reduce the percentage of coverage. Still, the company believes they are able to offer a very generous package to their employees.

Executive Team

Once an owner achieves success, it’s not uncommon for them to become egotistical and rely heavily on their own experience and instinct. According to Rushang Shah, HawkSoft’s Vice President of Marketing, that’s not the case with Paul and HawkSoft. Paul had



HawkSoft's Executive Team, 2019. Back Row: Paul Moyes, Aaron Bean, Greg Fish, Sean Hawkins, Paul Hawkins. Front Row: Jason Hansen, Jake Dunbar, Crystal Erlitz, Pamela McConnell, Rushang Shah, Aedan James.

the humility to create a ten-member executive team to provide different voices and perspectives before making any decisions. “A lot of times we forget our origins and why we became successful, but to me the fact that, even in his position, he emphasizes core values so much, that’s impressive.”

The executive team consists of the three founders, and the heads of every department—IT, Sales, Marketing, Product Support, Product Development, Human Resources, Client Services, and Accounting. (This makes a 10-member team as Sean is both a founder and the head of Product Development.) The executive team meets once a week, every Tuesday, to discuss decisions that need to be made.

“We want a team of people to support each other, and most decisions that are made within the company are made in that team, so there is visibility on everything, from financing all the way up the top,” Rushang said. “It takes us longer to make decisions, but we think the benefits far outweigh the challenges.”

Like a Family

The focus on creating a fun and supportive workplace permeates throughout the leadership team. Paul said that when Fred was hired, he was a “hoot.” Watching Fred’s “fun factor” helped Paul and others realize it was important. “We really started understanding the employees and their needs,” Paul said.

Some of the ways HawkSoft maintains its family culture is through quarterly luncheons, pizza parties, and events such as “Hawkapalooza,” an annual company picnic and fun day for employees and their families. They started such events on a small scale when they moved to the Aurora office, and they grew bigger over time. “That’s so much fun just to get together and let your hair down and just enjoy each other’s company,” Fred said, also



Clockwise from top: The attendees at Hawkapalooza; Paul grilling hamburgers for the crew; Hula hoop race with Kenneth Hendricks, Matt Brauer, and Darrin DaFouw.

an amateur musician who plays many instruments, including bass guitar, electric guitar, keyboard, ukulele, and mandolin. Other musician employees, including John Barnes, joined Fred to perform at Hawkpalooza in recent years.

“It was just cool to be able to get up there and just jam on these songs, never having played with these guys before, and it was just so much fun,” Fred said. “It’s just cool to see people in their own environment. Yeah, Hawkpalooza is fun, and they still invite me!” Fred said, adding with a laugh, “Actually if they don’t invite me, I’ll still show up. Great food. . . They’ve got snacks.”

The event is often held at local parks and provides great entertainment, such as bounce houses, face painting, balloon art, and lots of great food.

HawkSoft encourages all employees to participate in their local community through service and fun, as well as in the Canby area. A HawkSoft committee meets monthly to look for activities where employees can participate for charity, education or just fun.

The company has sponsored any employee who wants to participate in the annual Canby Dahlia Run, a half-marathon and 10K run/walk. The company team calls itself the “Hustlin’ Hawks.” Money raised from this event funds local charities.

HawkSoft departments hold friendly competitions to encourage participation in events such as food drives or month-long clothing drives for a local charity. Workers have taken outings to work in the local food bank. The Customer Service group donated \$500 to buy new clothes.

In 2017, a few employees from the Conversion Department dedicated time each week to read to students at nearby Knight Elementary School. As one of their quarterly community service projects, the Billing and Accounting teams worked with the North Willamette Valley Habitat for Humanity to put up siding on a house



The Accounting-Billing Team dressed as dwarves for Halloween. From left: Jacqueline Manuel, Aaron Bean, Bruna Haley, Sarah Johnson, Christian Briggs, Kyle Deardorff.

in Mount Angel. Afterward, they enjoyed a delicious German lunch at the Glockenspiel Restaurant. “It was to let people know that we’re a business in town that cares about the community,” Fred said.

Product Support

Once a year, the company dedicates a week to Product Support with celebrations, fun, and games. They hold themed dress-up days, contests, potlucks, and chili cook-offs. During specific busy seasons, Product Support occasionally provides employees with paid time off, if they haven’t called in sick. In later years, the department has celebrated Product Support Week each October with lunch, snacks, coffee, root beer floats, a pancake breakfast, column decorating, daily contests, prizes, raffles, pizza, puzzles, trivia, games, and other activities. The department also started the quarterly HawkSquawk award to honor an employee, nominated by his/her coworkers, for behavior that best represents excellence in customer service.

“One year we took them to Dave and Busters,” Jake said, referring to a restaurant, arcade, and sports bar. “That was fun. The hard part is that it’s a position where they’re so glued to their seat that there’s not a lot of flexibility to take them all off of the phones. There’s nobody there.”

The employees work Monday through Friday. They don’t like to schedule anything after-hours that cuts into family time. Many of the product support employees are younger employees but not all. One employee in New Bern, Scott, takes pride in resembling Santa Claus. “It can be hard to arrange to do something as a department, as a group, in the middle of the day,” Jake said. “Somebody’s got to be on the phones.” Jake suggested four years ago that former customer service representatives fill in so the workers could take time off for a fun event, but it never came to fruition. “That’s a crazy idea that I have to think about more,” he said.



Team Manager John Barnes waiting for pancakes as part of the Product Support Week.

Employer Becomes Employee

Sometimes life brings people full circle, which is what happened in 2011 when Bob Bloom, Paul's former boss at Insurance Express, accepted a job with HawkSoft. Bob sold his insurance company in 2005, then worked for a couple of other insurance companies and then as a contractor.

From time to time, he would run into Paul at an insurance agents' convention. "After my last job had run out, I told him, 'I'm on the market if you're looking for somebody.' Paul said, 'Well, that would be great.'"

In 2011, Bob started working at HawkSoft as Sales Manager, based in the Aurora Airport office. Bob, who describes himself as probably the least techy of all the employees, coordinated the efforts of the four territory sales reps throughout the country. "I went to a fair amount of conventions," Bob said.

Bob hadn't realized how large the company had grown until he started working for it. He had seen Paul work the retail side with the agencies and knew the product was good and easy to use. The overall growth of HawkSoft impressed Bob. "I know there were people who have wanted to buy HawkSoft from him occasionally, but he was intent on building," Bob said. "He was having fun."

He described Paul as an incredibly dedicated family man. "There's nothing that money could have bought that would have given him the satisfaction that working with his son and son-in-law could ever touch," Bob said.

Timing in the Market

The timing was right when Paul started HawkSoft, Bob noted. "Paul would be the first to tell you, he couldn't start this up today," he said. "The winning piece was he was in the early days of agents starting to use computers." The market was untapped.

Some of the larger companies offered expensive software, but their systems weren't easy to use. Paul initially geared his program to small independent agencies that sold personal lines of insurance—homeowners and auto. It has expanded since then.

“But at the time it was a great niche product that had this market of people who needed what he had,” Bob said. “The other systems were way more expensive than Paul’s was.”

Bob’s job as sales manager evolved. “When I started, there were still a certain percentage of agencies that had never had a system, and then there were agents who had had a system for a while, but they had headaches with it,” Bob said. “Now there’s not much virgin territory out there anymore, so clients are converting from other systems.”

HawkSoft today faces more direct competition and fewer easy sales. And still it grows. The company’s top selling point is efficiency. Insurance agents, like many professionals, are subject to claims of negligence. HawkSoft’s software tracks and records everything, and this provides hard documentation that can protect agents. An attorney friend of Bob’s often asks for a printout of the HawkSoft file before defending a client in an errors and omissions professional liability case. In the past, most agencies didn’t have the paperwork documented, and handwritten paperwork didn’t have a lot of credibility.

“As things evolved, the other piece that HawkSoft was really good at was converting data from another system into HawkSoft. HawkSoft does a terrific job of that compared to other companies,” Bob said. Sometimes agents have to start over when switching companies, but not with HawkSoft. The company works with the new client to transfer old records into the new system.

Customer service is also a selling point. HawkSoft provides quick, efficient responses to agents when they call the customer

service number. They can easily reach a person in the office in the United States who helps answer questions and solve problems.

“It’s just a little harder to quantify, but how we used to do it was, ‘Here’s our number, give us a call, try us out, see who you get.’ That was always really good,” Bob said. “Three top selling points: ease of use, conversions, customer service.”

Bob retired in 2017, when he was sixty-five. Paul Moyes took over as Vice President of Sales. Bob said, “Paul does a great job, doing it better than me. He understands the technology a lot better than I do. To be honest, I think the business was outgrowing what I was good at. They needed somebody who had more technical savvy, even in that position, than I did. The timing was good. It was time for me to let somebody else do it. I was looking forward to retiring.” He describes his former coworkers as “dear friends.”

The HawkSoft Culture

The HawkSoft family atmosphere stems from Paul, Sean, and Jason, a family that leads by example. The workplace culture at HawkSoft fosters relationships among employees. “We really do feel very privileged to work with each other,” Fred said. Due to its dedication to its employees, HawkSoft has annually been voted as one of the Top Workplaces in Oregon every year since 2015.



