



National

Clothesline

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Mak family mask-makers



Vince and Alison Mak sport two of the masks made by family members at Hong Kong Cleaners in York, PA. Since their 14-year-old daughter Hailey got the mask-making ball rolling, the whole family has pitched in with some 500 masks made so far.

While it's not business as usual, cleaners have found things to do that not only keep them busy but also provide useful and necessary services.

At Hong Kong Cleaners in York, PA, Vincent Mak and his whole family have joined in to make face masks which are suddenly in great demand and short supply.

It started with his 14-year-old daughter, Hailey, who wanted to experiment with mask making. Five hundred masks later, everybody in the family has been involved — while Hailey runs the sewing machine, 12-year-old Lexi is in charge of ironing and pleating and seven-year-old Connor is the appointed elastic cutter. Also in the act is his wife, Alison, mother Amy (a seamstress by trade), and sister Betty.

What else would you expect in a true family business?

The mask making is not replacing the usual income stream for Hong Kong Cleaners but it has kept everybody occupied and active during this slow time, Vince says. Word-of-mouth (and a Facebook following) have kept the customer requests coming in.

Meeting this new demand has led to some new experiences, too. Material, especially elastic, can be hard to find. The hunt for elusive elastic brought about a

one-hour road trip to a person who makes doll clothes and had a supply. That kept the assembly line humming.

Hailey is saving money for her dream violin, so what she earns goes to that. Lexi will donate her share to the ASPCA. But most important, he says, is that they are helping the community and learning respect.

As for Vince, he is waiting for the day when the shut down ends and he can get business ramped back up by offering a big special on cleaning sweat pants and pajamas. There should be some need there.

Allied trades pitch in

Masks have also come into play at Nu-Way Cleaners in White Plains, NY.

Richard Bayliss, owner of the 75-year-old, family-owned business, thought he had seen everything over the years, but nothing compares to recent developments.

"I have never seen it like this in my lifetime. You drive by a mall... every single store is shut down," he said in mid-April. "It's not good. We're down about 75 percent. It's hard. We're barely doing payroll. I didn't lay anybody off yet."

Like many cleaners, Bayliss has ex-

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COVID shutdown hits cleaners hard

Drycleaners are not immune to the crushing side effects of a widespread shutdown of businesses intended to curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus that has infected millions worldwide, hundreds of thousands in the U.S. and has been responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands.

By mid-April, about a month into the shutdown, cleaners were reporting that business was off 70 to 80 percent from a year ago. Political leaders and government health officials were flirting with the idea of allowing at least a gradual easing of restrictions in the coming weeks in hopes of resurrecting a moribund economy.

The irony for drycleaners is that they escaped the mandatory shutdown orders in many states, having been declared "essential businesses" that could stay open. But being open does not mean having business.

With many people working from home and many others out of work completely, the demand for drycleaning dried up almost overnight.

In a move to support small businesses, Congress approved a package that included the Paycheck Protection Program which proved to be so popular that all \$359 billion that was allocated was used up in two weeks. The program allowed small businesses to borrow up to 2.5 times their average monthly payroll expenses in loans that could be forgivable if the business maintained its payroll through June 30.

Many drycleaners applied and some received funds. It was a mixed bag for the application process. In some cases, it seems banks weren't ready to handle the influx of loan applications, leaving applicants frustrated; for others, the process was smooth and the funds were received quickly.

At any rate, the money ran out. Congress began working on a second allocation of funds for the program and on April 22 appeared on the verge of having a deal worked out that would put another \$310 billion into the PPP program.

That money could go quickly, too. For this round of funding, the banks should be pretty prepared to process applications; in fact, many already have applications in hand from the first round. Cleaners who had applications in and didn't get approval before the first batch of money ran out should have a good chance of scoring the second time around. Those who have hesitated may not be lost but if they're left out in the cold they will have to hope for a third round of funding. There's no guaran-

tee that will happen.

While the main purpose of the program is to keep employees on the payroll, the money can also be used to pay rent and utilities, interest payments on mortgages and other debt incurred before February 15, 2020, retirement benefits and state and local employment taxes.

The good news is that the PPP loans can be forgiven. But the amount of loan forgiveness may be reduced if the employer reduces the number of employees or reduces the pay of any employee by more than 25 percent as of the last calendar quarter. Employers who re-hire workers previously laid off as a result of the crisis will not be penalized for having a reduced payroll for the beginning of the relevant period. Borrowers are eligible for loan forgiveness for eight weeks commencing from origination date for the loan of payroll costs and rent payments, utility payments, or mortgage interest payments.

If a business does not meet the requirements for forgiveness, the loan will have to be repaid.

Therein lies the dilemma for drycleaners. They must remain fully staffed to qualify for forgiveness but with business off so dramatically, the usual work is not there for employees to do. Employees could be paid to stay home and not come into work or work part-time but get paid full-time. Or they could be put to work on other tasks.

Those tasks could include cleaning and painting the store, organizing areas that there never seems to be time for ordinarily, calling customers to pick up orders waiting in the plant, taking DLI online courses to improve their skills, cross-training. Even if it's only busy work, it keeps employees engaged with the company and keeps the lights on and doors open, avoiding that "closed" look.

To avoid problems down the road in seeking loan forgiveness, businesses have been advised to set up a separate bank account to receive and disburse the funds. This will make it easier to demonstrate that the money was used for its intended purposes in case of an audit when seeking loan forgiveness.

Cleaners are also eligible for the Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) program. The loan is made by the Small Business Administration directly and a \$1,000 per employee advance on the loan, up to \$10,000, can be requested as well. This

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Sneak Peek

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Stay in touch with your customers and be ready for the reopening of business, advises association executive Peter Blake.



10 Disinfecting fabrics

Garments can be effectively disinfected in the drying and finishing process says Dan Eisen.



16 Looking for business?

Now more than ever pickup/delivery and wash-dry-fold services can bring in much needed business, says James Peuster.



20 Tell the truth

If you need to reduce staff, communicate to employees clearly and truthfully the reasons why, advises Frank Kollman.



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Difficult but not hopeless

Almost half, or 45 percent to be precise, of adults in the U.S. reported that their mental health has been adversely affected by the current COVID-19 battle, according to a study published on April 21 by the Kaiser Family Foundation, a non-profit organization that focuses on national health issues. That already-high number is likely to continue rising the longer the COVID-19 crisis plays out. Making matters worse, there is no way to predict when a viable vaccine will be developed and made available for widespread distribution. Until then, nobody is immune from the health, psychological or economic fallout that comes from a pandemic.

