

CLEANING BUSINESS TODAY



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**How To
Add Professional
Organizing Services**

**Get Free Funding
for Business Growth**

**States Prohibiting
Criminal History on
Job Applications**



**How Sara Martin
OUTSHINES
The Competition**

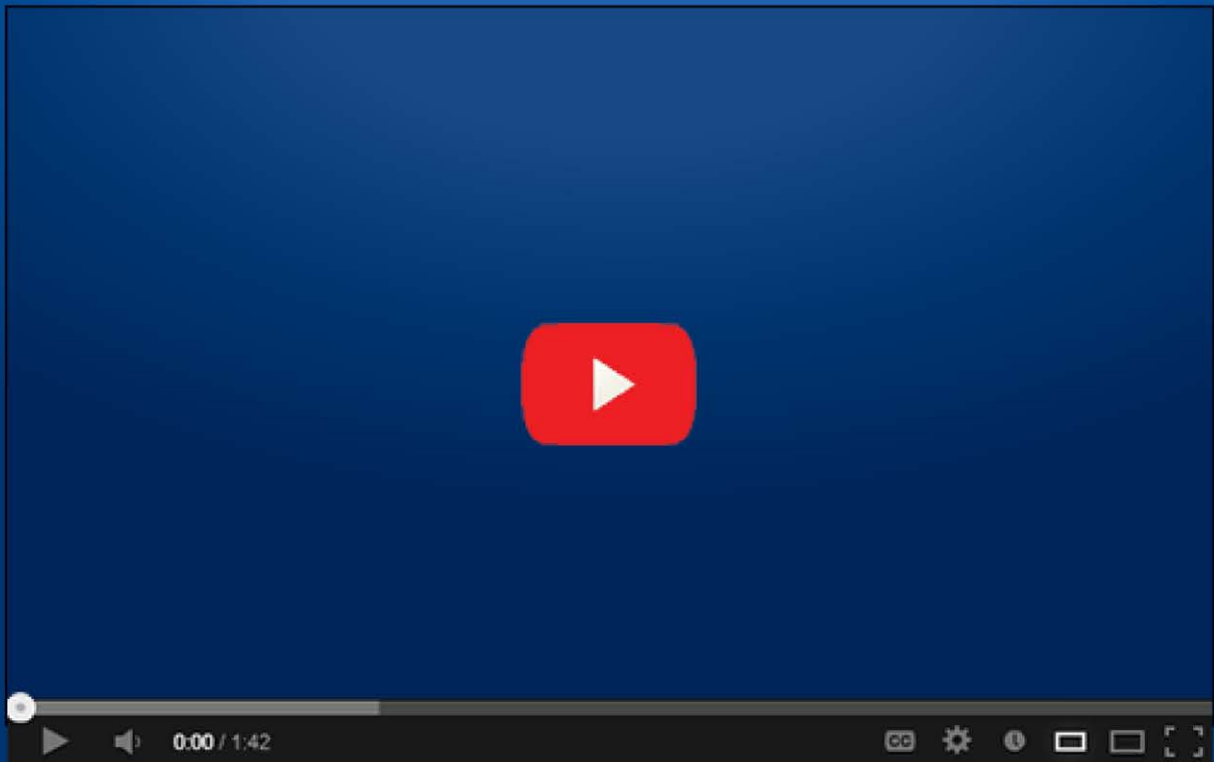
May 2015 ISSN 2330-1112



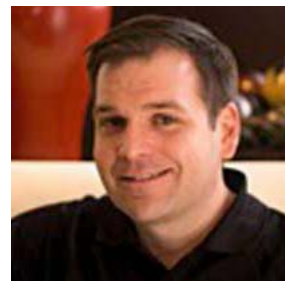
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AFTER A LONG COLD WINTER, SPRING IS BACK AGAIN and for many of us that means the phones are ringing again. I have not done a formal survey, but in talking with cleaning business owners across the country, 2015 looks like it is shaping up to be a big growth year for most companies. My dad was a sales person, and he always taught me to fish when the fish are biting. And when it comes to cleaning, the clients are looking now which is why we made business growth the focus for May.

There are many paths to business growth, and we are trying to explore a few of them this month. One tried-and-true method is to add more services to your company, and this month we have a great article on organization services. Another method for growth is to make sure you are not losing too many clients. Liz Trotter helps us on how to deal with clients who are just flat out wrong.

While growth is great, it is also very expensive as you have to hire and train all those people that may or may not stay and carry all that expense before they start to bring in revenue, and that is before you have to buy equipment and vehicles for them. Mess Maid Right NW has learned how to leverage the PWP program in their state to help offset these expenses and enable them to grow faster than they could without the program.

Last but not least, we have a Success Story profiling pHClean who absolutely dominates the residential cleaning niche in her small Iowa town, generating more than \$1.0 million in revenue in a metro area that is smaller than a single suburb in many larger markets.

We hope these and similar articles you read at CleaningBusinessToday.com for the rest of the year help make 2015 the best ever for you, your business, and your family.

Derek Christian,
Publisher, Business Development & Sales Director

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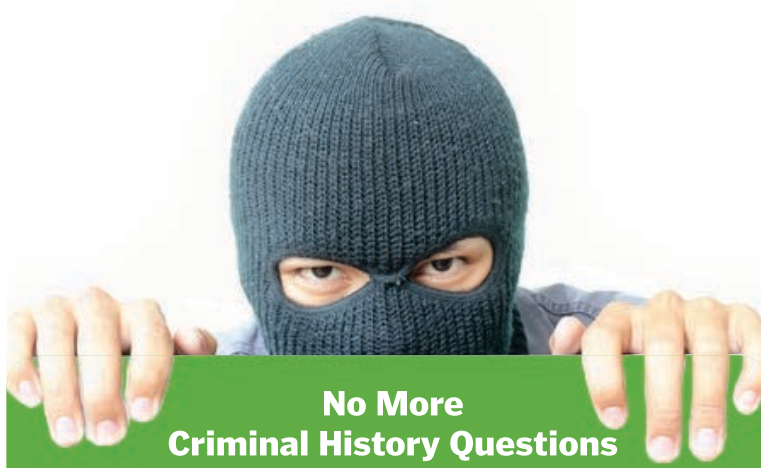
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No More Criminal History Questions for Virginia Job Applicants

On April 3rd, Virginia became the 15th state to remove the criminal history section and questions from state employment applications. Private businesses using state grant money or staffing state-held contracts will also be required to remove these sections from their applications. The state encourages private business owners to follow suit for all hiring needs.

