



FROM TEACHER TO TURNER:

How Quality Wet Paint Scaled From \$13.7K To \$1.5M With Tough Leaf

Breaking Into Major League Construction

In 2019, Bernardo Flores was a PhD-holding special education teacher making \$150,000 a year in New York City. With six children to support, even this seemingly substantial salary wasn't cutting it in one of America's most expensive cities. When an opportunity arose to start a painting company, Bernardo took a leap of faith that would transform not just his career, but his entire family's future.

// **I had never been an entrepreneur. Never," Bernardo recalls. "I knew that world of education very well after 29 years, but construction? I didn't even know the jargon.**

The company's journey exemplifies the rollercoaster reality of small business ownership:

- **Pre-COVID (2019):** \$400,000 in revenue in just 9 weeks
- **COVID Impact (2020):** Crashed to \$13,700 annual revenue
- **Recovery (2021):** \$75,000
- **Growth (2022):** \$115,000

But the real challenge wasn't just surviving, it was breaking into the major leagues of construction, where established relationships and complex compliance requirements often shut out newcomers, especially minority-owned businesses from The Bronx.

The Turning Point: Discovering Certification and Tough Leaf

Bernardo's journey into the world of certifications began with an unexpected encounter at a paint store. Initially dismissed by staff, everything changed when they learned his business partners were also Hispanic.

// **Listen, there are programs in the South Bronx that help you because you're Hispanic," the clerk told him, referring him to SOBRO.**

(South Bronx Overall Economic Development Corporation).

This led to Bernardo discovering the power of MBE (Minority Business Enterprise) certification. Working with a lawyer from SOBRO, Quality Wet Paint achieved certifications from:

- New York City MBE
- New York State MBE
- Port Authority of NY & NJ
- Multiple compliance certifications for major projects

"I learned that big projects, especially in New York City, require primes to meet diversity goals. And now there's real policing of it, compliance departments that ensure it happens," Bernardo explains.

But certification was just the beginning. The real game-changer came through Columbia University's Grow Vendor Development Program in 2022.

The Tough Leaf Difference: From Ignored Emails to Industry Recognition

Initially, Bernardo deleted Tough Leaf's "claim your profile" emails, thinking they were spam. It wasn't until Wissam Akra, Tough Leaf's CEO, presented at Columbia through The CU Grow Vendor Development Program that Bernardo understood what he'd been missing.

He had this big screen and said, 'We only work with MBEs for free, and all you have to do is click one button to claim your profile. Everything is already there,'" Bernardo remembers. "I was like, who does that for free, especially in New York?"



What happened next transformed Quality Wet Paint's trajectory:

Immediate Impact:

First Major Win	Connected to Consigli Construction through Tough Leaf's matching
Project Value	\$365,000 (potentially \$620,000 with change orders)
Time to Award	8 months from initial connection
Additional Wins	Second Consigli project worth \$570,000

The Numbers That Matter:

2020 Revenue	\$13,700
2025 Projected Revenue	\$1.5 million
Growth Multiple	50x in 5 years
Pipeline	Potential \$500,000 Turner Construction project pending

Beyond the Platform: The Power of Intentional Networking

Quality Wet Paint's success isn't just about having access to Tough Leaf, it's about how they leveraged every opportunity. The Flores family developed a systematic approach to growth:

1

Professional Presence:

"I go to every networking event in a suit and tie, purposely. I'm the one they remember because I'm the one with the tie," Bernardo shares.

2

Team Representation:

When visiting Consigli headquarters, Quality Wet Paint brought five team members while other companies brought two at most. "We came in with the team. It showed we're prepared, and we were noticed. That is how Turner (which was at the Consigli Headquarters due to a Consigli/Turner Joint Venture) remembered my 5-member team and called me for the pending Turner project."

3

Problem-Solving Mindset:

Drawing from Shark Tank's Daymond John's advice, Bernardo instructs his team: "Our job is to solve their problems. Don't come with our problems—they're paying us to solve theirs."