That does not mean everything is hopeless right now, just incredibly difficult.

In fact, there is quite a bit of hope right now, especially if you look inside the “essential” drycleaning and laundry industry. Our front page story only covers a handful of companies that have contributed to bettering their community; however, they are hardly in a class by themselves. Good deeds are being accomplished all over the country. A multitude of professional and amateur tailors have crafted much-needed masks for healthcare workers. Cleaners (from the mom-and-pops to national chains) have offered free cleaning for front line responders — the medical and healthcare workers, fire fighters, police and other heroes selflessly risking themselves in the COVID-19 containment effort. It’s impressive to see how many individuals and companies in the industry are finding ways to give back, but it’s hardly a behavior relegated to this industry. Day by day, industries forced by dire circumstances are enacting drastic changes practically overnight.

In the age of Social Distancing, restaurants suddenly relied 100 percent on pickup or delivery orders. Musicians who need to tour for income traded in their bus for a livestream living room concert funded by online tips. With no theaters open in which to debut movies, Hollywood studios premiered their new releases on home streaming services. Where there is a will, people will find a new way.

Of course, people still craved food and entertainment, but what about the hospitality and travel industries? Hotels across the country have opened up millions of rooms altogether to help isolate and protect the homeless in some cities, and others have donated their use as temporary quarters for healthcare workers. Major airlines have had to cut back flights only to find themselves saddled with extra food and beverages in stock, which were donated to heavily depleted food banks. Others are also using their planes to transport healthcare workers who volunteer to help in major affected states like California and New York. Perhaps most surprisingly, some distilleries have found ways to use their equipment to produce hand sanitizer locally in areas where there are great shortages.

The lesson here is not complicated, but it is easy to forget: When it’s needed the most, human ingenuity finds a way to shine through. We will be seeing a lot more creativity in the months to come. In the meantime, stay well.

The future: Destination unknown

A month ago in this space, we noted that there were more than 7,000 cases of COVID-19 in the U.S. and that the death toll was just under 100. Since then those numbers have skyrocketed. As of April 23, there were more than 800,000 cases and the death toll has topped 50,000.

The impact on the economy has also been devastating but harder to quantify. Unemployment levels that rival the Great Depression tell part of the story. That’s the result of so many businesses being ordered to close. About a third of the nation’s workforce can work from home, we’re told. Of the other two-thirds, some are among the essential personnel who go to jobs in health care and public safety, but most are without an income from jobs they were working at just a few weeks ago.

Likely it will be months before we know just how many businesses have succumbed to this disruption. We fear that many drycleaners will be among those who do not survive. The longer this goes on, the lower the survival rate will be for at-risk businesses.

We’re seeing some indications that government officials are planning to get things started back up again. Cautiously at first, then, if early efforts go well, maybe a quicker return to full functioning. That’s looking like a months-long process right now and we’re not likely to ever return to business as usual pre-Covid, or PC as James Peuster calls it in his column this month.

So as we navigate these rocky shoals, recognize that the port we arrive in will not be the same one we left. Be prepared to be different and be open to new ideas for reinventing your businesses. We expect there will be some marvelous success stories.

Dear Readers,

Like so many of our you, we at NATIONAL CLOTHESLINE are adjusting to a new reality. Despite the disruption in our regular routine, we still want to provide you with news, information and a sense of connection to the industry during these times.

As you may have noticed, we have fewer pages than usual in this issue and it’s all in one section. So if you were wondering that maybe a second section had gone astray in the mail, the answer is no. You are holding the entirety of it in your hand.

Like everyone else, we look forward to the day when it’s once again safe to meet and gather and do business and we hope that day comes sooner rather than later. In the meantime, with things changing rapidly, you can stay in touch and keep up-to-date by following us on Facebook and the web and please check in with your state, regional and national trade associations, too, through their websites and social media pages as we all work hard to understand our current circumstance and plan for the future.

—The staff at National Clothesline

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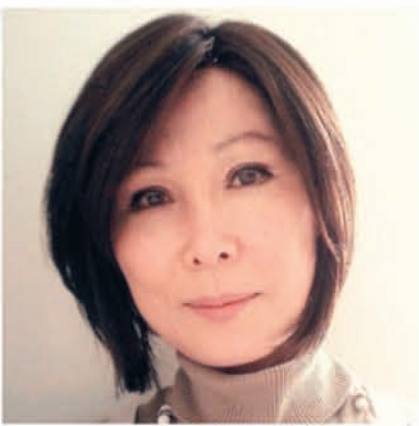


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Cleaners find ways to contribute

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perienced a cataclysmic drop in volume and has been tasked with making a torrent of unpleasant business choices. “It’s tough because you say to yourself, ‘Wouldn’t it be smarter just to shut down?’” he said. “But, by the same token, the few customers that you do have, you don’t want to give them a chance to go some place else. If I can make payroll for another month or so like this, it’s better than nothing. The biggest fear is getting all your help back.”

“Two weeks ago Saturday, a doctor who is a customer of mine came into the store,” Bayliss began. “He said to my son, Michael: ‘The bags that you put the blankets in... how can we get some of those?’ My son asked, ‘What are you trying to do? What is the purpose behind it?’ So, he said, ‘The small bags, once you don’t zip them shut, we’re using them as face masks at the doctor’s office and at some of the hospitals.’”

Once they realized why they were needed, the Baylisses promised the bags would be free and proceeded to call Jeff Schapiro, president of Cleaners Supply, in order to have them ready as soon as possible.

“On Monday morning, Jeff had 400 of those bags up in my store,” Bayliss noted. “We only asked for a couple of hundred and he sent us 400.”

According to Schapiro, Bayliss was not the only one with such requests. Cleaners Supply has donated quite a bit of materials for mask-making, including many rolls of elastic and plastic, over the course of weeks while business is anything but booming. “Everybody’s intention is good,” he said. “Of course, it’s tough to help every single person, but we try.”

The allied trades company is also trying to help drycleaners though this tough time, as well. “Right now, our focus is we’re looking for ways to help our cus-

tomers and we’re doing some different things. We have a poster program we’re offering to the customers and they can put in their windows to promote that they’re open and that they do wash and fold, and comforters and pickup and delivery,” Schapiro added.

“When we do start opening up and business goes back somewhat to normal, the cleaners need to understand one thing: the worst thing that you can do is start to discount,” Bayliss emphasized. “That’s only going to put you behind the eight-ball even more. Be proud of who you are. Be proud of the product you are putting out. Make sure the product is good and don’t be afraid to charge it.”