[Read more](#)

EVENTS CALENDAR

Stay informed with the CBT Events Calendar! View major happenings in the cleaning industry or promote your own events.

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Rise in Flu and Tonsillitis May Stem from Bleach-based Disinfection

A new study appears to show that children exposed in the home to bleach are at significantly higher risk of a variety of infections, including influenza and tonsillitis.

[Read more](#)

WHIZZ

Q



THREE MORE ON-DEMAND CLEANING SERVICES TO WATCH

Whizz

Following in the footsteps of Handy and Amazon Home Services in the US and Helping across Europe and Asia, Whizz is angling to corner the on-demand cleaning market in Australia.

[Read more](#)

Managed by Q

New York-based office cleaning start up Managed by Q is now available in Chicago and names Uber, BuckFeet, and Kargo as its first clients.

[Read more](#)

Planet Maids

Planet Maids launched its "affordable" on-demand cleaning service for NYC residents. Based in Astoria, Queens, they offer services in all five boroughs.

[Read more](#)

GOOGLE PANDA ISN'T AS FRIENDLY AS IT SOUNDS

Test your website and see if you're in the 40% of small business websites now penalized in search results by Google.

[Read more](#)

NJ Cleaning Business Pleads Guilty to Employee Tax Fraud

One NJ business owner with multiple cleaning and maintenance businesses will be sentenced in July; he owes \$120,841, accrued over one year.

[Read more](#)



PA Cleaning Company Investigated for Theft

Police are investigating a Lancaster, PA independent cleaning company after multiple clients filed theft reports; no arrests have been made.

[Read more](#)



SEALED AIR ENTERS ROBOT CLEANING MARKET

With its acquisition of Intellibot Robotics, Sealed Air, the makers of bubble wrap, will apply its new line under the Diversey Care brand.

[Read more](#)

Yelp Wins Suit to Protect Reviewers Identities

Yelp, one of the few review sites to allow anonymous service reviews, has won its appeal to protect the identities of anonymous reviewers. The court's decision focused on the technicality that Virginia was not the proper lawsuit filing location.

[Read more](#)



Cleaning Business Today to Expand Reach with Prosumer Website Brands

CBT has acquired HousekeepingChannel.com and HealthyHouseInstitute.com as part of its brand expansion strategy.

[Read more](#)



project materials, stuff heaped on the bottom stair waiting for someone to take it up to the next floor.

4 Invitational: Invitational clutter is the most invisible, and therefore the most problematic. This is clutter generated unintentionally by simply being alive in today's society. These are items that are invited into the home without considering whether they still have value. This may include

“If you’re in their home, they already like and trust you! You can offer organizing packages for their specific needs.”

magazines never read, unwanted catalogs that keep coming, small gifts accumulated – but not necessarily appreciated.

It Isn't About the Stuff!

For 20 years, I focused on helping people eliminate physical and paper clutter. With the dawn of the Internet, I started applying those principles to email and digital files, but in recent years, I've concluded that often physical clutter and digital clutter are a symptom of a bigger problem: emotions that block decision-making about our “stuff” and a lack of systems to implement the decisions the client makes – from how to file paper so the owner (or his/her spouse!) can actually find it again to how to physically eliminate what they don't really want.

Unfortunately, there are no requirements for someone calling themselves an “organizing consultant.” Wives and mothers are thrilled to discover that people will actually pay them for what they have been doing for free – often for decades – and not even being appreciated!

They go into homes, categorize everything into a variety of containers, implement color coding, and add labels – and leave with everything looking “organized.” Frequently, six months to a year later, the clutter returns, and everyone feels worse.

The organizer doesn't have a happy client, the industry doesn't have a successful organizer, and the client feels like he/she is so bad that “even a professional couldn't help me!”

It's All About Customizing SYSTEMS (Saving You Space Time Energy Money)

Just as every cleaning company has developed SYSTEMS for cleaning every aspect of a home, organizing is about developing systems for initial and ongoing removal of clutter. The more effective you are at naming and describing those systems, the

more you can charge for your services. Clutter removal skills require more staff training than cleaning skills, but are needed far less often, and can be billed out at a higher rate.

The Value to Your Client

You can explain to your client that you will be able to do a better job of cleaning when the clutter is reduced. One of the big challenges that every professional organizing company faces is the reluctance of a prospect to hire them due to embarrassment about their situation. Another obstacle is their lack of trust that the organizing service can actually help them with their specific situation.

But if you're in their home, they already like and trust you! You can offer organizing packages for their specific needs including assessments, hands-on organizing services for initial

clutter reduction and follow-up maintenance packages.

So, How Do You Make It Work?

Many cleaning companies have added a clutter-reduction component by simply hiring “naturally” organized employees. Based on what I have seen in the past 30 years in homes around the country, the results leave much to be desired – and will not likely result in a profitable, sustainable income stream for your cleaning company.

Here are two other highly viable possibilities:

1. Partner with a local organizing company to provide the organizing services for a percentage of the income. An added advantage to this possibility is cross-marketing opportunities between the two companies. Many organizing companies offer seminars at which you could advertise your cleaning services.
2. Send one or more of your employees through a certification program for organizing consultants. Make certain to sign a non-compete agreement that prevents them from leaving your company and starting their own.