4

Strategic Partnerships:

Through intentional networking at Columbia events, Quality Wet Paint secured projects even before graduating from the program and after graduation, was awarded a 3-Year Painting Contract.

The Human Side: A Family Legacy in the Making

This isn't just a business success story, it's about building generational wealth and changing perceptions. Alondra Flores, VP at Quality Wet Paint, who is Bernardo's daughter, represents the next generation of construction leadership.

The company's vision extends beyond profit:

- Creating job opportunities in The Bronx
- Building a legacy business for all six Flores children
- Changing perceptions about Bronx-based businesses
- Providing pathways for young people choosing trade careers

"I go to these events in my dresses with my pink hard hat and pink vest," Alondra says. "I feel like I'm not supposed to be there, but I'm there. Seeing women in this industry, especially women leaders, it's amazing."



The Tough Leaf Advantage: Why Free Matters

Unlike other platforms that charge premiums for enhanced access, Tough Leaf's free model removes barriers for growing businesses. As Bernardo notes, "With other platforms, if you want more, you pay the premium. They catch you. With Tough Leaf, it's intentional – "here are the projects you do, in your area, and we'll connect you."

Key differentiators:

- **No spam:** Targeted project matches only
- **Active support:** Personal calls from team members like Mac to ensure fit
- **Strategic introductions:** Not just listings, but warm connections to decision-makers
- **Ongoing advocacy:** Tough Leaf team members actively promote successful contractors

Results That Speak Volumes

The partnership between Quality Wet Paint and Tough Leaf demonstrates what's possible when certified small businesses get equal access to opportunity:

- **Revenue Growth:** From near-bankruptcy during COVID to seven-figure projections
- **Major GC Relationships:** Active projects with Consigli, potential with Turner
- **Industry Recognition:** Featured in Columbia University programs and speaking at major events that Tough Leaf spearheads
- **Expanded Certifications:** Positioned for WBE certification when Alondra takes leadership
- **Geographic Expansion:** From residential work to major commercial and industrial projects across the tri-state area

Looking Forward: The Next Five Years

Quality Wet Paint's ambitions reflect the transformative power of access:

- Shifting from residential to commercial/industrial focus
- Building permanent office space in The Bronx
- Creating employment opportunities for trade school graduates
- Establishing relationships with additional major GCs (Omnibuild, Hunter Roberts, Gilbane, AECOM Tishman, Skanska)
- Positioning Alondra to lead as both MBE and WBE certified

"We're from The Bronx, and we're proud of it," Bernardo states. "Our company was born here, and as The Bronx grows, we'll grow with it."

This commitment to community growth isn't just talk. In 2023, Quality Wet Paint demonstrated their values by providing pro-bono painting services to a local school—a \$26,000 project that exemplified their belief in investing back into the community that shaped them.

"We understand that our success means we have a responsibility to lift others up," Bernardo reflects. "When we give back to our community, especially to schools and young people, we're investing in the next generation of leaders and entrepreneurs."

Small businesses don't need handouts, they need access.



The Bottom Line

Quality Wet Paint's story proves that certified small businesses don't need handouts, they need access.

When given the opportunity to compete on a level playing field, they deliver quality, solve problems, drive economic growth in their communities, and give back to those who need it most.

Through Tough Leaf's platform, a special education teacher who once needed public assistance to feed his family is now building a million-dollar business that will support generations to come. That's not just ROI, that's transformation.

As Bernardo puts it: "Where we are right now is because of Tough Leaf. Every time I win something, even if it has nothing to do with Tough Leaf directly, I tell them. Because they made me leap from making \$100,000 to making half a million and more."

// Construction is never going to go out of business, especially in New York City. Everything needs to be painted or repainted. We're always going to have work. It's about having the connections to get the jobs." - Alondra Flores, VP, Quality Wet Paint

For certified contractors ready to scale:

Visit Tough Leaf to claim your free profile and join thousands of small businesses winning major construction projects.

For GCs seeking diverse talent:

Partner with Tough Leaf to connect with pre-vetted, certified contractors who deliver quality while helping you meet compliance goals.

toughleaf.com

qualitywetpaint.com