Stretching for elastic

In Henderson, NV, Silvia Hernandez, a seamstress who works for Dry Clean Depot, has been trying to make up for lost income after the business greatly reduced hours in March. Previously open six days a week, the company now only operates on Mondays and Wednesdays.

To date, she has sewed hundreds of masks and is selling them for \$7 each, or 3 for \$20. She, too has had trouble getting the elastic she needs. She told Fox5 KVVU-TV in Las Vegas, “My boss ordered it three weeks ago and it hasn’t come yet,” she said in mid-April. “It’s hard to find it. So yesterday I drove to California to buy elastic.”

She took a day trip from Las Vegas to the LA fashion district to find the coveted item. According to Hernandez, before the COVID-19 crisis, rolls of the material sold for about ten dollars. She had to pay \$25 a roll recently, but felt it was worth it. “I feel good when I make something to help,” she told the news station.

Helping front-line heros

Cleaners have found other ways to stay busy while making an important contribution.

In Alabama, despite the state declaring drycleaning and laundry

as an “essential personal service,” there is not much work coming in. So David Whitehurst, owner of Champion Cleaners in Birmingham, figured out a way to help essential healthcare workers on the frontline.

“We continue to operate although with a much lower volume of business than is normal for this time of year. Since we have the people and the equipment, we decided to give back to those working so hard for our recovery with our #HampersforHealthcare program,” he noted.

“We have offered a wash, dry and fold service to our customers for many years using our Champion Hamper. This is a service that can help our healthcare heroes in their life outside of patient care. Doctors, nurses, therapists — anyone involved in the battle against COVID-19 can take advantage of this offer. These professionals are working long hours and making great personal sacrifice to protect our community. This is something we can give back to our local healthcare heroes.”

The free service was made available to those fighting on the front lines of the pandemic from April 13 to May 15, 2020 at all four of its locations.

In the early stages of the program, Whitehurst discussed the current guidelines, though he admitted those might change in time.

“We will handle the regular family washday laundry for as many as possible while they help us recover from this pandemic,” he said. “It’s the least we can do for them. We will not be washing the scrubs and other PPE being used in the hospitals. But we will wash the family’s weekly laundry just to ease their burden at home.”

In a similar effort promoted by national television advertising, Tide Cleaners and the Tide brand mobilized a Loads of Hope initiative to show gratitude towards paramedics, doctors, nurses, police officers, fire fighters and hospital and medical staff by offering free laundry services for them and

their families through May 9.

The Loads of Hope program was announced in national television commercials that began airing in April on a variety of major network and cable channels including, ABC, CBS, FOX, USA, BRVO, NBC, CNN and CWN.

Altogether, Tide’s charitable efforts have encompassed dozens of major U.S. cities where affiliates are located: Phoenix, AZ, Raleigh, NC, St. Louis, MO, Columbus, OH, Detroit, MI, Atlanta, GA, Colorado Springs, CO, Las Vegas, NV, Little Rock, AR, Indianapolis, IN, Minneapolis, MN and much more.

In Texas alone, the company has reached markets in Amarillo, Austin, Dallas, Lubbock and Houston, all of which offer the free cleaning services to first line responders.

According to Kyle Nesbit, senior vice president of business development, compliance at Edit TX, LLC (a Tide Dry Cleaners franchisee), the 38 franchises in Houston have endured a rocky ride recently.

“I think it’s both a blessing and a curse that we’ve been considered an essential business because, when you’re the captain of the ship, you’ve got to be out there,” he said.

“When it first happened, we let go of a good portion of the staff... before the PPP loan came through. Then, once it came through, we’ve been running to

get all these people back in the door. It’s been a really busy time, to be honest — and tough mentally, too, because you’re watching your business drop 70 percent and are trying to keep the ship afloat while getting in touch with landlords. With us, it’s not one landlord. It’s 38 landlords.”

When morale was low, the Loads of Hope program helped pick spirits back up. “I am so proud that we get to provide the service to the front-line responders. That’s really awesome. It gives my team a sense of purpose, which we really need,” Nesbit noted. “Also, it’s keeping them busy. Yeah, we’re not making any money off of it, but it’s keeping our people busy so they’re not just standing in an empty store doing nothing.”

Doing nothing is no longer a problem. The work has poured in. The last data Nesbit had readily available was from April 9, very early in the program. “We had 2,100 front-line responders give us a try,” he said, referring to collections made at all 38 stores in the Houston area. Since then, many more have continued to sign up.

“The program has been a monster success here in Houston,” Nesbit added. “I really am so proud to be a part of the Procter & Gamble family... that they would really put this out there to help those who are basically our heroes.”

COVID shutdown hits cleaners hard

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loan advance will not have to be repaid.

The proceeds must be used for working capital needs such as fixed debt and payroll. The interest rate is 3.75 percent with loan terms of up to 30 years. An automatic one-year deferment on repayment means the first payment

will not be due for one year. Information on the PPP and EIDL programs is available in the Small Business Administration website, www.sba.gov. Industry trade associations also offer information and assistance.

Events canceled

The Michigan Institute of Laundering and Drycleaning and the North Carolina Association of Launderers and Cleaners have joined several other associations in canceling events in the face of the coronavirus threat.

MILD announced that its summer convention planned for July has been postponed until next year.

Also falling victim were two events planned by the North Carolina Association of Launderers and Cleaners.

A meeting of stakeholders in the Drycleaning Solvent Cleanup Act scheduled for April 30 was cancelled.

NCALC also had to cancel its spring meeting planned for May 1-3 at the Blockade Runner Beach Resort at Wrightsville Beach, NC.

The Midwest Drycleaning and Laundry Institute announced that all group gatherings and educational seminars have been canceled.

Previously, the Southwest Drycleaners Association canceled its trade show that was to be held in April in Ft. Worth, TX. SDA now plans to hold its next Cleaners Showcase in April, 2022 in Irving, TX.