Clutter is contagious. But order and clutter discipline can also become contagious – and it will be good advertising for the quality of service you offer! ■



Barbara Hemphill is the Founder of Productive Environment Institute which offers a certification program for organizing consultants. She is also the author of [Less Clutter More Life](#).

[More info](#)

Free Funding for Business Growth

One Oregon company uses state and charitable funding to hire and train workers, add a sales position and upgrade their company cars.
By Denisse and Craig Baker

One of the biggest stigmas in the cleaning industry surrounds hiring injured workers. No business likes to hire previously injured workers because of the risk of workers compensation insurance rates going up.

What if I told you that hiring previously injured workers is a growth strategy not many businesses are taking into consideration. Thousands of businesses pass up growth opportunities due to fear. You could be saving thousands in wages, worker compensation rates and even work creation costs by hiring a previously injured worker.

At Mess Maid Right NW, we don't keep poor performers long, and the only way to keep the business going when we need to release workers who don't change their ways is to be on an "always hiring" roll. We constantly run our hiring ads, and that is how we came to hiring our first previously injured worker through the State of Oregon's Preferred Worker's Program as well as gaining an entirely new in-house sales & marketing position.

I was reviewing cover letters and resumes for a house cleaning tech position one Saturday morning when I came across Jack's cover letter:

"Dear Hiring Manager, I'm on the Preferred Workers of Oregon list which offers many benefits to the employer that hires me."

How often do you hear employer benefits? Not knowing exactly what this program was, I dropped the letter and researched this program I've never heard about.

What is the Preferred Worker Program (PWP)?

The [Oregon Preferred Worker Program \(PWP\)](#) encourages the



re-employment of qualified Oregon workers who have permanent disabilities from on-the-job injuries and who are not able to return to their regular employment because of those injuries, but still have work skills, work experience, and a desire to return to work after an on-the-job injury. Other states with a PWP include [Washington](#) and [North Dakota](#).

What are some of the benefits of hiring a preferred worker?

Premium exemption: An employer does not pay workers compensation insurance premiums or premium assessments on a preferred worker for three years. Business owners must contact their insurer within 90 days of hiring a preferred worker to activate premium exemption or as the State requires.

Claim cost reimbursement: This protects the employer from the costs of a new workers compensation claim if the preferred worker has a new injury during the three year premium exemption period.

Wage subsidy: The employer receives 50% wage subsidy reimbursement for the preferred worker for six months. Wage subsidy may be used two times, once each for two different employers or twice with the same employer for two different jobs.

Worksite modification: Modifications can include tools, equipment, and work-site redesign needed to overcome injury-caused limitations so the preferred worker can do the job. It may be used once with two different employers or twice with the same employer for two different jobs (\$25,000, maximum benefit).

Employment purchases: This is help needed for a worker to

find, accept, or keep employment. Purchases may include:

- Tuition, books, and fees for instruction to update existing skills or build new skills (\$1,000, maximum benefit).
- Temporary lodging, meals, and mileage to attend instruction when overnight travel is required (\$500 maximum benefit).
- Tools and equipment mandatory for the job, such as tool starter sets (\$2,500, maximum benefit).
- Clothing required for the job (\$400 maximum benefit).
- Occupational certification, licenses, and related testing costs, drug screening, physical examinations, or membership fees required for the job (\$500 maximum benefit). This can include the IICRC House Cleaning Technician certification course and examination.
- Worksite creation costs to help an employer create a new job for the preferred worker (\$5,000, maximum benefit)
- Miscellaneous purchases that do not fit into any other category, excluding a vehicle purchase (\$2,500, maximum benefit).

What is it like getting started with PWP?

The application process when hiring a preferred worker is typically fairly easy. Both the employer and future employee sign for the items necessary to perform the job. Creating a new position comes with a few challenges as there are a lot of other factors that affect the position is being created. Usually, those difficulties include creating systems and protocols the new employee must adhere by. The budget is fair though and a lot of these items can be easily covered by hiring a professional to help the employer with any difficulty. One of the first items on our list was creating a Safety Manual for Office Staff since we didn't have one. An additional benefit would be the use of the manual as additional office staff gets added.

A clear picture of knowing where your business will be financially after wage subsidy ends is also very important. A defined pay scale, whether hourly or commission based, needs to be established and explored prior to employment to avoid any unpleasant surprises.

What other business growth assistance can you look for?

Coupling a state program with other beneficial programs such as a Matched Business Grants with an [Individual Development Account \(IDA\)](#) via Mercy Corps is also a great way to skyrocket business growth. Mercy Corps provides a specific IDA for starting or growing a small business. They have several options; two of their most popular:

Option 1: Participants save \$1,000 for a minimum of 6 months. Receive match grant of \$3,000, for a total of \$4,000.

Option 2: Participants save \$2,000 for a minimum of 1 year. Receive match grant of \$6,000, for a total of \$8,000. You will use the total to buy fixed business assets.

IDAs are meant to be used to acquire the skills necessary for an individual to successfully start or grow a business, so you have to show that you are a business in good standing and take some classes for before you can choose an option and receive matching funds.

“Growth is never by mere chance; it is the result of forces working together.” ~ James Cash Penney, Founder of JCPenney

For Mess Maid Right NW, we are currently using Option 1 to replace one of our first company vehicles with a much newer one.

What's next for Mess Maid Right NW?

We continue to hire new cleaning technicians through the PWP and are in the process of developing our sales & marketing position, also through the PWP. And we're currently saving our second \$1000 to acquire another updated car for our fleet.