Since 2015, HawkSoft has been voted one of Oregon’s Top Work Places (Oregonian Media Group).

It's a family-focused environment where founders and employees adhere to foundational values. Paul follows the mantra: "If you want to be successful in business, you have to surround yourself with the right people." When HawkSoft hires employees, their qualifications are important, but they also want to know if they'll fit into the culture.

Fred said, "When I first interviewed with Jamie, I said, 'Jamie, you know I don't know anything about computers?' and he 'lied' to me, saying, 'Well, you don't have to know that much.'"

But it is true in many ways. Working at HawkSoft takes much more than knowledge. "You can learn the stuff we do," Fred said. "But you can't teach someone how to be encouraging, or how to be nice, or how to be civil, or not talk behind someone's back—you can't teach that."

Hiring employees who fit well in the HawkSoft family is an ongoing challenge. The hiring process is personal, even with a committee evaluating candidates. They'll invite three or four candidates to interview at the same time and rate each one. First and foremost, are they a team player? Do they have an ego? Are they fun?

"If a person has an ego, don't bother walking in the door," Paul said. "We don't have a spot for you. Our hiring team chooses the right people, and it's been phenomenal," Paul said. "Now and then, we end up with people who aren't good fits and we say goodbye to them fairly quickly. It doesn't tend to work out." The HawkSoft founders want to avoid damaging the culture with strife created by unhappy employees. They have seen what happens.



Top: HawkSoft employees having some Halloween fun for Product Support Week. From left: Sean Hawkins, Rushang Shah, Greg Fish, Dana Stephens, Rachel Stauffer, Crystal Townsend, Paul Moyes, Pamela McConnell, Kenny Hendricks (bunny). Bottom: The “Hustlin’ Hawks,” employees from HawkSoft who participated in the annual Canby Dahlia Run. From left: Jake Dunbar, Cami Dunbar, Jason Hansen, Alex Krotzer, Wade Koehmstedt, Brita Brodin, Jackie Manuel, Emma Koehmstedt (Wade and Brita’s daughter).



Chapter 6

HawkSoft's Core Values

HawkSoft has adhered to a set of core values since its inception, but as the company grew, its leaders worried that those values and the culture they created might be displaced. To ensure that didn't happen, they realized the importance of articulating those core values.

"Around 2010, we were worried our values were going to disappear because of the growth and how many people we were bringing in," Jason said. "I think Jamie really spearheaded this saying, 'We have to maintain culture, or we will lose what we've built.'"

"We needed to get these values and this culture down to the grassroots, and make sure that the people that we were hiring kept those same values," Paul said. "Otherwise, we could lose it in a snap." Communicating the core culture meant spreading those values throughout the company deliberately, rather than hoping it would happen on its own.

In 2012, the company's executive team sat down to



Product Support Team participating in community cleanup.

verbalize the company's culture, its core values. They then divided interested employees into teams to write down ideas and submit those values for consideration.

The core values defined by the leadership team in 2012 are:

- Sense of Community
- Deliver an Exceptional Experience
- For the Good of All
- Do the Right Thing
- Work to Live, Don't Live to Work
- Focus on the Solution (later changed to Continuous Innovation)

The company leaders then formed six groups of three to four employees and asked each group to put the values into words. "We never want to lose sight of what drives our company," the leadership team wrote as instructions.

Jason said, "It was really the employees at the time defining who we were."

"The core values aren't just words," he explained. "We ask every employee when they start, within the first three months, to go through core values training, which is all of the executive team sitting down in Hawk's Nest upstairs (a conference room), telling stories of the company, reading the core values, how we would relate them, how we would do it, and then at the end of the meeting what's asked is, 'If you ever see us not applying them, call us out on it. Let us know why you think we're not so we can have a discussion.'"

"We reassessed our core values again last year," Paul noted in 2019. "Originally, the Attitude of Gratitude wasn't there. We lived it, but we didn't think about it as such."

Then, a programmer named Alex joined the company. “He changed the internal workings of our development team in a significant way by just saying, ‘Thank you! I really appreciate your help on that!’” Paul recalled. Everybody began saying thanks more often, showing the value they saw in others and finding value within themselves.

Jake Dunbar said, “Something I love about HawkSoft, they won’t shy away from just being able to show some gratitude—an attitude of gratitude being a core value—and it’s one that we strive to meet.” After a recent week with a high volume of calls for the product support team, they were provided pizza as a thank you for the hard work. He said, “We know it’s a small token compared to the very busy and hard week they’ve had, but we hope it helps.”

The core value Pursue Growth and Learning was also a later addition to the list, being formalized in February 2019 as “Growth” and then changed in October 2020 to “Pursue Growth and Learning.”

“I think those core values just nail it,” Fred said. “I think it really is what we’re all about. Again, those core values really haven’t changed since they started the company. Now it’s just put down in text.”

One of the core values focuses on families. “Our families are the most important thing there is,” Paul said. “Family is number one. That’s one of the things that we celebrate here, our families, whatever you perceive them to be.”

“I see purpose in the core values,” Paul said. He, along with other company leaders, believe “if each HawkSoft family member follows the company’s core values, they’ll treat one another and their customers with respect. This is what makes people happy, when these values have meaning.” To him, that satisfaction means more than money.

HAWKSOFT CORE VALUES

Sense of Community

Here at HawkSoft we value family—not only our individual families but also the HawkSoft family. That family includes coworkers, customers, vendors, and our surrounding communities. Because we recognize that customers and vendors have a hand in our success as much as we have in theirs, we want all our communities to feel the positive impact of being associated with HawkSoft.

We strive to make the work environment a place where groups of people work together to reach shared goals, and our families are valued and celebrated. Simply put, our most valuable assets are the people we surround ourselves with.



Sean leads a group of students on a tour of HawkSoft. On the right is a wall listing HawkSoft's original six core values.

Deliver an Exceptional Experience

We seek to deliver a positive experience to our customers, coworkers, and business partners by focusing on our relationships. Our goal is to provide accurate, timely, and knowledgeable support with empathy, humility, and a focus on empowering the individual. We take the initiative to make things better by taking ownership of our work. HawkSoft has grown by word of mouth because we strive to make every experience an exceptional one.



Family fun at Fred McGrath's Hawaiian Luau retirement party. Sean and Paul Hawkins, Heather Hansen.

For the Good of All

Decisions that balance everyone's needs will lead to greater benefit for all in the long run. These decisions can only be made through an effective exchange of ideas in an environment of mutual trust, respect, and empathy, which amplifies and transfers our strengths. Through open communication and teamwork, we can take advantage of our strengths, overcome limitations, and find solutions for the good of all.

Do the Right Thing

We conduct ourselves fairly and honestly. We honor our commitments with integrity and respect. Here at HawkSoft, we play by the rules, applying them consistently to ourselves and to others. We hold ourselves accountable, taking responsibility for our actions and decisions.

Ultimately, we do our best to do the right thing. By living this core value, we build positive relationships of trust, which are vital to our success.

Work to Live, Don't Live to Work

HawkSoft measures itself by the success of its employees as well as that of its customers. Recognizing the value of family and the importance of a balanced life, we implement plans and strategies to balance the needs of employees and customers by setting realistic goals and expectations.

We encourage our employees to follow their work schedule, to strengthen their knowledge through education, and to be involved in activities outside of the workplace. Happy employees result in happy customers.



During HawkSoft's annual Sales Week, all the Territory Managers come to its headquarters for a week of training and team building. Noemi Rodriguez, Anisa Newkirk and Pamela McConnell enjoying an evening on the Portland Spirit.

Continuous Innovation

There will always be new needs to be met and opportunities for change and growth. By understanding the problem, processes, and pain points, opportunities for innovation will follow. Our eagerness to seek change—even when change may not be requested—allows us to stay ahead of our competition and our own perceptions of our boundaries on excellence. Growth comes from learning from our past to make the future better.

Innovation is woven into the fabric of every employee and their respective role in the organization. Our openness to fix even that which is not necessarily broken, for the sake of a better experience, is the basis of our drive to innovate, create, and continuously improve.

Pursue Growth and Learning

It is only by continuing to strive to be better in our personal and professional lives that we grow as individuals and team members. We focus on the future and seek opportunities to achieve our goals through education, mentorship, and new experiences. HawkSoft believes in seeking out and providing growth opportunities to each member of our family to help them achieve their goals.

Attitude of Gratitude

We make a habit of expressing our gratefulness to customers, employees, partners, and colleagues in all of our relationships. Viewing our lives through the lens of gratitude allows us to be humble and recognize the tangible and sometimes invisible contributions of the countless people who have positioned us on the path for personal and professional success. The work we engage today and accomplishments we are able to achieve are built upon the foundations that these people have laid for us.

We view people and opportunities with an attitude of gratitude.



Top: In October 2011, HawkSoft had a groundbreaking ceremony for its permanent home at 1230 SE 3rd in Canby. *Bottom:* HawkSoft leaders and invited dignitaries prepare to turn the dirt. From left: Jamie, Dave, Sean, Paul, Jason, Jake.