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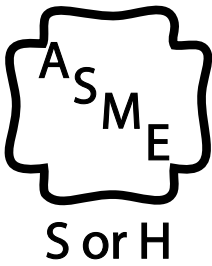
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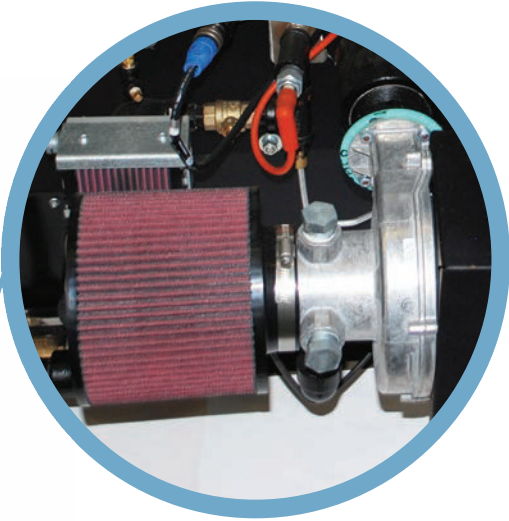
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BY PETER BLAKE

From all of us at NEFA, SEFA, MAC, CCA, and DLI, we hope you are all safe and healthy in these challenging times. Eventually this will pass. It may not seem like it right now, but there is light at the end of the tunnel and we must be positioned to move forward.



Peter Blake

We need to formulate a plan and take all the steps necessary to answer the challenges. We need to understand the changes the industry is going through, and how drycleaners and launderers will continue to adapt to a new reality.

Making changes and decisions to stay viable

No one is ever prepared for a change this dramatic. Three months ago, we were looking at starting to grow, heading into the busy season, looking at the potential opportunities and planning how to take advantage of them. Fast-forward today and most cleaners are looking at 70 to 80 percent drop in over the counter business and route sales drops on average of 40 to 60 percent.

The first 10 days of the pandemic saw business owners need-

ing to make critical decisions about their businesses: cutting store hours, reducing staff, closing stores, and in some cases closing altogether. Many plants took immediate action. It is better to take action and be decisive than to hold off and over analyze until it is too late. You will make more mistakes by not acting than by taking action.

My role in this regard was two-fold: provide cleaners the opportunity to keep operating and provide as much information as possible to make those decisions.

We all worked tirelessly with our members and industry advocates to make sure we were included in all "Essential Business" lists. Drycleaners called whatever contacts they had to make sure they could operate.

The second key was to develop lines of communication to keep everyone up-to-date with events and news changing. I had been developing plans for a Facebook group for NEFA, SEFA, MAC, and CCA since Early February—but if there was ever a need for such a tool it was now. Within an hour of creating the group we had over 35 members. By nightfall, it was approaching 100, and by morning we had eclipsed 120. It was apparent this was a critical need for our members, and it was transitioned to a DLI Member Community. The group has grown to nearly 500 to date.

Understanding the need for the entire industry to have critical

COVID-19 resources, I made sure all our websites have free resources for all on our webpages for anyone to use.

Stabilize your business

Business started to dry up almost immediately as the waves of "Stay at Home" orders swept the nation, impacting every region of the country.

One of the first challenges is to let your customers and your community know you are there, you are essential, and you are open for business to serve them.

Communication and information is everything. If people have learned one thing through this ordeal, it is to develop as many ways of communicating as possible, and to collect as much information from your customers as you can, including email addresses and cell phone numbers.

Everyone asked the same question: how do I get business in? The answer is always the same: communicate. Reach out and talk to your customers by any means possible: email them, call them, text them if you can.

I provided sample scripts on our websites for calling current customers and for contacting customers with clothes on the racks so they could facilitate pickup or delivery.

Cash flow is imperative and there was a lot of money still on those racks. The message is very simple: "We want to check to see how you are doing, and we want

to let you know we are here to help."

Part of that help is cleaning your garments, blankets and comforters. Not only those of your customers, but their neighbors too! This is a perfect opportunity to ask your customers to help their neighbors by reaching out and letting them know you are in the neighborhood and there to help. You will be surprised how many customers will spread the word, especially if they understand they are doing it for their neighbors' benefit.

A second-tier issue is letting your community know you are open. You must be visible. Make sure your lights are on, even overnight if possible. Park cars in front of the building. Invest in banners outside, sidewalk easels — anything to alert people you are in operation.

Reach out to apartment buildings in your area. Many apartment buildings discontinued use of washer/dryers in common areas leaving those residents with no laundry capacity. Be aggressive.

One of the best things we were able to do was to entice international branding expert Brian Rashid to do a live hour-long question and answer session for our members. This provided extremely valuable information on the types of messages that resonate and how to get the word out.

We are now providing graphics for Facebook and Instagram. We have helped members "boost" posts and helped them target them effectively. Community relations leads to business opportunities. Get the word out to your potential customers, not just your current ones.

Financial resources: dazed and confused

This has been one of the biggest areas of need and assistance. We have partnered with PuzzleHR to produce a string of webinars exploring all aspects of the new Federal Relief Packages including the FMLA Regulations, the CARE Act, and the ensuing EIDL and Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) Loans.

As everyone knows, the process was as clear as mud. The applications were a moving target, and the forgiveness rules and stipulations have been reinterpreted a hundred times. Applications and info can be found on nefabricare.com and our other association pages.

One thing is clear, every drycleaner should apply for the PPP. The initial funding ran out quickly and it's up to Congress to appropriate more. If and when that happens, get your application in quickly. We have produced some great overviews and worksheets to help people and guide them through the process.

The biggest fear I have with these loans, however, is the confusion and misunderstanding over the forgiveness requirements. The worst thing I envision is for recipients to get the loan and then mis-handle or misunderstand the rules

and ending up with little or no forgiveness. They will be faced with a large loan payable within two years.

I can't stress enough how important it is to work with a company like PuzzleHR or another HR company to help guide and advise you. They will work with your current payroll company. Make sure you plan and know the rules. Reach out to me if you are confused and need help.

Be ready for the reopening

Take this time to evaluate what we have learned through this adversity. Look internally at your business and see how it has changed. The old adage, "Necessity is the mother of invention" is as true as ever. I can't tell you how many times I have heard, "We don't do wash-dry-fold," and my answer through all of this was: "Now you do — figure it out."

No delivery capability? If you don't figure out how to serve the community with social distancing, you aren't surviving. You needed to figure ways to get customers serviced through make-shift routes.

New business opportunities? They are out there. Whether it is consolidating the industry by buying out a competitor in the area or simply expanding into areas where other businesses closed down, there are opportunities.

Your core product, TIME, will continue to be vital to your target customer. You main product is time and convenience. When people are released from the cages and confines of their homes, I believe they will place an even greater appreciation of leisure time. They are tired of chores, tired of being cooped up, and they are going to be willing to spend money to get more time to enjoy life.

Are you ready for that? Now is the time to forecast and reinvent yourself.

Learn from the changes you have already seen. Will more people work from home? Probably. Will people dress as professionally as they did three months ago? Probably not in the short term. That means be prepared for even more wash-dry-fold. Put your own spin on it. Maybe wash-dry-hang?

