



# Giving a Lift to Those in Need

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Like millions of Americans, Steve Powell was a caregiver for his aging parents.

"My mother and father both had a chronic falling problem," the former tech worker said in a phone interview. "It got to the point where in one four- or six-week period, I had to go to my mother's house five times. The fire department went a sixth."

Powell's obese father suffered from osteoarthritis in his knees. Consequently, his knee would frequently go out, so he fell often and, at over 300 pounds, it was very difficult to get him off the floor.

"The fire department had to pick him up over and over again, and he got black and blue in his arms and shoulders from being raised by these guys," he said. "It was compounded from falling and trying to get up, to the pain that it took for them to pick him up because he was bruised and never had time to heal."

## Danger of Repeated Falls

Powell cared for both parents while he was working as a tech consultant; running his winetasting business, [Tesla Vintners](https://thesingingwinemaker.com/) and performing as The Singing Winemaker.

His father's wife was a nurse and they talked to the doctor who prescribed a Hoyer lift. Powell used that with him a few times, but his father was afraid because it was a lifting sling.

So Powell decided to make a machine capable of lifting a person who had fallen but could not stand up, and make it so simple to operate that people who had collapsed could use it by themselves.

"We spend billions of dollars a year training people how to [fix their houses](https://www.nextavenue.org/home-renovations-in-retirement-that-are-worth-the-cost/) so

they don't fall and how to adjust things so that they're safer at home," Powell said, "but they still fall down, and they have to get up."

## Building a Prototype

A lifting device also could get someone back on their feet without hurting their caregiver. "My mother couldn't pick up my father and my father couldn't pick up my mother," Powell said. "They were at risk of injury. Many times, it's the caregivers who are in worse shape than the people they're giving care to because they're injured taking care of them."

He left the technology work once he decided to put a business together – "it needed to go forward because there were so many people to help."

Powell made the first prototype of [IndeeLift](https://indeelift.com/) in February 2014. The company incorporated three months later, and Powell then filed patent applications. On October 1, 2014, IndeeLift was in business.

He raised about \$1.5 million from friends, family and Rotary Club members to start production and launch a marketing campaign.

IndeeLift delivered its first machines, for commercial applications, in 2015. Their first machines for people living at home were shipped in May 2016, as were IndeeLifts designed for fire departments to use. "Fire departments were the ones that were going out and picking up all the people," said Powell.

Chief Mike Stanley with the Oshkosh, Wisconsin fire



department said IndeeLifts can significantly increase safety for everyone involved – patients, caregivers and first responders – and are a much-needed advance for treating patients' falls. "It provides a safe and affordable mechanism for older adults and their caregivers to help them independently recover from a fall," he said.

"We had some fire department guys say, 'If we had a machine to pick (people) up, we wouldn't get hurt doing it,'" Powell added. "We sold a lot of machines to fire departments so that they could solve their lift-assist problems without getting injured or injuring their patients."

## Getting IndeeLift to Market

The goal was to get machines in the hands of people at home who needed to stay home, who wanted to stay home, and who needed help to stay home.

Hospitals and other institutions have sling-like devices to raise patients, but these lifts, made by other companies, require trained medical personnel to operate. IndeeLift's model for home use consists of a seating platform, armrests, lifting tower and wired remote control.

To use it, the person who has fallen scoots over to the lift and sits on the platform, which has beveled edges to make it easier to slide on. Pushing a button on the remote control slowly raises the platform 21 inches up the lifting tower. Grasping the armrests, the user can rise as if standing up from a chair.

## Managing Manufacturing

"Our product was built specifically to get somebody not only off of the floor, but to help them stand up when they're done or transfer them to a wheelchair or to a bed," Powell said.

IndeeLift sells machines all over the world. "We have machines for assisted living facilities, commercial facilities and hospitals and machines for emergency medical services, ambulances and fire trucks," said Powell. "The main machine is the one for people at home because we want to keep people independent

and safe."

At first, IndeeLift did its manufacturing in the United States but found that it could not do so and keep the product affordable to most people. "America is not a place where you can successfully do that," he said. "While we built them well and we made a good product, the price was so high that it's kept us from being able to support the real people that need it."

IndeeLift just finished moving all of its manufacturing to China and already is looking to relocate production to Thailand. IndeeLift lowered their machine price from \$2,500 to \$1,500 and in 2024, the company is seeking ways to be able to sell machines to people at home for approximately \$750.

Powell said lower prices change the game completely because adult children can pay one or two hundred dollars each and "now mom and dad can pick each other up safely and stay at home forever because they really want to."

IndeeLift's target points for the two basic classes of their machines are \$750 and \$900.

## Reducing Caregiver Injuries

IndeeLift now has six employees and did \$2.5 million in business last year. "The demand was really there," he said. "But now that I can bring the price down to half of that, we believe we're going to be able to serve more and more people at home."

Lower costs also will make lifts more accessible to people in assisted-living facilities, skilled nursing homes and long-term residential facilities. That, in turn, may help reduce occupational injuries to medical staff who now manually lift patients who have fallen.

"OSHA came out with a new set of guidelines because a quarter of a million health care workers a year were becoming permanently disabled from picking up patients," said Powell. "Safe patient handling is a very important and key thing in health care in the modern world, and we make machines that are made for hospitals as well. We now make a specific machine to help hospitals get patients onto imaging and radiology and treatment tables."

Medicare does not yet pay for Indeelifts, but Powell is working on that.

"We are in the process of getting Medicare codes, which will allow doctors to prescribe them for people with neuropathy, muscular dystrophy and [muscular sclerosis](https://www.nextavenue.org/what-to-know-after-being-diagnosed-with-ms/) (https://www.nextavenue.org/what-to-know-after-being-diagnosed-with-ms/) and people who fall down natively because of the afflictions they endure," he said.

"Our goal in business is not to be a multibillion-dollar profit-making company," Powell concluded. "Our goal in business is to survive in business, make a reasonable profit and help a lot of people."

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