Chapter 7

A Permanent Home

HawkSoft had grown so much that, even split between two offices, they were running out of room. In addition, they were eager to bring the local HawkSoft “family” under one roof again. From June through October 2011, the executive team searched for an existing structure in the Canby region to rent but had no luck finding one to meet all of their requirements, particularly high-speed internet service and the required number of parking stalls.

Although HawkSoft had previously purchased land in Canby, the leadership team hesitated to build. They considered constructing a new office in phases, or even constructing the entire building and then renting part of it out. “And the expense,” Sean added. “It felt like it was more than we could bite off at the time. Even when we finally decided to break ground on the building, we were a little afraid.”

Although the company had grown significantly during its first sixteen years, most of that growth was organic, without the need to borrow money. Building the new office was different. In 2011, the company applied for guaranteed loans through the Small Business Administration. “We’ve always stayed away from venture capital,” Jason said, in part because investors would then have a say in business decisions. “This is the biggest loan we ever took for the business. We spend what we make, and we’re always reinvesting in the business. It’s cool not to be in debt.”



The different phases of construction for the HawkSoft Headquarters in Canby, Oregon. Brother and sister Sean and Heather Hawkins (Hansen) are shown visiting the construction site.

When they constructed their building, their chief financial officer told them HawkSoft operating costs would dramatically increase each month, estimating it would be four times as much as the airport office.

Sean recalled. “Our CFO scared us at first, but then he said, ‘Of course, it’ll cost us less than hiring one new employee.’ Then we’re like ‘Oh! Is that all? Okay, move forward. We’re good.’”

“We started talking with a construction company and an architect about building a new building, and groundbreaking started in October of that year [2011],” Jason said. Architect Gene Mildren from the Mildren Design Group in Tigard, Oregon, designed the building, and Perlo Construction erected it. HawkSoft involved all the children of longtime HawkSoft employees at the groundbreaking ceremony. Jake Dunbar remembered his young children were included, wearing hardhats and participating in the event.

“This building was a pivotal moment, when we were actually able to build and design our own building instead of occupying something that somebody else built,” Paul said. “Every day I still walk in here, ‘Wow! How did this happen? Thank you, Lord!’”

Carol considered construction of the HawkSoft office building one of the highs in the company’s history, a milestone realization that HawkSoft was big enough to own a nice place for its employees to work. Heather Hawkins Hansen, who had studied interior design for three years at college, was charged by her dad to decorate the building’s interior. One of Carol’s favorite memories is seeing Heather and Sean in hard hats.

With a move-in date in June, Jason started working with the internet service provider in early 2012 to make sure all service lines would be ready on move-in day six months later. He spent hours making sure everything thing would be ready for the official move-in date, Friday, June 29. “We started moving a few critical servers to the new building on the evening of June 28,” Jason said. “Email being the one I remember.”

The company coordinated moves from both Aurora and Charbonneau. “We hired Rose City Moving & Storage to bring in totes a few days before for packing, and to bring trucks and movers on the day of,” Jason said. “Everyone was responsible for packing up their own things and then unpacking them in the new office,” Leslee

recalled. “Jason and Peter Horst worked tirelessly to get everyone hooked up and all the servers working properly. It took the whole weekend.

“Some of us stayed later into the evening that Friday night trying to get everything hooked up and ready for work on Monday morning. I helped Sean hang the big smart boards in the two big conference rooms. It was fun and a lot of hard work,” Leslee said, chuckling. “It was months before I actually attended a meeting in one of those conference rooms and got to see how they really worked.”

Jason described the relocation as “a long, tiring weekend. Servers and racks were the first to be moved as they would take most of the day to get up and running in their new home. We hired Christenson Electric (Mike Cabbage) to be on hand to mount the last rack in the server room, hired Xiologix (Kevin Elder) to be on hand to uninstall and reinstall the SAN (network storage) in order to make sure we didn’t get hung up on any of the foundational items in moving the network.

“I was the only one to come in on Sunday to finish up, and that was only because our remote SIP phones were experiencing a one-way audio problem,” Jason said. “I just could not find what was causing it.” Finally, on Sunday afternoon, he called Robin Mills,



During the company's move into their new headquarters, Jason Hansen and Peter Horst worked long hours to make sure the servers were working, prior to the first official workday.



During the weekend of June 29, 2012, many employees worked hard to get things in order. The move began Thursday night, with IT moving the mail server and phone system. The office closed on Friday to have everyone on site to help move and unpack their own work areas. Movers were brought in to help load and unload trucks. IT continued to work through the weekend to make sure everything was ready for Monday. The final problem, with the phone system, resolved Sunday around one pm. Shown above are Sean and Paul Hawkins (left) and Brita Brodin (right).

a phone system tech, who guided him to the setting that fixed the problem in about ten minutes.

In preparing for the move, the executives realized the number of desks needed. Rather than Paul make each one, they approached a Portland office furniture store specializing in design. Paul wanted cubicles centered on the corner, giving the employee the feeling of greater space. Jason said, “We wanted what we wanted, and the designers said it wasn’t possible. So, Paul went home that night and came back with the prototypes the next morning, and put it in.”

The designers they had spoken to visited a few weeks later. They were impressed with Paul’s design, wanting to take pictures of it



HawkSoft Product Support cubicles with desks made by Paul Hawkins.

for their own use. Paul declined. With the executive desks, Paul revised the executive desks several times, so their size matched to the rooms, with some shorter than others depending on the room layout. Upstairs, there are cockpit desks.

For Jason, this move was the first time his commute became closer. “Every time we’d move, my commute would get longer, until the last time.” Jason said. “I don’t know if I can beat it. I’m under a mile away now.”

“Of course, here we thought there’s no way we’re going to out-grow this building, and we already do experience growing pains just trying to find meeting rooms,” Jake said recently.

Department Growth

Those early years in the new building proved exciting as the company created separate departments and hired new people to fill the departments. Leslee Wilcox, who worked for HawkSoft for 11 years before retiring in July 2019, noted much of the personnel growth and its impact on the various departments.

“Our customer service has always been the best in the business,” Leslee said. Now, that department has grown to four teams, with one on the East Coast. She also praised the Product Support department. “We added a marketing department, expanded the Sales department, and expanded development into several teams doing fantastic things to keep up with the times and technologies. At one time, Dave [Olson] and Todd did all of the accounting and human resources,” Leslee added. “Now we have three departments covering all of that.”

Call Recording System

To improve the quality of their customer service calls, the leadership team decided in early 2013 to invest in a call recording solution for quality assurance.

“When the order was placed, I saw the requirements for setting up the network switches to support the software,” Jason said. “So, I started playing around with trying to build an alternate solution while we were waiting for the new software.”

Weather in the Northeast delayed shipment. A few weeks later, the order was still on hold.

“We decided to cancel the order and use my homegrown system,” Jason said. “We ended up using the call recording solution for about five years, until we got a new system [Ring Central] last year that now has it built in. We don’t have to do it anymore. But it was fun because I got to build something. No one asked me to do it. I just did it nights and weekends until it was nice enough to start showing here.”

Jason likes to program. He even builds electronic toys, such as one that lets him see the call stats upstairs on his screen.

The company continued to grow. Within three years, HawkSoft added three new offices upstairs in the Canby building.



Above and facing page: Every quarter, HawkSoft holds an All-hands meeting. These meetings are used to: 1) honor employees' work anniversaries, 2) announce any significant changes in the company, 3) introduce new employees, 4) present progress towards company goals, 5) share sales report, and 6) answer questions. Lunch for the entire group follows.



Chapter 8

Customer Training

As mentioned previously, Paul used to visit every new HawkSoft customer's office, installing and training the staff. As the company grew, and technology became available, training via telecommunications, then internet, became the better methods.

"Many of the HawkSoft customers own family businesses and it resonates with them when they realize they're getting treated just like family," Paul said.

However, as the program became more complex it took longer to train. "By 2004, we decided to stop doing in-house training because it took eight hours to train and people were brain dead by the end of the day," Sean said. "I mean after the first two hours, you



stop listening. That's when we started to break it down into smaller segments and do it remotely."

At first, the new training sessions were two hours long with a ten-minute break. They did one training each week, and each session lasted four to five weeks. "Some people would be put out from the fact that it would go on so long, but they didn't realize how much this program would do," Fred McGrath said. "It's a full-blown system where you can make changes through the company right there on the system."

On the first day of training, Fred would provide an overall view of the program without much detail. "Most people have a little bit of anxiety about it," Fred said. "Just getting them to warm up to the program was really my goal the first time around." Many had never used a management system, or if they had, it wasn't HawkSoft's.

"There's nothing more exciting to me than having a good product with outstanding customer service," Fred said. His biggest challenge was working with people afraid of technology. "They're afraid they're going to blow something up. I used to love those people, because I had been there. I knew exactly what they were going through. I just loved teaching people how to use the software."

Fred always had a list of names who were in the training remotely over the phone. Although he couldn't see them, he tried to get to know them. "I would try to call on them by name and ask them really elementary easy questions, or just 'How are you doing? Are you with me?'" Just to keep them engaged."

Fred also asked what people did when they weren't selling insurance. He'd write it down and ask about their hobbies later. "Anything to make that connection," Fred said. "Customer service was always one-on-one."

After the technology became available, he could log into their computer remotely and guide them to the correct places. Trainers

must know their product, but every agency is different. “You’ll have some people who are engaged, and some people who don’t want it, and so the real challenge to me was to get them on my side,” Fred said. “We want to become friends.”