One of our goals for 2015 has been to advance our business education and growth, and we are actively implementing new and revised systems to improve our success. We can't wait to see the fruit of all the different forces that we have in the works. ■



Denisse and Craig Baker own and operate *Mess Maid Right NW* in Portland, OR and enjoy rapid and consistent growth. They are members of ARCSI, graduates of *Foundations of Success*, and a Chapter Member of *Cleaning for a Reason*.



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Our Readers' Choice of Best Cleaning Products



Announcing the very first group of CBT's "Best of" Winners!

CBT IS PROUD TO ANNOUNCE THE WINNERS of the 2015 Best of Awards for Cleaning Products and Equipment.

Best of Cleaning Cloths: PerfectClean

While microfiber in general dominated this category, readers voted PerfectClean as the leading brand in microfiber; huck towels followed as the second favorite, with terry, cotton, and disposables trailing.



Best of Dusters: P&G Swiffer 360° Dusters Extender

With so many different styles and methods for dusting, we were excited to see many represented in the voting. While the Swiffer Duster earned the most brand-specific votes, the aggregate votes for using microfiber cloths for dusting earned that tool/method a definite honor-



able mention.

Best of Mops: Direct Mop Sales Microfiber Cut-Pile Scrubber Pad

Hands down, the favorite mopping system is a flat mop; the aggregate votes completely closed out string and sponge mops of any variety.

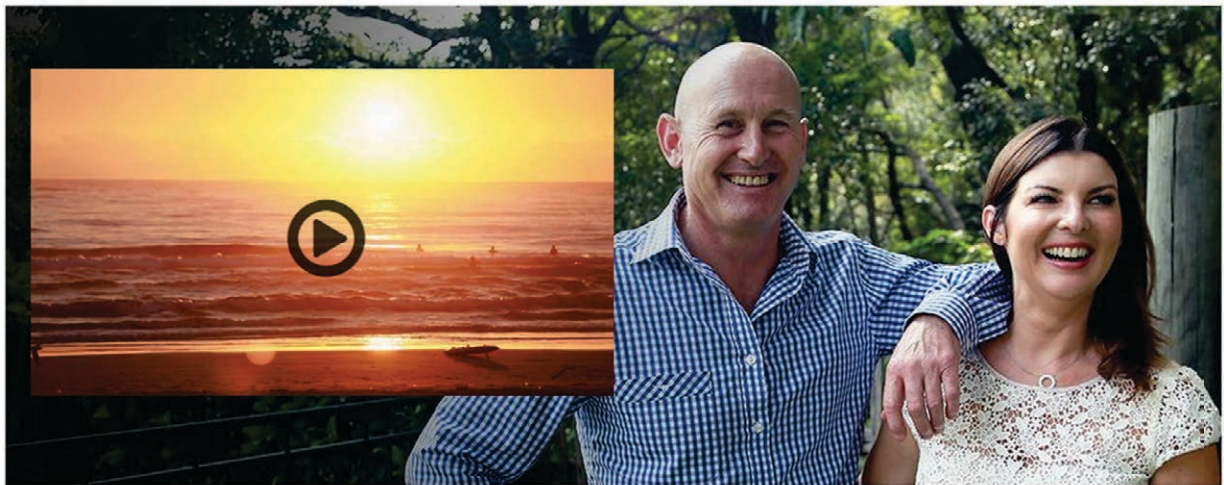


Best of All-Purpose Cleaners: Bar Keepers Friend Soft Cleanser Deionized (DI) Water Core Hydroxipro (H2O2)

The leaders in this category land in a three-way tie as all achieve effective cleaning through different methods while all meeting "green" expectations.



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-- Joe Polish, Piranha Marketing

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Best of Disinfectants:

Benefect Botanical Disinfectant
Advanced Vapor Technology Ladybug with TANCS
Envirox Concentrate 118

In a surprise result, the winner and second place awards in the disinfectant category go to low-impact “green” disinfecting options, showing that cleaning companies are choosing tested products and methods over untested home-made products.



Best of Glass Cleaners:

SC Johnson Windex
Deionized (DI) Water
Acetic Acid (food-grade 5-7% white vinegar)

SC Johnson Windex hasn't been America's #1 glass cleaner for decades without good reason, and readers have confirmed that. Tying for second place are the primary ingredients of a great window/glass cleaner: acid and water.



Best of Soft Scrub:

Bar Keepers Friend Soft Cleanser
Sponge Outlet Melamine Eraser Sponges

After winning as the best all-purpose cleaner, it should be no surprise that Bar Keepers Friend again takes the top honor as the best soft scrub. But second place may surprise you.



Best of Floor Cleaners:

Bona Floor Cleaners
Deionized (DI) Water
Shark Steam Cleaner

If you're not using one of the favorite all-purpose cleaners on the floor, you may be looking for a specialized surface cleaner or something even greener for the floors.



Best of Vacuums:

Best Upright: Riccar SupraLite
Best Canister: Nacecare Henry
Best Backpack: ProTeam Sierra

And finally, in the most highly competitive category, readers voted three vacuums as the favorites for use in professional residential cleaning application:



Thank you to all of the readers who voted! Be sure to vote in May for the Best of Technology for Cleaning Businesses.



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The Customer Is Always Right, Right?

Don't believe it, but make sure your client thinks she's right. **By Liz Trotter**

Every time I hear this, I cringe because I know the conversation will turn into a discussion about how true the statement is rather than on what it means. Whether it's true is NOT what's important. It doesn't mean that EVERY customer is right about EVERY single thing on EVERY given day. What it does mean is that it's your responsibility (and smart business decision) to treat them as though it is 100% true.

“Those Clients”

Now some of you are still stuck thinking, “Yeah, but what about those clients.” Who? The liars, rip-off artists, constant complainers. I say, “Yep, even those clients.” Why? Because it's the prudent action of course, and you can see that when you aren't emotionally charged.