Make your business adaptable, and make a plan to go out and capture the marketplace. If you need help, let me know. We can develop some tools to help you prepare.

Be safe, be strong, be resilient — and be prepared, because this too shall pass, and we all need to be ready. Email me at peteblke@aol.com and we can plan together or call (617) 791-0128

Peter Blake serves as executive director of the North East Fabricare Association, the Southeastern Fabricare Association, the MidAtlantic Association of Cleaners and the California Cleaners Association.

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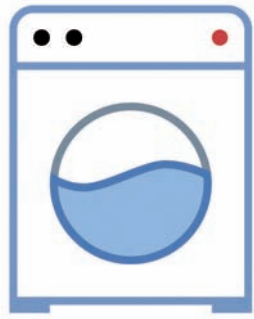
THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE!

To all the essential workers out there (including dry cleaners!) giving it everything they've got, every hour of every day, to see us through this crisis, we thank you for your service!

Many thanks for the support & timely information from our Industry Associations and Trade Publications!



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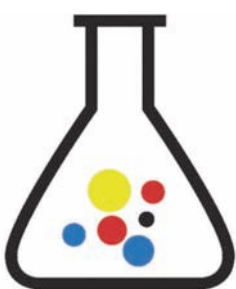
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THE SPOTTING BOARD



BY DAN EISEN

Facts about disinfecting fabrics

There have not been tests made on whether drycleaning solvents in use destroy the new covid virus. It has been known for years that the entire drycleaning process using detergents, heat of drying and pressing destroys most germs, bacteria and viruses. Each part of the process plays an important part.

Drycleaning solvents

Drycleaning solvents alone

may be a purifier in some cases but bacteria can survive in some solvents.

Strong solvents such as perchloroethylene have less problems with bacteria. This solvent also has a greater effect on some impurities such as mold spores. It is the solvent used for destroying mold and mildew on fabrics

It would be interesting to know whether heating solvents destroys more germs and viruses.

It would also be interesting to know whether the new alcohol-based solvents are a better purifier.

Heat of drying

Reports have come out that high heat temperature destroys the virus.

The heat of drying may be confusing. The heat of drying may not reach the temperature you think it does for any length of time.

When you set your drying

temperature at 150°F, there is a cooling factor on reclaiming. The temperature of the incoming air used may evaporate solvents from the clothes but the clothes remain cool from this evaporation.

This means that the temperature of the clothes may not reach the incoming temperature. The clothes reach the incoming temperature only after all solvent is reclaimed and only for a short period of time.

The drying cycle then goes

on a cool down. We do not know if the heat of drying destroys the virus even when set at 160°F.

There is also a difference in heat when obtained in drycleaning and that heat obtained when clothes are wet.

Finishing process

The heat used in all finishing would most likely destroy all germs, viruses and bacteria. The temperature of the steam created reaches temperatures of over 300°F. It would seem that steam tunnels would be an efficient way of disinfecting.

The wetcleaning process

The wetcleaning process seems the most efficient way of destroying the covid virus.

EPA has a list of disinfecting agents that destroys the virus. These registered agents include hydrogen peroxide, peracetic agent, and sodium hypochlorite.

This means that oxygen bleaches such as sodium perborate and sodium percarbonate would be effective. These bleaches release hydrogen peroxide.

Reports coming out also indicate that wetcleaning detergents are a purifier.

Some wetcleaning detergents are cationic and are known to be germ purifiers.

Hand cleaning

EPA lists alcohol and hydrogen peroxide as purifiers.


Accepting items

It must be remembered that it is illegal for any consumer to bring in garments known to be in contact with an infectious disease.

It is also illegal for a drycleaner to accept garments that have been in contact with an infectious disease.

For updated information, check with your drycleaning trade associations and chemical salespeople.

Dan Eisen, former chief garment analyst for the National Cleaners Association, can be reached at (772) 340-0909 or (772) 579-5044 or by e-mail at cleandan@comcast.net. He offers independent garment analysis and provides consulting services. His book, "Professional Guide to Restoration on Fabrics, Suedes and Leather," deals with restoring color and camouflaging discolorations. His website is www.garmentanalysis.com.



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When I found out I had to change from perc after 14 years, I was very concerned that I would have to deal with the “alternative solvent” headaches I had heard so much about. To my surprise, since switching to **intense®** I have had none of the issues I was worried about. My cleaning results have been nothing short of amazing. My customers have noticed that there is no chemical smell on their garments anymore and are pleased with the feel and cleanliness of their clothes, as well as the idea that we are more environmentally responsible now. **intense®** was the right move for us.

Bob Hamila (*Lighthouse Cleaners / Palm Beach Gardens, FL*)

Finally, a solvent that is comparable to perc in cleaning strength, but gentle enough to handle all of the beads, sequins and faux finishes that adorn today's clothing. **intense®** is clean smelling, incredibly reclaimable and easy to use. We are 10 weeks+ in a new Union hydrocarbon machine with **intense®** solvent and extremely satisfied with the results. We still haven't had to change the filters or have the waste picked up because there is so little of it, but we look forward to the savings there as well. Probably the wisest decision we've made yet. Thanks Ken for all your help.

Stephanie Barrero (*Door2Door Drycleaners / Bluffton, SC*)

I've been waiting for a solvent alternative to PERC. I look for companies that have a proven track record of longevity. What's important to me is to partner with a company that believes in constant innovation, technology advances and unparalleled support. I have always found this with SEITZ, which gave me the confidence to embrace and convert to their new solvent. It is performing fabulously and will allow me to make the necessary changes to continue to improve my service and my business.

Bill Wright (*Royal Fine Cleaners / Northport, AL*)

For as long as I've been in dry cleaning, I've been using Seitz products. From their spotting chemicals to dry cleaning detergents, all performed beyond my expectations. So when it came time to make the switch from Perc to an environmentally friendly solvent, I turned to SEITZ. Their answer was **intense®**. It's cleaning and grease cutting ability made my transition from Perc very easy. I'm glad I chose SEITZ. Thank you for another quality product!

Julian Bulsara (*Prestige Cleaners / Lauderhill, FL*)

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New required workplace poster

As part of the Family First Coronavirus Recovery Act (FFCRA), employees at small businesses may be entitled to a number of new benefits for sick and family leave. To make sure employees understand their options, employers are required to post notice of the requirements.