When he trained people in the agencies, he usually taught several at a time through conference calls, or later in virtual classrooms. “I would be assigned several agencies and we would set up times to get together and we would start the training,” Fred said.

Customer Training has changed throughout the years. Early on, the experience could be different depending on your trainer, as each person had his/her own style. Fred said, “The company realizes, as I did, that we needed to become uniformed. We couldn’t afford to have somebody not hear a concept. We had a script developed, with bullet points to hit during each class.”

When webinars were added, presenters were paired with partners. “We not only had to know our stuff and learn the script, we had to do it with a partner,” Fred said. “We would go back-and-forth where the slides would change. I would try to stay on my script, which they also had, and still keep it personal and flowing and off-the-cuff with the customers.”

“You have to be literally on the same page, and we would all print out the script, but sometimes I would make notes on mine that weren’t on hers,” Fred said. “There were times when it wasn’t always exact. Plus, sometimes they would lose connection from their computer. It could get very, very intense. Because once one little thing was changed, there’s a whole group of things that have to be done in order to get that little change in there.”

Though the spontaneity of the training was reduced, it didn’t take away from the personality of the trainers. “The people who do this have really great personalities,” Fred said. “They’re wonderful people, and that personality comes through.”

In customer training, agents are told that HawkSoft works for them. Fred stressed this in his training, as do others, “If there’s something that you’ve seen in a program that you’ve used before, and we don’t have it, we want to know about it. If there’s something that you think is just stupid, we need to know. This is a program for you. The better we make it for you, the happier you are, the happier we are.”

HawkSoft University

In 2015, Nationwide announced it would “release” its customers and allow their agencies to pick from three different client management systems, including HawkSoft. “We knew we needed to make some changes to accommodate them,” Leslee said. “As a result, HawkSoft University was born, so we could train more agencies with the professional service consultants we had.”

Propelled by Jamie Phillips, HawkSoft University’s purpose was to streamline training. A team manager, an additional designer and a part-time freelance eLearning Developer (who worked remotely) were hired. Before many of the courses were launched, HawkSoft employees tried them out.

HawkSoft University (also known as HSU) added courses and resources weekly as employees geared up for a surge of new contracts from agencies released by Nationwide. They prepared trainings for CMS Overview, Personal Lines Workflow, and Commercial Lines Workflow. They offered one-on-one agency trainings and small group trainings as well as self-study courses.

By early 2016, a hundred agencies and four hundred customers were added to HSU, and a thousand people attended Live Learning Events, while 450 completed online self-study courses. The department continued adding courses such as Suspense Reports, Activity Reports, Creating Correspondence Templates,

Using Correspondence Templates, and Commission Importer Live Learning Event. Self-studies included Creating Correspondence Templates and Using Correspondence Templates. HawkSoft moved its Commission Training into HSU online self-studies.

Then HawkSoft University was added to the ecommerce portal on August 15, 2016, so customers could pay online for the training they needed for new staff. New courses were added through 2017 and 2018.

“After a few years we realized that the Nationwide project wasn’t going to grow as quickly as we were led to believe,” Leslee said. Jake added, “We were expecting a big wave of sales and it just never panned out. That was tough, because we had hired all these people and really had no place to put them. We had to let a couple of people go, if I remember correctly.” It was hard on the team, too, as new associations and relationships had been established.

“HawkSoft invested more than \$50,000 to launch HawkSoft University and expected to recoup some of those costs as agencies paid for the training,” Jake said. But it didn’t prove to be a cash cow at all. “It never should have been a paid service,” Sean said. “You don’t sell people on ‘Oh, you want to get help in the system? You’re going to have to pay for help.’”

Adjustments

For fifteen years, Jamie Phillips had been a key player in HawkSoft’s growth from the time he was hired. He had become Vice President of Customer Relations, with Jake Dunbar as his assistant. This allowed Jamie to focus on strategy and big-picture facets of the business.

Helping Jamie, Jake quickly moved into people management and, before long, he handled employee performance evaluations. “It was great under his tutelage,” Jake said. “He was a great mentor

to me, very patient, very encouraging, but also very willing to hold me accountable, willing to invest time and money to help me learn and grow.”

In 2016, Jamie asked Jake to manage the Professional Services team, which focused on training new customers. “It was a challenge, because the team was not in a good place,” Jake said. Morale was low partly because the company had had to lay off people.

In 2017, after nearly 15 years with HawkSoft, Jamie decided to pursue other interests. “Jamie contributed a lot to the success of HawkSoft,” Jason said. “Jamie started out over Customer Service and expanded to be over Professional Services, Marketing, and Sales. His impact will be forever felt here.”

Paul agreed, “Jamie was a fantastic asset and played a big role in the company’s growth.” After Jamie left the company, Jake took on the director role more formally and continued doing what he had been doing. In addition to Professional Services, Jake was asked to oversee HawkSoft University, and later Education Services. He also oversaw Database Management.

By 2018, the company revamped HawkSoft University to create Education Services, using people from within the company to create short five-minute videos instead of the hour-long interactive training sessions. Feedback from customers had shown they preferred quick access to short videos and articles that were easy to digest. “It was so much easier for our customers to use,” Sean said. “In a little three- to five-minute chunk, they’re like, ‘Oh that makes sense!’”

HawkSoft requested applications from professional video contractors who could compile these lengthy sessions into short clips. Sean’s teenaged son, Djeryd (pronounced “Jared”), submitted his sample anonymously. The committee selected Djeryd’s submission as a favorite.

“The goal was to replace the content with easy-to-digest short videos, rather than interactive content,” said senior videographer Ryan Reese. “We began by watching every University course, and documenting the topics covered therein. A lot of the content was interactive, which does not translate to a simple video format. We took this opportunity to redesign the manner in which the content is presented, crafting what we call ‘Learning Pathways.’”



Top: 2019 HUG National Conference, Las Vegas. Christy Patterson, Steve Neff, and Anisa Newkirk. Bottom: Chris LeJeune and Paul Moyes at an insurance trade show.



Father and son, Paul and Sean.



Chapter 9

The Birth of a Marketing Department

For the first twenty years, HawkSoft operated without a marketing director, let alone a marketing department. In 2015, the company, which traditionally hired from within, advertised for a product marketing director. It was one of the first serious searches the company had launched.

Rushang Shah was hired to fill that position. Later, Rushang spoke of how Bob Bloom, as Vice President of Sales, had done a great job of producing some of the marketing in-house. However, the HawkSoft team didn't have a concerted marketing plan or even an understanding of how effective marketing could empower the company. "Most people don't have that understanding," Rushang said. "They think of marketing as advertising, but that's a subset of marketing."

Rushang had earned his undergraduate degree in computer engineering, then went on to obtain his MBA. He said, "I tend to excel more when you're applying engineering in a business concept." He worked with tech startups and other companies, moving to Portland with his wife in 2005, where he worked for a company called CompanionLink Software. It was one of the first third-party synchronization apps for handheld digital devices and computers.

He said, "After spending a decade on the bleeding edge of technology in the mobile world, I was searching for an



HawkSoft's first and current Chief Marketing Officer, Rushang Shah.

industry that was on the lagging end of the technology curve. Insurance is definitely one of those industries.”

What convinced him to join the HawkSoft team was a 10-minute video where Paul talks about the HawkSoft story, found on the ‘About Us’ page of the old website. It was a simple video taken during an employee training. “What sold me was two things really—the story itself and how Paul was saying it—it came off very authentic,” Rushang said. He appreciated how Paul credited great people for the company’s success. “That humility is really what sold me.”

Most companies give the marketing director limitations, either a budget or a schedule. “To Paul’s credit, he put no parameters, because I think he was humble enough to know that he didn’t

know what he didn't know," Rushang said. Paul asked the new Marketing Vice President to define their goals and put together a plan to achieve them. Rushang started from ground zero, building an entire department and teaching the rest of the executive team about what marketing could do.

"HawkSoft didn't have a focused department on getting our story out, our message out," Rushang said. "That vacuum created room in the market for other vendors to tell our story. I think we were beginning to see the impact of that." For example, competitors described HawkSoft as too small to do the job. When the company was located at the Aurora airport, prospective customers were told by naysayers to view HawkSoft's address on Google Maps. It was mistakenly identified as a mobile home. Jason said, "People were told, 'You guys don't want to be using them, they're just running this out of their house.'"



Being the CEO doesn't stop Paul from doing anything that needs to be done, including mowing the lot next to HawkSoft headquarters, which the company owns.

“Honestly, the first three months of my time here were spent talking to the heads of every single department,” Rushang said. He wanted to understand the product and why agencies preferred HawkSoft to other companies. He wanted to know what their competitors thought of HawkSoft.

From there, he developed a marketing plan, explaining what marketing is and isn't. He identified where to invest resources and what to do the first, second, third, fourth, and fifth years. “Here we are five years later, we are still a very nimble department in Marketing,” Rushang said, noting he has five people in the department.

Rushang enjoys his coworkers and working in a values-driven company. He described Paul's humility as CEO of a successful company as unique. “That humility attracts me,” Rushang said. “I've seen a lot of big players, especially in the tech industry, and when you get a certain level of success, the other side begins to wane. Everything that got you to that point you tend to forget, and you can live in that echo chamber.”