Now does it mean that you have to keep these clients? Nope, not if you really don't want to, and this needs to be a business decision also,

not an emotional one. You can still treat the client as if they are right without committing to be their eternal service provider.

A Gracious Example

Take the lady who accused our company of denting her wall, when a week later she watched her dog make an identical mark on a bordering wall. When she continued to stick to her guns about the original dent, we had options, and this is the one I chose:

We fixed her wall, didn't ask for reimbursement, and graciously gave her the names of two independent cleaners (licensed) in the area who might be better suited to her home.

Did I mention we were gracious? In hindsight, I treated her as though she was right, but I wish I'd gone further and kept her as a client. In those days, my average client was valued at \$13,000.00. The repair was less than \$100.00.



Liz Trotter is founder of *American Maid Cleaning* as well as an entrepreneur and leadership trainer. She is a former ARCSI board member, a partner in *Cleaning Business Builders*, creator of the *HiPEP* employee development system and a charter member of *Cleaning For A Reason*.

[More info](#)



Not my best move, especially since we'd been cleaning for her for over two years without an incident. Now if it had been one of the first few cleanings, letting her go might have been a reasonable decision; maybe every tiny problem she ever saw in her home was going to come back on us and it wouldn't have been smart to take on the liability. Maybe. But not in this case.

As it was, at least we treated her well – like she was right. Even though it might not have been ideal, we still hear from her today when she needs a cleaning crew for her husband's VERY LARGE construction company. We've made up more than the \$13,000.00, but that never would have happened had we decided that she was wrong and she was going to know it.

Was she right? Doubtful. Did it matter? YES, because she was right to her and that's what mattered. That distinction is what you need to focus in on during the trying times. Does she think she's right? If so, your best option is to treat her that way. No good comes from anything else.

5 Ways to Treat Your Clients

Here are five ways to treat your clients that make them feel like they're right, because that's what's important!

1. Respond quickly, preferably by phone if it's something big.
2. Listen to understand. Stop thinking about your side when you are supposed to be listening to theirs. It's rude, and it isn't helpful.
3. Focus on solving their problem first, not yours. More times than not you will find that when you solve their problem, yours goes away.
4. Say "You're right." It can go a long way toward getting someone to calm down and be more rational.
5. Make a list of things your clients complain about, update it religiously. You may just find some things you thought were fine really aren't. ■



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Maid Service of Aurora-Naperville Relies on ProTeam Backpack Vacuums

Saving time, creating happy customers, and making more money with backpack vacuums. **By ProTeam**

Ray Pillar's career took a turn in the late '90s when the dot-com bubble burst and left him ready to make a major change. He took his time deciding what to do next, spending a year and a half studying his options and talking to many different types of franchises. When he met with the people at a large national maid service franchise, he made up his mind almost instantly.

"I felt at home as soon as I walked in," said Pillar who is now a longtime franchise owner under his business Pillar Enterprises, Inc., in the Aurora-Naperville Area of Northern Illinois. "They brought the entire office out to greet us. It was a very friendly environment."

Pillar received his starter kit for his franchise with two upright vacuums and two shoulder vacuums, but he found the uprights to be cumbersome and heavy. When he met [ProTeam®](#) Sales Manager Mike Harrington at a trade show six months later, Harrington introduced him to the [Sierra® backpack vacuum](#).

"We began using the Sierra with the electric power head on carpet and the floor brush for hard flooring," said Pillar. "The efficiency of using one backpack vacuum was so much greater than using two vacuums for carpet and hard floors, and the weight was only 10 pounds."

Today Pillar employs a staff of 45 who clean residences for a flock of loyal clientele. He maintains and repairs his fleet of 22 Sierra backpack vacuums himself.



"The backpacks don't really break down. The first ones I bought 12 years ago are still out in the field cleaning today," said Pillar. "I've replaced brushes, hoses, and a few motors. The motors last a long time. Even when we did have a problem with a defective harness, ProTeam was on top of it and took care of it right away."

Clients have remarked on the cleanliness of the carpets and the nice lines the powerhead leaves behind. His employees like the backpacks, finding them easier to use. When he receives the occasional complaint about wearing the vacuum, he immediately addresses the fit of the harness.

"If I hear a complaint about the backpack being uncomfortable, I know that they are not buckling and tightening the straps," said Pillar. "The waist belt is where the weight of the vacuum rides. Once they adjust the fit, the complaints go away." ■



How to Be the Biggest Cleaning Business in Town



Starting out in a small town didn't mean phClean owner Sara Martin had to be just another small town business.

CBT: When, why and how did you get your start in the cleaning industry and with phClean?

SM: My dad was a farmer, and I married my first husband after three years of university classes in early childhood education. I didn't know much about working at a "real 9-5 job with benefits," but I worked out of my home to assist my property manager husband, taking our then-toddler with me to show apartments, take calls, deal with tenants. As our property management business got bigger, we moved into a real office, traveled a lot, had a fun life, drove fancy cars and even had our own "cleaning lady" for a few years. But I couldn't balance a checkbook and never really knew how much money we had; I left that all to my husband.

But in 2006, I found myself a single, stay-at-home-mom who didn't have a college degree or a job history! My husband left me to get a job and raise our daughter on my own. Since I wanted to keep my daughter at home and homeschool a bit longer, I emailed all of the contacts on our old country club mailing list: "My hubby left me and told me to get a job, so HEY - I am cleaning homes!" And I drove up to those homes to clean them...in my Mercedes...at least, until it was taken away. And that's how I got started in the cleaning industry.

I started out cleaning homes alone in 2006, and this gave me pocket money and enough money to finish a degree at Iowa State University. But It wasn't until I hired my first real, legal

employee and started advertising in 2008 that I decided to do this for real.

CBT: You started with one location and today have two. What's your process - your strategic leader thought process - when you're considering "getting bigger" and what does that mean for you? To what do you attribute your fast growth?