The Department of Labor has released a mandatory employee rights poster (printed below). It should be posted in a conspicu-

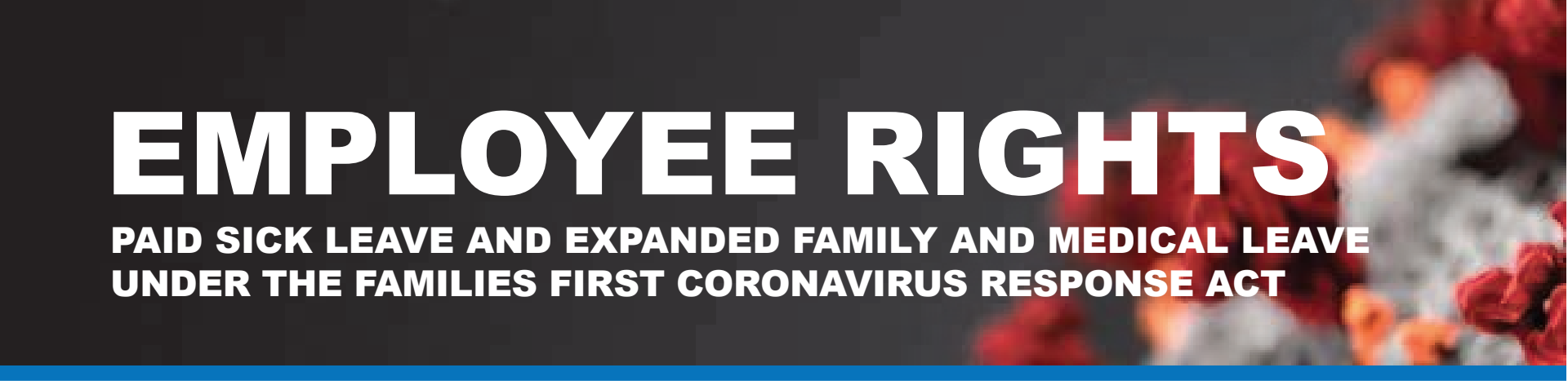
ous place on your premises. An employer can also meet this requirement by emailing or direct mailing the notice to employees or posting it on an employee information internal or external website.

Two of the FFCRA's provisions provide eligible employees with paid sick leave or expanded family and medical leave for specified reasons related to COVID-19: the Emergency Paid Sick Leave Act (EPSLA)

and the Emergency Family and Medical Leave Expansion Act (EFMLEA). These provisions will apply from April 1, 2020 through December 31, 2020.

The EPSLA requires covered employers to provide employees with up to 80 hours of paid leave under circumstances spelled out in the poster. Employees of private sector employers with fewer than 500 employees are eligible for the leave.

The EFMLEA temporarily amends the federal Family and Medical Leave Act. Eligible employees may take up to 12 weeks leave if an employee is unable to work (or telework) due to a need for leave to care for a son or daughter under 18 years of age if the child's school or place of care has been closed or the child care provider of such son or daughter is unavailable due to a public health emergency.



The **Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA or Act)** requires certain employers to provide their employees with paid sick leave and expanded family and medical leave for specified reasons related to COVID-19. These provisions will apply from April 1, 2020 through December 31, 2020.

► **PAID LEAVE ENTITLEMENTS**

Generally, employers covered under the Act must provide employees:

Up to two weeks (80 hours, or a part-time employee's two-week equivalent) of paid sick leave based on the higher of their regular rate of pay, or the applicable state or Federal minimum wage, paid at:

- 100% for qualifying reasons #1-3 below, up to \$511 daily and \$5,110 total;
- ⅔ for qualifying reasons #4 and 6 below, up to \$200 daily and \$2,000 total; and
- Up to 12 weeks of paid sick leave and expanded family and medical leave paid at ⅓ for qualifying reason #5 below for up to \$200 daily and \$12,000 total.

A part-time employee is eligible for leave for the number of hours that the employee is normally scheduled to work over that period.

► **ELIGIBLE EMPLOYEES**

In general, employees of private sector employers with fewer than 500 employees, and certain public sector employers, are eligible for up to two weeks of fully or partially paid sick leave for COVID-19 related reasons (see below). *Employees who have been employed for at least 30 days* prior to their leave request may be eligible for up to an additional 10 weeks of partially paid expanded family and medical leave for reason #5 below.

► **QUALIFYING REASONS FOR LEAVE RELATED TO COVID-19**

An employee is entitled to take leave related to COVID-19 if the employee is unable to work, including unable to **telework**, because the employee:

<div>1. is subject to a Federal, State, or local quarantine or isolation order related to COVID-19;</div> <div>2. has been advised by a health care provider to self-quarantine related to COVID-19;</div> <div>3. is experiencing COVID-19 symptoms and is seeking a medical diagnosis;</div> <div>4. is caring for an individual subject to an order described in (1) or self-quarantine as described in (2);</div>	<div>5. is caring for his or her child whose school or place of care is closed (or child care provider is unavailable) due to COVID-19 related reasons; or</div> <div>6. is experiencing any other substantially-similar condition specified by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.</div>
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► **ENFORCEMENT**

The U.S. Department of Labor's Wage and Hour Division (WHD) has the authority to investigate and enforce compliance with the FFCRA. Employers may not discharge, discipline, or otherwise discriminate against any employee who lawfully takes paid sick leave or expanded family and medical leave under the FFCRA, files a complaint, or institutes a proceeding under or related to this Act. Employers in violation of the provisions of the FFCRA will be subject to penalties and enforcement by WHD.