Marketing Goals

“We needed to get our brand out,” Rushang said. “And we did, as seen in Paul's story, in the startup story. We had a very different story than a lot of these companies.”

The first marketing goal was to increase the company's digital footprint or presence. “It really felt like HawkSoft was ten years behind,” Rushang said. He focused on revamping the website, discerning the best keywords to optimize for search engines and convert browsers into buyers.

The second marketing strategy during the first year was to better define the company's identity and brand. This strategy depended a lot on how much growth the HawkSoft board of directors wanted to

see in the future. He said, “We are in a very crowded marketplace where people have very little attention to give you. They’re going to judge you in seven to ten seconds.”

Rushang asked each individual on the Executive Team to provide their thoughts about growth for the marketing plan. The question he asked: If they had a thousand customers, how would they use their limited resources? Would they use it to better understand and serve those thousand customers? Or would they use those resources for acquiring a thousand more customers?

“Almost unanimously, each said understanding the current thousand, because we’re not looking to make the sacrifices for that hockey stick growth,” Rushang said. “We, at HawkSoft, like that steady growth because we don’t have to change who we are and the type of company we are.”

Identifying the story HawkSoft leaders wanted to tell helped Rushang incorporate that into the actions the company took. In other words, everything HawkSoft said, everyone they hired, how employees behaved had to be rooted in that identity. “We’re not looking for quick growth,” Rushang said. “We’re looking for steady growth, and let’s tell that story. Let’s get that out into the public.”

Those first five years with focused marketing saw great success. In 2019, the company hit all-time records nine of the twelve months. “We’ve hit records in terms of the number of leads that will come into our sales funnel,” Rushang said. “That’s been a win.”

But that’s only one measure of success. “The biggest win, I think, is getting our story out,” he said. Today, if someone is asked what they think of HawkSoft, the answer will be along the lines of “a small company that cares about people, its customers and employees,” and “is not looking to sell out.”

The last point is an important message to share. “In the market we’re in, the two big players have been sold multiple times,”

Rushang said. “They are billion-dollar companies, and their customers feel the fallout.” Often these larger companies acquire smaller companies, incorporating the new technology from the smaller businesses, then phase out most of those technologies. These big conglomerates will shut down other purchased companies, creating havoc for the customers of that software.

“Today, people know that HawkSoft is the anti-corporation,” Rushang said. “They have one product. They’ve been working at the ‘knitting’ for twenty-five years, and they don’t have an exit plan. They know the type of company they’re investing into and its values.” The company has succeeded in getting its story out and identifying its brand clearly.

HawkSoft is also competitive in pricing. “We are not the cheapest by any means,” Rushang said. “There are a lot of startups that are a lot cheaper than us—great value there—but you don’t get some of the things that you get with HawkSoft, like the customer support.” Some of the larger corporations will start with a lower rate but then raise costs over time so their costs are actually comparable, or even higher, to what HawkSoft charges.

The Face of HawkSoft

On his first day on the job, Rushang flew with Paul to a user group meeting in Oakland, California. “It’s one thing for me to hear about the company from people in the HawkSoft building, it’s another thing for me to hear it from outsiders or customers,” he said. “So, I went, and what struck me was the HawkSoft brand is so synonymous with Paul Hawkins.”

On the return flight, Paul asked what Rushang thought of those two days. Rushang offered him good news and bad news.

“The good news is we’ve got very avid customers that love us. I feel like they love the product. They love the company and what

we stand for,” Rushang told him. “The bad news is that HawkSoft to them is you. What happens when you’re gone? Do we fall into the abyss?”

Rushang described that as a scary thought for the company—and for its marketer—“because that brand is attached to one figurehead.”

To ameliorate that threat, Rushang put together a marketing plan that attempted to dissociate the company’s brand from its primary founder and then broaden it. HawkSoft employees are asked to join Paul at conferences and other events. “Paul’s making the right introductions for these people,” Rushang said. “Case in point, Kenny Hendricks, who’s on my team, travels quite a bit throughout the year, joining Paul at various industry events. He’s done so well at it, and he’s so well-known now, people recognize Kenny as HawkSoft. He transitioned from product marketing coordinator to more business development and he’s working with many different vendors in our industry.”

“The next face of HawkSoft primarily is Sean, who will fill a lot of that role,” Rushang said. “Originally, he wasn’t so comfortable with that, but if you look at him now, when he’s presenting at these national events like HUG, you can tell he’s stepped into that role. I think he’s come to terms with what he excels at and what he doesn’t,” Rushang said. “HawkSoft will be different, but the core values will be there.”

Like Paul, Sean’s role at HawkSoft has evolved over the past twenty-five years. When HawkSoft was smaller, if an idea developed, someone would take it to Sean. “He would famously say, ‘Yeah, I can do that in ten minutes.’ Sure enough, ten minutes later, we had a new feature and it could begin rolling out,” Jake said. “Now, it’s much more regimented but in a very, very good way, to make sure that we’re dotting i’s and crossing t’s, being as efficient as possible in that valuable resource that we have in our developers.”



Besides being brothers-in-law, Sean and Jason are good friends who love working together, especially computer programming.

Sean has gone from the full-time programmer to delegating much of that and stepping into greater management roles, overseeing other aspects of the business.

Though HawkSoft's first official full-time employee, and one of its founders, Jason is happy not to be in the forefront of the company's image. "I'll always be behind the scenes," he said. "I'm not a presenter. I am not the face of HawkSoft by any means. I really like to have more private conversations in smaller groups than some of our larger leadership meetings."

In spite of Jason's protests, his strengths are recognized. "Jason is one of the brightest people I've ever met," Rushang said. "People look at him and think, 'Yeah, this guy is an introvert.' He is, to me, the Swiss army knife in our company. Projects that people don't

know how to start, don't want to do, end up on his plate, and it takes a different personality to take those on, and hats off to him."

"Jason is a chameleon. Wherever you plug him in, he excels," Fred said. "All the servers we have back here, he put all of that stuff together. He has to go out and research all of this stuff and know what it does and know how to install it. It's mind boggling."

"Paul, Sean and Jason, they're like the three pillars," Fred said. "I don't think HawkSoft would have happened had it not been for that combination of people. People can be trained to do a job, but the personality they bring is much more than just what they do."

Rushang said, "To me that's the truly unique part in HawkSoft's story, the ability to retain your original intent and core values even through the ups and downs, and over twenty-five years that's quite a statement," Rushang said. "That's hard to do."



Top: HUG conferences begin with the United States Pledge of Allegiance. Bottom: HUG attendees, HawkSoft clients, and employees during the 2018 HUG National Conference in Las Vegas.



Chapter 10

HUG & Annual Conventions

Years earlier, while the company was working in the Hawkins' home on Pine Street, Paul spoke about the need for a HawkSoft User Group, also known as "HUG." However, they didn't launch until the early 2010s.

The purpose of the HUG was to give customers a platform, independent of HawkSoft, where they can talk about how they use the software. Rushang said, "We needed to give them that space to talk independently and share their ideas. How we intend for them to use our software may be very different than how they're actually using it."

Initially, regional HawkSoft sales managers would get agencies in their regions together for a one-day event. In 2015, the HawkSoft board decided to democratize the user group. Rushang said, "We wanted the user group themselves to manage the network of customers."

The year previously, HawkSoft brought in a big cluster, which is a group of agencies with the same carrier, from Ohio. This cluster came with a history of many different management systems.

Rushang said, "We ended up winning the sweepstakes and that whole cluster chose HawkSoft as their management system of choice. That cluster had a number of people on it that had run a user group for another management system that no longer existed.

We were fortunate to inherit these people. In 2015, we flew nine of them to the home office here in Canby. We met for two full days.”

Those at HawkSoft believed that the true benefit of a user group comes when it is run by users. They wanted to make it a little more independent and asked if some members could step forward to manage it, with HawkSoft providing the resources to make it work.

“That group, kind of leaning on their past experience, stepped up to the plate and said, ‘Yes, we’d love to do this,’” said Rushang. Though HawkSoft is a big contributor to the funds behind it, the group is independently run.

HawkSoft gains a great deal from the user group. Rushang said, “We rely on the group’s feedback any time we’re building new features and new capabilities.” Those in the user group are utilized for beta testing new features, polling their thoughts about new designs, and collecting input on what programming HawkSoft should focus on in the upcoming year. Rushang adds, “Once a year, we actually send out a survey to say, ‘Here’s what’s on our product roadmap for the next year, you prioritize these for us.’ Honestly our product roadmap is driven a lot by that user group.”

HUG National Conventions

Through traditional channels, HawkSoft users initially learn the software benefits from the sales representatives and implementation training team. Ongoing, they have access to Product Support and the Help system’s articles and training videos. But it’s the HUG conventions that bring customers together for in-person networking and allow them to learn from each other about the best ways to use HawkSoft.

The first national HUG conference was held in 2017 in Ohio. By the 2018 event, held in Las Vegas, there were four hundred people attending.



Above: Paul addresses HUG attendees while Sean looks on. Right: HawkSoft employees enjoy their time at HUG gatherings. From left: John Barnes, Jake Dunbar, and Ruben Hurse.