SM: In 2008, two years after I booked my first cleaning job, I decided this should be a real business. I wasn't cleaning any homes by then; I had hired part time people to help and had found my start-up resources: HouseCleaningBiz101.com, Debbie Sardone's programs and ARCSI.

As I had hired my helpers, I was using the solo cleaner model, and I kept that as I listened to all the CDs I could, downloaded all of the material I could and went for it.

I believe the reason I was able to grow fast and strong is that I did not clean. Rather, I treated my business like a business from the beginning, advertising right away with both grass roots and paid advertising. And since our home market is small, that also meant no competition, or at least not competition that was bringing it to a professional level.

Our first "home" location is in a college town, Ames IA, with a population of 58,000. But since this includes the ISU students,

the “real” residents number closer to 30,000. Looking at the population and demographics, I predict we have to start hitting a ceiling soon with growth. We also have no real competition (too small for a franchise), but that doesn’t mean someone won’t try to horn in soon. If I am going to keep growing – as opposed to sustaining – I need a larger venue, and our second location in Ankeny has that, while only being 30 minutes away; this allows us to share staff and resources while it is starting out.

“Many people don’t spend enough on advertising; we spend about 3% on marketing materials and advertising.”

CBT: Originally, your company was named Professional Home Ames, but you’ve rebranded to pHClean. What prompted you to change the name and rebrand your company? What benefits or disadvantages have you experienced from the change?


SM: The name you choose for your business when you are sitting at home with no experience is WAY different than the one you SHOULD have chosen! In the beginning, I wanted to present as professional, and our town is Ames, but “professionalhomeames” is a really long thing to type. And when I began to realize we really could grow out of the town, I knew I needed to switch.

I made the change incrementally, and stayed with the same green circle we had been using, just tweaking it so it remained identifiable. pHClean gets the town name out, puts the word “clean” in, and we trademarked it! Now it is a brand name we can use in any town (or state), and it is short and sweet.

And since we worked off of our existing logo rather than starting over with a total rebranding “look,” our clients barely noticed the change. So we’re not experiencing any disadvantages.

CBT: When things get frustrating or you just get stuck in a rut, from where do you draw motivation, inspiration, and plain ole energy to work through them?

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SM: I go first to my small Facebook group of fellow cleaning business owners. They help me work out a thought, see something another way, or just let me vent to help clear my head.

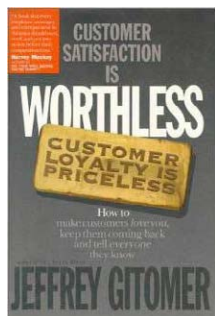
I draw energy by looking at the steps I CAN take and taking them rather than looking at all of the steps I have not taken yet or need to do. I'm also pretty good at not taking things too personally, which helps me not get too bogged down in negative energy. And finally, I avoid dwelling on what doesn't work and trying someone or something else when my first (or second or third) choice doesn't pan out like I planned.

For motivation, I keep in the front of my mind the fact that there is nothing else I can go out and get a job doing that will give me an equivalent paycheck. So I am motivated to keep that going! But plain and simple, I also like seeing progress and forward motion, tracking successes and failures. Looking back and seeing our growth motivates me to press on.

Now that I've gotten big enough to expand to a second location, I look at the bigger cleaning business owners like Tom Stewart of Castle Keepers for both the size of his operation and the skill he wields in continuing to grow. And I still get inspiration from Tom, Derek and Liz at their [Cleaning Business Builders](#) conferences.

CBT: We've heard you enjoy quite a high customer retention rate. Would you share your retention rate...and your secret?

SM: In 2013, our customer attrition rate was 3.55%, which fewer than 9% of cleaning companies in the US achieve. But in 2014, we drove that percentage down to 2.42% with an aggressive quality assurance program. Yes, you're reading that right; that's a 97.58% [customer retention rate](#), meaning we keep 97.5 out of every 100 customers to whom we sell services.



In 2014 we added a Quality Assurance manager for four days a week, to check homes, encourage staff in the field, correct problems in the field, re-train as needed. This was the only major change. We also read and promote the ideals in the Jeffrey Gitmer book *Customer Satisfaction is Worthless - Customer Loyalty is Priceless*. This year we have a dedicated Staff & Quality Assurance Manager, with a part-time Quality Assurance assistant.

I have always been heavy on staff in the office, but I also believe that that is what we need to serve well the volume of clients we have. We don't drop balls, we are able to be prompt and proactive, and even more now, we are in the field working

with staff to make that client happy. To me, that extra staffing is why we have been able to keep client loss rates so low. The attitude we have at phClean is Client Happiness First. All of my staff know that if a client wants to switch technicians,

“I have someone in the office dedicated to hiring and hiring-related things 15 hours a week. All I do now are the interviews, and I’ll be passing that off to my manager soon.”

do it fast. If they have a problem, follow up with a prompt action and communicate it to the client. Techs let us know when clients have life events like a baby or illness, and we send cards, flowers, or drop off a small gift. We have a cupboard filled with local gift certificates that we grab and send to a client if we have “screwed up” and they let us fix it. We all know it is better to keep what you have than scramble for more new clients, and this is particularly important in a smaller community like Ames.

We always try to do the right thing and act with integrity and have great and caring communication, and that relationship the clients have with us enables us to keep them through the occasional mistake or disappointed cleaning.

CBT: As you look forward to celebrating your 10th anniversary next year, what goals have you accomplished along the way and what new ones are you looking forward to going after soon?

SM: In the past nine years, going from content stay-at-home mom to owning and managing phClean is huge. Hitting \$1 million in annual revenue mark is a source of pride for all of us, and keeping it above the line is essential to us now. Managing over 37 people blows my mind. It is a huge responsibility, and I don't take it lightly. And knowing that we brought one person from tech to trainer to scheduler to being the new Manager of our 2nd location really makes me proud.