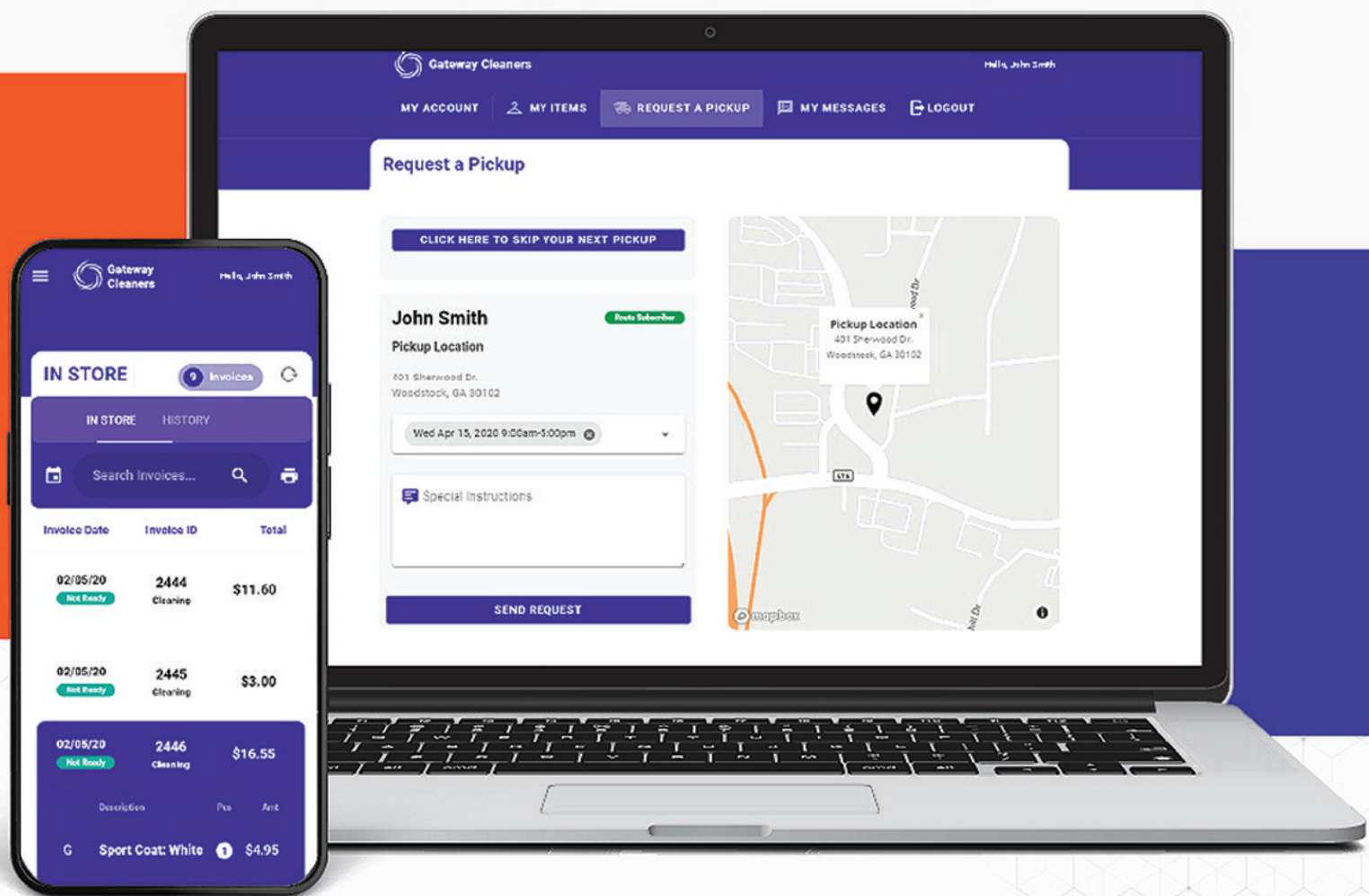
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THE ROUTE PRO



BY JAMES PEUSTER

Now is the time for wash-dry-fold

Pre-Covid...PC. This may be the new way we forever talk about our industry. As we were preparing to attend the SDA Show, I was excited about the presentation I was to give about wash-dry-fold. We were all set to talk about marketing, presenting, pricing and selling this service. But now most of us are spinning our wheels on deciphering PPP rules and applications, labor saving ideas and watch-

ing for the next update on when things are going to return to "normal!" First of all, I don't think the new normal will be exactly where we left off PC. Many of you are fighting the continual

battle of trying to make sensible decisions in order to not let your fears dictate your next steps. So this leads up to where I was at preparing for the presentation — wash-dry-fold is

still a service that everyone can do. Look at it this way. Everyone can be a potential customer no matter what is going on around them. They can always use home, free pick-up

and delivery. Their occupational wardrobe doesn't necessarily dictate how much we can service. This is why the time is now to implement an aggressive home service. Many operators were slow to get a van and start delivering; now they may be late to the party. This is the same thing that I see in the wash-dry-fold world. With many staying home and not having any drycleaning needs, many operators have turned to the home laundry service for their saving grace.

There is a decline in professional garments but an increase in demand for home services. Hit this moving target head on.

With the PPP loans in place, you can now have your staff stay busy by picking up, cleaning and delivering wash-dry-fold. Simply put, you have the opportunity to get your foot in the door in the one service that can carry through and beyond the COVID-19 crisis.

The longer you delay, your chances of getting new customers lessens. This lesson learned should have hit those who haven't been focusing on pick-up and delivery. Remember, you are competing with laundromats who also can service their customers at home.

Wash-dry-fold is easy to inject right in your current route schedule, provided you are doing routes right. The turnaround time can not be longer than three days so the typical Monday/Thursday or Tuesday/Friday route schedule will suit your customers just fine.

We are seeing a decline in professional garments but an increase in the demand for home services. Hit this moving target head on by getting going on laundry delivery. Your future may depend on it. While you may pick up a drycleaning bag once every two to three weeks, you may pick up wash-dry-fold every route day.

The bottom line is the time is now for you to decide whether or not you plan on doing wash-dry-fold. One quick tip is to out-source it if you don't feel like you have the facility or time to do it. Most of you do, so make it happen and utilize this service to get you and your team through this.

James Peuster is a consultant who specializes in route development, management and maintenance. He offers onsite consulting as well as ongoing coaching across the country. He also has cost groups to monitor route efficiency. For information, call (816) 739-2066 or visit www.theroutepro.com.



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WRENCH WORKS



By BRUCE GROSSMAN

Building a boiler, one part at a time

In last month's article, I discussed the similarities between a pressure cooker and a boiler. I described the importance of water level safety controls which shut off the gas supply to the burners in the absence of the proper water level inside the boiler.

In this article I will be explaining the use of pressure controls and various other components that comprise that device we call a boiler. I'm continuing from paragraph C which ended last month's article.

D. At this point we are operating our pressure cooker without blowing up the plant via a gas explosion or melting the pressure cooker by running out of water while the heat source on.

Doing great so far, so let's not forget about generating too much pressure in the pressure cooker and taking the roof off the building that way.

In order to control the internal pressure we need a control that will turn off the gas when the desired pressure is reached. In fact, for safety sake, let's add two controls (See let-

ter A), an operational pressure switch that goes on and off with pressure changes, controlling the gas solenoid valve and a safety pressure switch that trips when the operating pressure is exceeded.

The safety pressure switch requires a manual reset. The reason for the manual reset is to let you know there is a problem in the pressure control system.

Since steam explosions are so devastatingly dangerous, let's install a fitting in the pressure cooker lid and screw in a spring loaded valve (See letter B) that will open at a pressure lower than the bursting point of the pressure cooker and allow steam to vent in case all the other controls fail.

This is your pressure relief safety valve.