Paul was overwhelmed. “I stood there for twenty seconds without being able to say a word,” Paul recalled. All those people using the software he, Jason and Sean had first developed in a two-bedroom apartment.

The HawkSoft User Group members are great champions for the software. HUG members also provide great word-of-mouth advertising. “This amazing user group raves about HawkSoft,” Rushang said. Customer referrals are an important source for new business. When Fred worked for the company, he estimated that sixty percent of new clientele came from current HawkSoft users.

In November 2017, the group officially became HUG, LLC, a subsidiary of HawkSoft. HUG’s executive coordinator, Jennifer Thompson, became a HawkSoft employee. In addition to keeping national conferences as the cornerstone, Jennifer was interested in developing more webinars and peer-to-peer training. At that time, twenty-eight percent of HawkSoft agencies were HUG members. Today, nearly 60% of HawkSoft agencies are HUG members.

“They do one national and about seven or eight regionals, so they have stuff going on throughout the year,” Jason said. “The

regional ones are smaller. They're more for agencies in that area, whereas the national one is for all members and people will come from all over to it." A HawkSoft representative attends each regional group with many HawkSoft employees attending the national gathering.

Regional HUG gatherings are smaller but still powerful, typically drawing around 50-60 attendees. They have taken place in California, Florida, Indiana, Iowa, Mississippi, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin.

2019 National Convention

The 2019 HUG National Convention in Las Vegas drew 432 people—360 agents, twenty-eight HawkSoft employees and guests, and forty-three exhibitor representatives. Amelia Jach of HUG has worked tirelessly to secure over \$20,000 in sponsorships for the event.

"HUG was *amazing!*" said Anisa Newkirk of the HawkSoft Professional Services team. "I felt the buzz of excitement from the agencies as soon as I walked in the door." Her coworker, Christy Patterson, described HUG as "an amazing opportunity to connect with our customers, to be able to further develop relationships with them, to hear what they love in HawkSoft and what they want to improve."

"I was inspired countless times watching agents helping agents," Jake said. "Oh, how grateful I am for our customers, for their passion and energy, for their willingness to help each other, and for their gratitude. There were many times when I was approached with a heartfelt thank you, for all of us here at HawkSoft, for all that we do for them and their industry."

"So proud to represent HawkSoft at the Vegas HUG conference (aka annual family reunion)," said HawkSoft's Senior Territory

Manager Linda Anderson. “Came back home energized to sell HawkSoft. We have the best customers in the world.”

Crystal Erlitz, Manager of HawkSoft Managed Accounting Services, also enjoyed HUG. “It was extremely refreshing to meet our customers and to feel the love and passion they have for our system and our company,” she said. “I can’t tell you how many of them asked me where our customer service reps were. They adore our Product Support team and always want to gush about how amazing of an experience they have with them every time they call in.”

Carol at HUG

Carol Hawkins didn’t attend the early HUG events. She had not traveled with Paul for several years, as the demands of being a caretaker for her parents kept her close to home. The 2019 HUG National Convention was the first large HUG event she had attended. Walking into the large hall, she was brought to tears. “It was very overwhelming,” she said.

It floored her to see so many people willing to travel so far for classes as well as association with other HUG members. Some of



Paul and Carol enjoying time together at the 2019 HUG convention.

the smaller agencies simply closed their offices for a few days to attend. She was impressed that so many agents were willing to donate time to train others in their industry.

Though she was introduced in a general session as Paul's wife, she blended in with the crowd. In a class taught by Linda Anderson, Carol visited with an agent about her business. Halfway through the class, Linda acknowledged Carol's presence. Laughing, Carol said, "The expression on this agent's face was priceless!"

Another time, while visiting with an agent from Ohio, Carol learned about problems the woman was experiencing with the software. When Paul walked over to say hello, she introduced the woman to her husband, saying, "Paul, can you help this lady?"

Carol said, "I don't think the agent anticipated that she was going to get answers so directly."

"I had so much fun at the HUG. I did not realize the number of wonderful, wonderful people that we'd meet," Carol said.

Though Carol doesn't work in the HawkSoft office, she has an active influence. When she comes across agent concerns or problems on the HUG Facebook page, she snaps photos of the comments and forwards them to Paul, especially if it hasn't been addressed in a timely manner.

The AUGIE Award

In 2017, HawkSoft and the HawkSoft User Group received the inaugural AUGIE Andy Fogarty Industry Impact Award. It was given in recognition of their Outstanding Volunteerism in Furthering AUGIE'S Initiatives.

According to its website, "AUGIE Group supports the discussion and implementation of technology to improve the efficiency of the independent agent and broker distribution channel in the digital age." 2017 was the first year the award was given. A further



HawkSoft and HUG received the first AUGIE award in 2017.

surprise and honor came when Andy Fogarty, who was also surprised to learn the award was named after him, personally handed the award to Paul.

HawkSoft earned the award for their efforts in helping clients with the cloud-based software IVANS Exchange. It's an online tool that includes automated connections for agents. A new release required users to update their passwords by year-end, or they would lose the functionality. HawkSoft had no obligation to help their clients and no clear incentive to do so; however, HawkSoft recognized the importance to their customers. They decided to dedicate resources to the project. The Customer Service team, and later a temp group consisting of employees' teenage children, proactively reached out to agencies, notifying them of the change and encouraging them to update their passwords.

“This year’s impact award centered on the key word ‘Download,’ the significance of its origin, and how technology has propelled the insurance sector forward,” the newsletter states. “The voluntary initiatives by HawkSoft and the HawkSoft User Group (HUG) have pushed the digital advancement of independent agents, IVANS, AUGIE, and the industry as a whole.”



Top: HawkSoft's leadership trio with its New Bern manager, Crystal Erlitz, in 2019. Bottom: Ribbon-cutting ceremony for HawkSoft's New Bern, North Carolina office, home to HawkSoft Managed Accounting Services, on May 2, 2019.



Chapter 11

Adaptations

In August and September 2018, HawkSoft faced a test to prove to its customers and others in the industry that its core values were more than words on the wall.

Crypto Virus

HawkSoft delivers its product in two forms: agencies can buy a local version and install it on their computers, or they can buy it online and access it from anywhere. For the latter, HawkSoft has a service provider hosting the company's software on servers in Atlanta. In August 2018, the servers were attacked using the Cryptolocker virus, which ran through the system, infecting and encrypting files. All of a sudden, HawkSoft customers couldn't access their data. Jason said, "The provider had to completely burn down their network and build it from scratch. There were like 900 customer service calls to HawkSoft that day. It was a really bad day upstairs (where the Product Support team works), it was a really bad day for the whole company." The malware put the entire company out of commission for two and a half days.

"That, for a lot of people, is death row," Paul said.

The service provider rebuilt everything within three days, but during the following month, clients experienced slowdowns as the data was being restored. Jason said. "It was a bad time in the

company. The highest call volume was probably for about a week, and then it just trickled down for probably about a month of people complaining, and there was nothing else we could do. It was a month of pain.”

The executive team needed to decide how the company would react. “Obviously, we’d worked day and night to get the service back up, but what do we do to make this right from a financial aspect for our customers?” Rushang said.

Legally, the company wasn’t liable for an action that wasn’t their fault. “We could have weaseled our way through it and said we’re not responsible,” Rushang said. The executive team members debated the issue a lot. “But we decided as a group we have to do what we feel is right.”

“I was a little worried that this crisis would sink us,” Jason said. “It was bad.” The executives shared how their departments would be affected by different courses of action, but the final decision was easily unanimous. “We decided that we’d credit our customers.”

“If we are to live by our core values, which is do the right thing, this is a financial hit we have to take,” Rushang said. “What’s really heartening was that a lot of customers recognized that we didn’t have to, and the outpouring of admiration only supported our decision. It was really quite something.”

Shortly afterward, Paul was at a regional users group meeting in Newark, New Jersey.

“Guys, we’re going to start with the elephant in the room,” Paul began his presentation. He has always believed in transparency throughout the company. “Last month we had a crypto virus in our data center. I just want to report to you what you had. How many of you were affected by that?”

About a third to one half of the hands rose. Then a woman stood to speak. Paul said he braced himself.

“Paul,” she said, “I just want to tell you something right now. You guys had us up in two-and-a-half days, and you guys were in constant communication with us. You were transparent, and you cared. And I want you to know that we wouldn’t leave you for anything.”

Paul received a standing ovation.

“They weren’t the complaints he was expecting,” Jason said. “They actually thanked him for what we did.” Although, Jason added with a laugh, “While it was happening, they weren’t thanking us.”

Jason said the resolution proved to be a good one, despite a bad situation where “lots of things could have gone sideways. But in the end, we probably lost only a few customers.” In 2018, HawkSoft added another data center for hosting, increasing the number to three.

New Bern, North Carolina

Crystal Erlitz, the founder of C.M. Temple & Associates, provided small business insurance bookkeeping solutions to many of HawkSoft’s customers, as well as to customers of other management services. The HawkSoft board saw a growing demand in providing comprehensive insurance accounting and bookkeeping services to independent agencies, in addition to its management services.

