

Franchise Mentor: BookKeeping Express Franchisee of the Year Grew Business by Becoming a “Professional Schmoozer” (Part 1)

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This post is the first of two parts. To read Part 2, please check back on Wednesday.

When a business coach helped Ileen Groves narrow down a list of franchises that would be a good fit for her, the name [BookKeeping Express](#) wasn't what she had in mind.

“It sounded to me like they were asking me to sit down behind a computer and work with transactions all day long,” Groves said.

But her coach told her to take a closer look at the company. It would not require her to be working with spreadsheets all day for small business clients, as Groves first thought. In fact, the company provided bookkeeping services for her clients through a central office, leaving her the time to work with small business owners in other ways, including improving their operations and efficiency.

That's the kind of work Groves wanted to do; and she has become so good at it that BookKeeping Express named her and husband Barry Groves Franchisees of the Year.

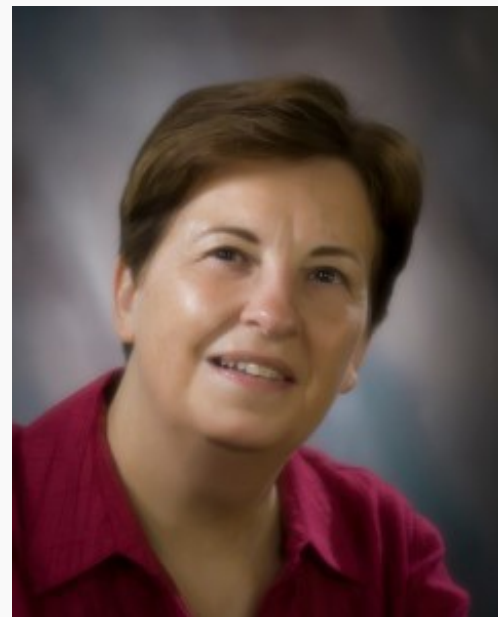
A graduate of Notre Dame College of Ohio with a degree in secondary education, Ileen Groves, 65, had spent her career in various fields, including work as a teacher, paralegal, and manager for a food brokerage business.

Finally, she became a logistics and supply expert for [Owens Corning](#) in Toledo, Ohio, a job that allowed her to travel to a company division in California. She loved the area so much she and her husband planned to move there. But when Owens Corning closed the division, making it impossible for her to transfer within the company, the Groves decided to go ahead with their move and Ileen began exploring various franchises.

“I decided to take the bull by the horns and make a business opportunity for myself,” she said.

Enlisting Business Coach's Help

She started exploring on her own, but when she went to a discovery day for [Seniors Helping Seniors](#), she felt she was in over her head and turned to a franchise consultant for help. It's assistance she would recommend to other potential franchisees who are looking to make an investment in a company.



Ileen Groves, BookKeeping Express Franchisee



“They will help you remove the emotion from it and look at it more objectively,” Groves said. “Thanks to my coach, we were able to narrow it down to things that were important to us, not just things we were knowledgeable in.”

BookKeeping Express was included in the top three choices along with the [Entrepreneur’s Source](#) and Expense Reduction Analysts. Once she learned more about BookKeeping Express and how it worked, Groves was sold on the company.

“What intrigued me about this business was that the bookkeeping was just a tool to allow me access to the small business owner,” she said. “I liked the autonomy of the BookKeeping Express model and the fact that it was very, very new. They were taking bookkeeping to a new level and a new art.”

Accounting Background Unnecessary

Because the franchise was so new, the franchise fee was low and she felt she could also help the company put operational systems in place. She became the first BookKeeping Express franchisee in California, serving Monterey County, and began the business out of her home in 2011. She estimates her total investment at \$50,000.

Groves attended training in Washington, D.C., with four other new franchisees, three of whom had accounting backgrounds. And while Groves could read a balance sheet and P&L statements, the last thing she wanted to do in her business was bookkeeping. Her strengths were marketing and sales, and that’s where she wanted to expend her energies. The BookKeeping Express model allowed her that freedom.



“I contract with the bookkeeping center for the hours I need to handle my clients. So instead of paying employees, I pay the bookkeeping center.”

By turning that work over to the number crunchers, Groves said she was able to customize her business to fit her background and spends more time working as a small business consultant for her clients.

“It’s my job to get to know them and their business and how they’re handling the financial aspects of their business,” she said. “My small business owners can call and talk to me about anything. I think of myself as their go-to person for anything to do with the operations of their business.”

Groves helps her clients seek out other experts when necessary for all kinds of guidance, whether it be writing a business plan, finding a [Small Business Administration](#) lender, providing templates for a business proposal, or even finding answers to questions about insurance and taxes.

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