Our goal moving forward is to become a mature business: fine tune, tighten things up, and take care of what we have done well in our 1st location while growing our 2nd location to the same size in less time. I'd like to see both locations at or above \$1 million in revenue in five years.

Personally, I would like to travel even more, and do some walking adventures like hike a trail for a month! My daughter will graduate next year. and I look forward to seeing where she lands and how she grows as a person. ■

Don't Pout About Dirty Grout

Clean grout is well worth the effort for the value it adds to your clients' perception of a clean home.

By Janice Stewart

Cleaning dirty or discolored grout is a frustrating job, but doing it right adds immeasurable value to our reputation as cleaners. Grout in showers is exposed to soap scum, hard water deposits (or scale) and mold. Grout on floors is exposed to all types of funky grime. In both cases, cleaning the grout between tiles isn't always straightforward because it often lies slightly below the level of the tile, requiring a separate scrubbing with or without a stronger cleaning solution. To help us do this right, let's take a look at what grout is.

What is Grout?

Grout is a mortar, a thick building material that hardens and is used in masonry or plastering. Grout binds tiles together and separates them a specific distance from each other. Grout also prevents the edges of tiles from getting damaged, prevents debris from getting caught in the crevices between the tiles, and provides a decorative accent.

There are two common types of grout: sanded and unsanded. Sanded grout is typically used between standard ceramic tiles and is more durable than the finer unsanded grout you'll usually see more with natural stone (e.g., granite, marble, and glass) floors and treatments, as well as tiled kitchen countertops.



Why is grout so hard to keep clean and white?

Grout is challenging because it is porous and absorbs water and soil. This makes it easy to stain and darken as spills are absorbed, soil is tracked in on shoes, or dust settles from the air; this porousness also makes it impossible to disinfect.

And because tile is most commonly used in the "wet" rooms of a home, it is constantly exposed to moisture, which, in the presence of organic material, like food residues in the kitchen and body oils and skin cells in the bathroom, promotes the growth of mold. This tempts most people to use harsh chemicals to clean the grout.

If you are having a difficult time removing what seems to be an intractable stain, asking if a masonry or grout sealer was applied will help with your cleaning action plan. Sometimes it is obvious a colored grout sealer was applied in a shower or on a countertop because the grout lines look painted. Clear grout sealer may make the grout look unusually shiny. Often it isn't obvious a sealer has been applied unless the grout wasn't cleaned well before the sealer was applied.

Strong cleaning chemicals, natural cleaners that are strong acids and bases, high temperatures from steam vapor cleaners, and vigorous scrubbing will wear off these grout

and masonry sealers pretty quickly. If your client has sealed grout, using milder cleaning products might be your best option.

What is NOT recommended for cleaning grout?

While it is certainly satisfying to see grout restored to its former bright glory, when used regularly harsh products can harm the grout itself and the surrounding surfaces. The problems with harsh (often acidic) chemicals used to clean grout include:

- Damage to surrounding surfaces, including commercial and natural tiles
- Severe etching of the grout causing it to become more porous, making the grout more susceptible to staining and possibly causing moisture damage to surrounding areas
- Damage to natural stone such as marble, travertine and limestone.

What are some best practices for cleaning grout?

When you clean a tile surface on a regular basis, it is best to choose a milder cleaning method and leave the more extreme methods for first time jobs with trained cleaning techs.

1 Focus your method on the A in CHAT (see graphic). Gentle, consistent agitation with a scrub brush aids the removal of mold and soil. Avoid scrubbing too vigorously, which can erode the grout and destroy the grout's integrity, causing problems with loosened tiles and moisture damage around or beneath the tiles.

2 Test any chemical products (even homemade ones) for color safety. Use caution with colored grout. Many grout cleaners are designed to whiten the grout, but you don't want to bleach out the intended color of the grout. Always read the labels of any grout cleaning product to check if it is safe to use on colored grout. Test any product you choose to use in an inconspicuous area, especially homemade cleaning products which have arbitrary recipes and concentrations.

3 Wear your safety gear. Most cleaners work best with warm to hot water (the H in CHAT - see graphic). If you use hot water, remember to protect your hands. No matter what cleaning products you use, you will want to take proper precautions and wear rubber gloves, eye protection and work in a well-ventilated area.

C Chemical Action: Works to separate soil from surfaces and to hold onto them through removal.

H Heat: Generally, the higher the heat, the more active the cleaning agent.

A Agitation: Both to increase contact between the cleaning solution and the soil, and to physically move soil.

T Time: Often referred to as dwell time. Chemical action is not instantaneous; it takes anywhere from a second to several minutes for the cleaning agent to work.

4 Start tough jobs with the mildest option and increase strength only as needed. Grout cleaners, whatever your choice, are usually best applied to dry grout so the solution can soak into the grout. Always read the label of any commercial products to be sure. Start with the mildest or most diluted solution and increase the strength of the solution as necessary to get the preferred result.

In Part 2 of "Don't Pout about Dirty Grout," I explore the lowest impact chemical options (sometimes called "green" or "natural" cleaning solutions) for cleaning and whitening grout as well as protective options for keeping grout clean longer between cleanings. ■



Janice Stewart Owner of [Castle Keepers](#) and driving force behind the development of the Modern Cleaning approach, Janice brings her scientific and healthcare background to inform the development of effective, safe, and healthy cleaning methods.

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But now we’re asking you directly – the cleaning business owner and manager and technician – what you’ve used in the past that you hated and especially what you’re using now that you love. Our May survey focuses on technology you use to streamline your operations and managing quality:

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Cleaning Business Today Acquires Two Brands

CBT to expand reach with prosumer website brands

Charleston, SC - May 1, 2015

Cleaning Business Today, a division of Supreme Mullet Media, LLC, has acquired HousekeepingChannel.com and HealthyHouseInstitute.com as part of its brand expansion strategy.