Crystal’s company, based in New Bern, North Carolina, was founded with a similar culture and core values to those of HawkSoft. She visited HawkSoft headquarters in Canby, talking with the HawkSoft team about their common customer base, and both sides realized that, by working together, they could grow both businesses.

The final decision to acquire C.M. Temple & Associates came after a trip to New Bern in September 2018, which coincided with clean-up efforts from Hurricane Florence. The HawkSoft team was deeply moved by the community’s resilience in the aftermath of the natural disaster.

The HawkSoft team knew then that this was more than a business partnership; it was an investment in a community and its future. New Bern felt similar to HawkSoft's northwest home in Canby, Oregon—similar size, deep family roots, and hospitable people who cared about each other and their community. The HawkSoft team wanted to be a part of this place, these people. On December 1, 2018, the purchase was made official.

The New Bern office, called HawkSoft Managed Accounting Services, which is a separate company owned by HawkSoft, is managed by Crystal. "It's one more service we can give to our customers that creates some stickiness to our product and our brand," Jason said.

The leadership team uses the word stickiness quite a bit. Jason explains, "The more services you're offering them, the harder it is for them to leave."

The next month, in January, the new office faced a crisis. Water pipes had frozen and broken, and the landlord, who had an office nearby, refused to fix them. Among the staff was a pregnant woman, so a working restroom was even more of a necessity. The landlord allowed HawkSoft employees to use his bathroom; however, the situation was not ideal.

They needed to find a new office as soon as possible. Jason Hansen and Greg Fish, HawkSoft's Information Technology Manager, jumped on an airplane the next morning. The one drawback to having the two distant offices is the travel, requiring two transfers to get to New Bern. "We left at six in the morning and got in at nine-thirty at night," Jason said.

The next evening, they packed up everything after the landlord had left, put it in the back of Crystal's van, and moved into a new office that had been negotiated earlier that afternoon. After moving in the furniture, Jason and Greg went back to build the network.



Employees and clients of HawkSoft Managed Accounting Services gather together. Kevin Roberts, president of the New Bern Chamber of Commerce is addressing the group.

Jason said, “We just started building what they needed to start working at the new location, and then we flew home.”

With an opening date of February 28, Jason and Greg flew back the following month to set up the needed computers for a new customer service team. The two also helped the workers clean the carpets and create a nice office space, working long days to get it ready.

On opening day, the water shut off unexpectedly around 9:30 or 10:00 a.m. After calling the landlord, who didn’t know why, someone called the water department. The HawkSoft team learned they needed to set up an account and make a payment before noon in order to get the service turned back on the same day.

“This is the first day for, like, ten staff over there, brand new location, and they have no water and no toilets,” Jason recalled. “And somebody has a stomach bug that’s going on, so a bathroom is important. I go running into town, get the landlord to meet me



Sean and MyLieve Hawkins at the grand opening of the New Bern office.

because we need a signed contract to open up service, and we didn't even have that yet.”

They waited twenty to thirty minutes at the water department for the landlord to arrive. “They wouldn't let us sign up for service without the lease agreement,” Jason said. It was 11:40, approaching that noon cutoff for service, when they signed the papers and paid the twenty-two dollars outstanding to restore service.

Jason and Crystal then visited the electric company to make sure nothing else would be shut down, paying a thousand-dollar deposit.

“We get done and find out that Greg had been taking five-gallon buckets to the pond next door to be able to flush the toilets,” Jason said. “There’s a video floating around somewhere of a fish floating around in one of the toilets, a little tiny fish.”

“It’s a nice little office,” Jason said. “I think we have about 3,600 square feet for about 15 employees over there.”

The core unit of Product Support representatives works upstairs in the Canby office, but a team manager and six Product Support representatives work in New Bern, answering calls from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time (5:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Pacific Time). The different time zone allows HawkSoft to have extended support hours. All product support calls come into the same number, but they’re then distributed to the different representatives and offices.

The open house and ribbon-cutting ceremony took place on May 2, 2019. Paul, Carol, Sean, MyLiege, and Jason flew to New Bern for the celebration. Crystal and her staff had a few surprises for the Hawkins family. Upon arrival, they were greeted with a beautiful engraved HawkSoft metal sign, along with eight matching plaques that proudly display the company’s eight core values. In addition, beautiful photographs taken by MyLiege had been printed and hung in the office. Jason Hansen added to the décor by secretly reproducing artwork that currently hangs in Paul Hawkins’ Canby office, a painting by Carol.

HawkSoft in 2020

Among HawkSoft’s current goals as it celebrates its 25th anniversary is moving the company to a cloud-based system. It has been in the works for the past few years.

“Each year we have big hopes, but it’s a very big task,” Jake said. It will change how the company delivers its software to customers. Jake added, “That said, we are charting new territory and we still

may find some bumps in the road that we'll learn from. It may still push things back, but we're not a company to rush through it and run the risk of poor quality."

Rushang agrees that this is a big leap, allowing the company to position themselves for the upcoming generation of insurance agents. Improving product support is a perpetual goal. "Exceptional product support—that's what keeps customers," Jason said.

With the company's growth, the three founders realized at one point that they hardly saw each other anymore. They felt they were missing some of the connections and cohesiveness of the early days. In response, Paul, Sean, and Jason decided to go to lunch every Friday. It has been a great tradition that gives them time to talk without too much distraction. They review how each is feeling about current operations and new developments, making sure that HawkSoft stays true to its foundational culture.

In these discussions, both Sean and Jason realized they missed focusing on what they loved most about work – programming. In November 2018, HawkSoft hired Greg Fish as Information Technology Manager, freeing up Jason so he could devote more time to developing software solutions. Greg commented shortly after he arrived, "This is an amazing culture."

Sean decided to block off regular time in his schedule to devote to programming, and he even puts a "Do not disturb" sign on his door. Recently, the two men worked together on a coding project which they both enjoyed.



Top: During HawkSoft's Sales Week. From left: Debby Neff, Anisa Newkirk, Linda Anderson, Christy Patterson. Bottom: HawkSoft's booth for industry shows celebrating 25 years.



The Hawkins and Hansen families at the 2019 HUG National Conference in Las Vegas. From left: Jason, Heather, Paul, Carol, Sean.



Chapter 12

Looking Back, Moving Forward

When talking about HawkSoft's beginning, Paul laughs when remembering how he and Jason worked out of their small two-bedroom townhouse. He didn't envision HawkSoft would grow as large as it has. "I didn't think of it that way," he said. "I just thought of one agency at a time. I'm helping them solve a problem and making their life better. I help them through their processes and help them do what they do on a daily basis."

Carol said she couldn't imagine a quarter of a century ago the growth the company would experience. "I did not envision the layers of what HawkSoft has become," she said. In some ways, Jason said he probably expected the company to have grown faster; however, the slow and steady growth created a more solvent company. HawkSoft today has the cash to pay off its debts and leases.

Bob Bloom admits he can get somewhat emotional about what he has seen in the past twenty-five years. He said, "HawkSoft is a wonderful story. The fact that they've built this company—started out with a great idea but were smart enough to know what they didn't know and bring in people who could fill those gaps—does speak a tremendous amount, not just to their vision, but their willingness to embrace change. And the fact that Paul's been able to build something that's going to last, that has staying power, is really wonderful. It's just a tremendous story."

Aside from family members, Rushang Shah identifies Jamie Phillips, Dave Olson, and Bob Bloom as key players in the company's history. "The HawkSoft story, to me, can't be told without them. Jamie brought a practicality to the dreams that Paul had. Paul is a high-level thinker, and HawkSoft wouldn't be where it is today without the meticulous detail and almost the contrarian view that Jamie presented. He was the balance; the other side of the equation that brought balance.

"Dave Olson was very practical as a Chief Financial Officer," Rushang continued. In addition to transparency with the numbers, he offered other business ideas and suggestions. And, because he and Paul grew up together, he could tell the CEO no. "He had a very candid relationship with Paul, and I think the company as a whole benefitted from that, because through that growth you always need that other person to say, 'No, stop.'"

"Bob Bloom had a big impact shaping Paul's ideology toward business, and the things you should look for," Rushang said. "Always look for smart people. Hire good people. Bob helped me understand what the industry cared about, because I came from the tech industry." Dave retired in 2016, and Jamie and Bob left the following year, in 2017.

Another important hire, Bob said, was Rushang Shah. "It was time to bring in a real professional for the marketing piece."

Bob served on a committee that reviewed resumes for the marketing job. Rushang's was impressive. "He understood the company," Bob said. "Rushang, who was probably only here a year or so before I left, is a real player. Somebody not just in marketing but who understood businesses and could see more of a big picture. I think the world of Rushang."

He said the board of directors knows their strengths and weaknesses. "They don't all think that they have all of the answers." That

is one reason the founders rely on input from their executive team and other employees

When the company constructed its brick office building in Canby, Jake said it felt like HawkSoft had arrived. “That was very momentous in my mind. While there’s never been a doubt in my mind about the longevity of the company, it’s just, wow, what a moment that was!”

Jake described himself as in awe of where the company is today, having been there when the company had only a dozen or so employees, and only a few in Customer Service. When he started, the company served agents in California, Utah, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. Today, it’s nationwide.

