



STEPPING OUTSIDE THE FRAMEWORK OF A TYPICAL NINE-TO-FIVE LIFESTYLE, ENTREPRENEUR STEVEN HARRIS FOUND HIS OWN NICHE IN AN ENIGMATIC INDUSTRY.

Inspired by famous spies, Steven Harris broke out of the daily grind to become a private investigator in 1996 by founding American Legal Investigations & Support Services (ALIASS). The Virginia-based firm keeps their investigative work local, but now offers legal support services nationally and internationally.

"We're different from other investigators because we do more than just investigations," Harris said. "We do process service and courthouse research. I would like to see American Legal become the number one go-to company when legal support services are needed nationwide."

Harris didn't know right away that he would enter the spy business. He tried other occupations ranging from construction to supervising for a pizza franchise, but he knew the nine-to-five lifestyle wasn't for him. "I always wanted something more," he says. "I wanted to have my own business—to live the American dream." That's when he identified private investigation as a field he'd enjoy.

"I'm out there with the cameras, doing surveillance, following people and do-

ing the P.I. work," Harris told *The Suit*. "Everything is done within the law, of course. We do car surveillance with different types of cameras, plant cameras in houses and use GPS units, along with other tactics. Everything is covert."

Harris says most of their investigative work is either for insurance and worker's compensation clients trying to prove the claimant was really injured, or for domestic cases, proving infidelity or doing background checks on a soon-to-be spouse. "We have clients who want us to check out their fiancé's background to make sure they are telling the truth." Harris explains that most of these clients have already gone through divorces from spouses who weren't who they claimed to be.

Harris' most satisfying case was preventing a child abduction when a family member was planning to take a child out of the country. "It can be tough because in cases like this people are really aware of their surroundings. They are constantly looking over their shoulder. It was a really tough but satisfying case."

Driven by ambition, Harris knows the key to success is watching others. "I learn

a lot by paying close attention to what others do. I learn from their successes and failures," he says. "In order to be successful, you have to learn from successful people. I do a lot of listening and asking appropriate questions."

ALIASS succeeds because Harris stresses a philosophy of teamwork. "One individual doesn't make the whole company. It's the team that works together to make us successful." He adds that finding the right people with the "same wants and desires that you have for the company" is the hardest part about running a business.

Entrepreneurship, Harris says, revolves around innovation and competition. "Individuals who think outside the box and are willing to take risks are the ones who find new ways to solve problems. When problems are solved, things work well and people do well. It spurs competition, which livens up the economy." ■