“The key to making and keeping the cleaning industry and related home services relevant is to be the resource consumers and cleaning business owners trust and come back to time and again,” says *CBT* Publisher Tom Stewart. “Allen Rathey has created trusted resources with the HousekeepingChannel.com and HealthyHouseInstitute.com.”

Where *Cleaning Business Today* is a premier information and news outlet for growing and established cleaning businesses in the US, HousekeepingChannel.com and HealthyHouseInstitute.com add key business startup and green cleaning and lifestyle resources to a growing body of knowledge. In addition, the two resources are respectable online knowledge centers providing credible alternatives to commercially operated home and lifestyle websites with mobile applications that reach consumers.

“The expanded industry and consumer reach of these sites was a key factor in our acquisition of the assets,” explains *CBT* Publisher Derek Christian. “Now we are in a position to put the businesses and contractors in our own industry right in front of consumers with content and to support the development of their online presence with backlinks that Google respects as coming from a reputable website.”



For 11 years, Allen Rathey has spearheaded the most successful development of consumer-facing online resources from within the cleaning industry through the HousekeepingChannel.com and HealthyHouseInstitute.com, among others. Rathey intends to continue his work as a subject-matter expert in the cleaning, janitorial and indoor environments industries as he turns his entrepreneurial talents to related areas.

About Cleaning Business Today

Cleaning Business Today is an industry news and business development digital resource for cleaning business owners and building service contractors providing services that improve the environment, health and appearance of the indoor spaces where people live and work. We invite non-promotional discussion of relevant topics on our website and social platforms. *Cleaning Business Today* is dedicated to empowering the whole cleaning business - business processes and systems in addition to professional cleaning practices and knowledge.

About Supreme Mullet Media, LLC

Supreme Mullet Media is a multi-media content outlet established to broaden consumer and business awareness of the professional cleaning industry. Its mission is to empower through data-driven content and value-added business growth tools an improved professionalism among those performing, managing, selling and buying cleaning services. ■



HousekeepingChannel.com (HC) is a comprehensive resource for "Better, Faster, Healthier" cleaning and housekeeping. Experts featured on the site have earned a reputation for no-nonsense advice and practical wisdom. We invite you to come explore all of our exciting content and add your business or cleaning service to our national database, a *free* service designed to connect you directly to customers seeking your services!

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Are You Wasting Money on Training?

Making time for thorough training and continuous training isn't the waste of money it may feel like.

By Richard D. Ollek



In the service industry today, no subject receives more discussion and fewer results than does training. Nearly every proposal I have seen in the contract cleaning industry has a section on how they employ trained personnel—POORLY TRAINED that is.

Just in the past few weeks I have had 5 BSCs contact me with employee issues of poor work out on the job, some to the point of losing an account. My first question is always “Describe to me your training program.” In each case, the answer was that they send them out to work with a current “experienced” employee to “learn the ropes.” My next question is “experienced at what?” When was the last time you checked the procedures your “experienced” employees are following? My contention is that on-the-job training will lead to on-the-job failure unless you have a systematic way of checking the work of the experienced worker.

When I conduct workshops for companies on the subject of training, one of the exercises we have the participants do in groups is to list what “better training systems” means to them and to the company as a whole. Let me list some that come to mind.

Reduces Employee Turnover

At the rate of \$500 plus per employee to put someone on the payroll, it doesn't take a genius to determine that this benefit comes near to the top of the list. Let me suggest you review the number of W-2s your company provided for everyone who worked for you last year, determine the excess over your normal payroll and [you will see the dollars you wasted](#). You may want to get some nausea relief pills before you do this exercise.

Improves Customer Retention

Ever had a customer tell you when [they cancelled the agreement](#) that the main reason was



Richard D. Ollek is the owner of *Consultants in Cleaning*, providing consulting to companies that want to realize profitable sales growth and improve staffing and administrative procedures.

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your high turnover? Most service companies, if honest, will admit they have been told that at least once. So, factor in the sales cost you have in finding new customers, and you have another big number and big reason for providing a quality systematic training program in your company.

Improves New Customer Acquisition

One of the questions being asked often today by prospective customers is "What's your turnover rate?" I have seen service contractors eliminated from the competition through this question. Some contractors become extremely creative in how they determine their turnover rate when asked this question. You see, in today's world, the mere fact that you are being asked to submit a proposal assumes you know how to clean. What the prospect wants to know is how you are going to manage the people and the systems, and the rate of turnover is a significant factor in determining if you're any good at the management. If you are constantly trying to "reload" with new people, prospects begin to doubt how well you can manage the entire process.

Reduces Labor Costs

You, no doubt, have heard or said this phrase: "Why is there never enough time to do the job right the first time but always time to do it over?" That costs you twice as much in labor costs and more in re-training. Well, with the proper train-

ing, there are fewer times the job has to be done over. Make sense? Every time the customer has to call you to complain that the job is not satisfactory, you lose more credibility with that customer, bringing you a step closer to making them a former customer.

I remember at one of our quarterly supervisor's management meetings, one of my key managers was explaining for the umpteenth time how to properly empty a vacuum bag. As he was going through the process, one of the attendees asked, "Bill, how many times are we going to have to hear how to properly empty a vacuum bag?" Bill's reply was "I will continue to repeat this process until we learn how to do it properly." As fate would have it, the bag Bill was showing came from the building the person asking the question was responsible for. It wasn't planned that way, and we didn't embarrass the person in front of his peers, but we certainly discussed it with him after the meeting.

I can go on with this exercise, but I have probably hit on the major reasons why having a systematic, organized orientation and training program is not a waste of time or money. Look at the reasons outlined above, review your training program, improve it and start putting more dollars on your bottom line. ■



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