Continued Growth through Trust

Most of HawkSoft’s growth has been organic. Through the years, satisfied clients shared what the management program could do with other agents, and the word spread. Today, many of the sales still come from referrals. Sean said. “We go to shows, exhibitions, but where most of our good customers come from are referrals.” Fred agreed, “Certain people are diehard HawkSoft people.”

Industry shows provide name recognition and networking opportunities for HawkSoft. “If we’re not there, people notice,” Sean said. “While we see some sales off of the shows, most of our new business comes from customer referrals.”

The company continues to grow. Paul shared some recent news with his then Director of Product Support, Aedan James. “Aedan, I’ve got good news and I’ve got bad news. Which one would you like first?”

Aedan responded, “Okay, give me the bad news.”

“We’ve got a master agency that is 158 agencies in Ohio that is looking to come to us all at the same time,” Paul told her.

“Wow! What’s the good news?”

“Same news.” Paul laughed.

That tremendous level of growth could be scary, Paul acknowledges, if the company isn’t prepared.

Unlike many other companies, HawkSoft doesn’t drop the price simply to beat a competitor. Some companies offer a price, labeling it an introductory offer that lasts for a year, but they fail to tell that to the customers. In 2019, HawkSoft picked up a Tennessee agency with 100 users after a competitor used that tactic. “The agency had almost gone with us in the first place, so they just dumped the competitor and came with HawkSoft,” Paul said. Paul lives by the standard that the truth will set you free, so he’s always tried to be truthful and upfront.

After Paul gave a presentation to a potential client, she brought up concerns she’d heard from competitors that HawkSoft’s software isn’t complete. “You’re right,” Paul responded. “We’ve got a lot of weak points. There are a lot of things that we want to do differently. I don’t think the software will ever be finished.”

He figured that ended the conversation and she’d go with someone else, but his honesty prevailed.

“Thank you,” she said. “You’ve got my business.”

Paul told another man their software wasn’t a good fit for his company. When asked why, Paul explained that it didn’t handle worker’s compensation and other items. The man said he would work around it; HawkSoft’s competitors had promised their software would work, but their demos didn’t live up to the promises. He wanted to use HawkSoft in spite of a few gaps.

“People want honesty,” Paul said. “They want that, and it’s just a hallmark of what we do. You’ve got to be honest and transparent.”

Looking Out for Employees

Several years ago, HawkSoft had an opportunity to grow tremendously large. A competitor offered to sell his FSC management system book of business to HawkSoft for a good price. Paul talked the offer over with his leadership group. As Paul listened to his team consider the option, he could hear the stress it was causing, just in the discussion stage. Paul turned down the offer because of the damage the increased pressure could cause to HawkSoft employees and their families at that time. He told the competitor his decision and reasoning, and the man said he respected Paul for it.

Three years later, the man sold that section of his business to another competitor, but many of their users in Wisconsin contacted HawkSoft, because the competitor was sunsetting that piece of software. “We still got half of those customers,” Paul said with a laugh.

The HawkSoft name brings with it a stellar reputation, in large part because its founders and employees adhere to its core values.

While HawkSoft has large clients, its biggest having 350 users, most of its market share consists of smaller independent agencies. Each customer’s voice carries the same weight. “We don’t have one or two agencies that dictate to us what we should do,” Rushang said. HawkSoft listens to each of its clients.

Jake said HawkSoft strives to be a go-to resource in the industry. “We really truly are here to help the industry, to help the agencies,” Jake said. “We continue to grow. That’s the amazing part. It’s getting harder and harder, I think, in this industry. There are definitely more and more agencies that are adopting technology, but we’re still able to grow and win over new customers because of the value we have in relationships.”



2012 ACORD Award for Download Vendor of the Year.



2019 BIGGIE Award for Technology Company of the Year.

Through the years, Paul and HawkSoft have won several awards from agent groups, which shows how he and the company are respected by their peers.

- 2019 BIGGIE Technology Company of the Year
- 2018 Nominated for BIGGIE Technology Company of the Year
- 2017 AUGIE Andy Fogarty Industry Impact Award
- 2013 BIGGIE Legend Award – Paul Hawkins
- 2013 BIGGIE N. California Vendor of the Year
- 2009/2012 ACORD Download Vendor of the Year
- 2006 LAAIA Valor Award Recipient—Vendor of the Year

Paul's Leadership

Through the decades, those closest to Paul have seen him grow and change along with the company. He acknowledges many of

those changes. “I had to learn new things, new skills,” he said. “The Paul Hawkins from twenty-five years ago could not lead this company right now.”

The willingness to make mistakes and learn from his trials and failures helped forge the person he is today, as well as the company. He learned that he didn’t have all the answers, to empower the people around him, and to thank people. “I had to let go of some control,” Paul said. “I had to trust where I didn’t necessarily want to.”

Paul’s belief is that he hasn’t done anything amazing. He has worked hard and done just one thing. “I’ve surrounded myself with great people, and the Lord did the rest,” he said.

Bob, who has known Paul since before HawkSoft, has watched the CEO’s confidence soar as he has developed a greater sense of self-worth. “He’s got a tremendous amount of pride in what has been accomplished, and who wouldn’t? He’s still the same guy. There’s no big change in who he is.”

Bob loves telling people about the guy who worked for him and built a business from scratch. “Paul, Sean, and Jason just did it with their own ingenuity, enterprise, and hard work,” Bob said. “I mean you get lucky enough to want to start that kind of business and then have a son and a son-in-law who complement it in the same way. It’s a great story, and to whatever extent Paul thinks I contributed, that’s great, but this is really all him. Strange as it may seem for an employer about an employee, I was just along for the ride.”

Jake said he’s learned from Paul the value of making great efforts to surround himself with great people. “I think he recognizes that he has strengths and weaknesses, but he’s tried to surround himself with people who can complement him, that can highlight his strengths,” he said. “His passion, he wears it on his sleeve. It’s not

just a passion for success, but rather a passion for the success for his family, and I include in that word all of the employees and the customers, and again his passion for the industry. It's admirable."

Looking Forward

Paul often receives offers to purchase or invest in HawkSoft, but he emphasizes the company's role as a family. He's not interested. He is still having fun and he is dedicated to providing a place for the next generation of employees to come to work, if they want.

The company owns the property next door to its current building, with talks of expanding. In nine short years, the company is starting to outgrow its large office. Another possibility, Jake mentioned, was remote employment opportunities. Though Jake acknowledges that it would be difficult for Product Support employees, who need insight from colleagues.

"I think how big it gets depends on whether or not other departments want to tap talent from the great people in North Carolina," Jake said. "See who's out there who can come be a part of the HawkSoft family, but for right now we have the two departments out there."

Adapting to a changing customer base is also needful. Rushang said that the insurance industry is in transition with a majority of independent agency owners today over the age of fifty-five. "The old guard is getting to that stage where they're either selling their company or they're retiring," Rushang said. "We've positioned ourselves to be very attractive to that audience."

But with the changing demographics, HawkSoft must decide how to position itself to reach the future owners who will likely be in their twenties and thirties. "We need to think about things like getting HawkSoft to the cloud," he said.

"I think the bigger we get, it's harder to keep that personal connection," Fred said. "We just cannot afford to lose that. I don't know

what the future holds, but if they do as good in the future as they've done in the past, I think they'll do well."

The company will change as Paul reaches a different stage in his career, but the core values are expected to remain the same. When he retires, he has told Rushang, "I want to make sure that when I leave, the executive team, the board of directors is comprised of the right type of people."

We each have different pivotal points in our lives. As we look back at the decisions we made, we can see how they have changed the course of where we are today versus where we could have been. Usually, there is somebody that has influenced or impacted that change. We owe it to those individuals to thank them for the influence they have had on our lives.

– Paul Hawkins

"I strongly believe the culture and the values is so deep-rooted and extends well beyond Paul," Rushang said.

It's hard to tell whether the third generation will follow their fathers and grandfather into HawkSoft. Jason and Heather have three children: James, Rachel, and Lily. Sean and MyLiege have five children: Djeryd (pronounced "Jared"), Erik, Annaliese "Anna," Alyxandria "Alyx," and Elisabeth "Elle." The grandsons are the only two who have graduated high school so far. Both have worked at HawkSoft during summer breaks.

Looking back, Paul said, “The first thing I think is how the Lord has blessed us every step of the way. I’m just thankful. I’m thankful to the Lord. I’m thankful to the wonderful people He has surrounded me with, what we’ve been able to accomplish together as a family. Not just the Hawkins family but the HawkSoft family.”



Top: Jason and Heather Hansen's family, 2020. Back row: Bonnie (James' wife), James, Rachel, and Lily. Front row: Heather and Jason. **Bottom:** Sean and MyLiege Hawkins family, 2018. From left: Djerdyd, Erik, Sean, Alyx, Elle, MyLiege, and Anna.



Top: Paul and Carol in 2020. Bottom: Paul and Carol's grandchildren, 2020. Front row, from left: James Hansen, Elle Hawkins, Djeryd Hawkins. Back row: Rachel and Lily Hansen, Anna and Alyx Hawkins. Missing, Erik Hawkins.

Dad, someday, you and I are going to have our own business. We're going to be partners in our own company, and we're going to call it HawkSoft.

– Sean Hawkins, 9th Grade