E. Assuming that we have some device connected to a fitting at the top of the pressure cooker that is using the steam generated, we must find a means to add new water to the pressure cooker to make up water to compensate for the steam that has flowed out.

How are we going to get

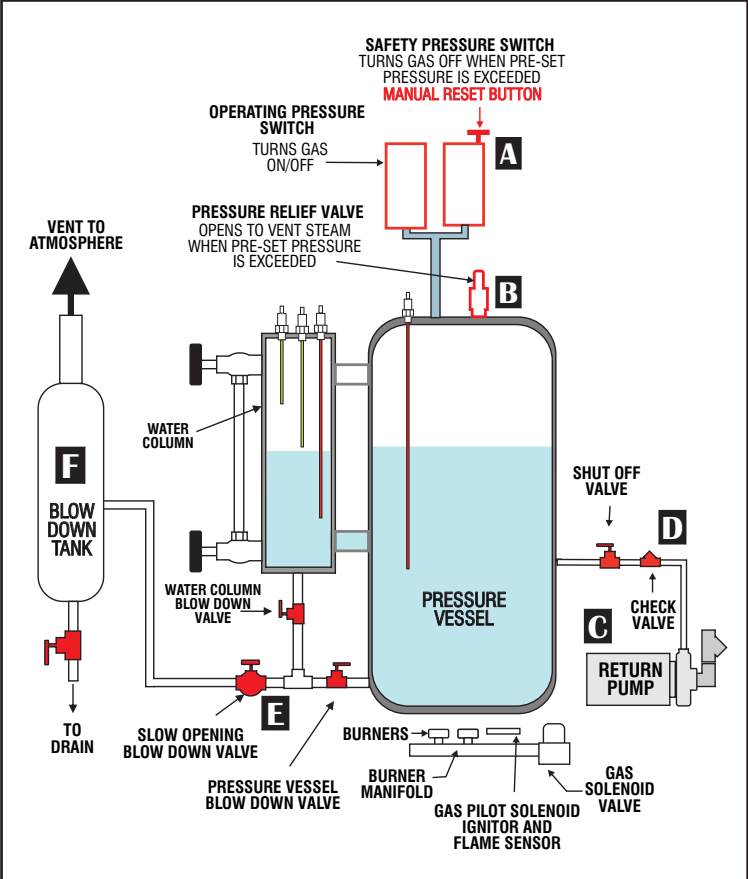
water into a hot pressurized pot? We can't open it and pour in water. How about adding a fitting that connects to a source of water that can be raised to a higher pressure than the pressure inside the pressure cooker.

We will do this by using a pump called a feed pump or return pump (See letter C). As a practical matter, when the pump is not running the pressure in the pressure cooker would just push the water out of the pressure cooker through the pump.

We can solve this problem by adding at least one check valve between the pump and the pressure cooker (See letter D). A check valve allows a fluid, water in this case, to flow in only one direction into the pressure cooker and will stop it from flowing back out.

F. Just like any container that keeps getting water added and then boiled off, there will be a buildup of the "stuff" called scale at the bottom of the pressure cooker. The easiest way to remove this scale would be to install a fitting at the bottom of the pressure cooker and use the pressure in-

BUILDING A BOILER 2 STEAM PRESSURE, RETURN PUMP AND BLOW DOWN COMPONENTS



side to blow out the scale.

So, let's install a valve that we can open at low pressure and let the flow water and steam push the scale out of the boiler. This is your blow down valve or valves (See letter E).

Since it's not safe to just let all this hot water and steam just blow out of a pipe, we'll place a cylindrical container at the end of the pipe with a vent out the top that allows steam to escape and a drain out the bottom for water.

Inside the cylinder we will put some baffles like those in a car muffler to slow down and damp the escaping steam and water. This is your blow down tank (See letter F).

Whew! There you have it. Finally, I can stop all this pressure cooker analogy stuff and call this contraption a boiler. Next issue will be devoted to learning about how the level

sensing controls operate, refining this boiler and designing the system that supplies steam to the machinery and handles the returning condensate.

Bruce Grossman is the chief of R&D for EZtimers Manufacturing, maker of the EZ Level return tank water level control. To prevent boiler scaling and other damage, the EZ Level return tank water level control replaces that troublesome ball float valve in the condensate return tank. For saving money on handling waste, the Sahara and Drop in the Bucket line of high purity separator water mister/evaporators provide a thrifty, legal method to get rid of the separator water generated by the drycleaning machine. For more information, visit www.eztimers.com Address any questions or comments to bruce@eztimers.com or call (702) 376-6693.



DRY CLEAN SUPER CENTER in Magnolia, TX, purchased two Union HL-860 machines with solvent heating through Gulf States Laundry Machinery. Pictured are Matt A. Lipman of Union and J. B. Mayfield, owner of Dry Clean Super Center.

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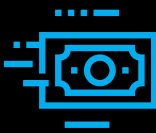
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SHIRT TALES



BY DON DESROSIERS

The cost of miscalculating PPOH

Some industry analysts will tell you that you should be aiming for 25 shirts processed for each and every shirt department labor hour that you buy.

This is commonly called pieces per operator hour and generally referred to by the acronym — PPOH.

I adopted this method years ago because this is the best way for me to get a snapshot of someone's plant. PPOH levels the playing field.

I have no idea what that comes to in labor cost percentage. Labor cost percentage is useless to me because I have clients all over the United States and four other countries who charge between 70 cents and \$15 to launder and press a shirt.

The gross income, of course, radically alters the percentage figure. PPOH allows me to compare workflow patterns at laundries regardless of what they have to pay for a shirt presser and regardless of what they can sell their service for.

It is a good barometer for you, too, because it will keep you from getting a tainted view of your individual situation.

For instance, suppose you are rely-

ing upon a percentage figure and yours is higher than you'd like or higher than that of your peers. You may hide behind the fact that you must pay higher wages because of your community standards or that you can't charge enough on average because of your wholesale accounts.

In reality, if using PPOH to compare, you may find that you've developed a highly efficient plant or that your profit margin is being lost in inefficiency. The biggest sin, I will prove to you, is calculating it incorrectly.

It happens to be a fact that 25 PPOH is very rarely achieved. About nine out of every 10 cleaners who call for advice have a PPOH below 19. Some cleaners are below 10 PPOH. Miscalculating PPOH makes my list of common goofs that cost you money with ease, and is probably the biggest cause of declining profits in the industry.

Let me explain, but first let's make sure that we all understand that labor is your biggest expense. No surprise there, right?

Still, we love to beat up our supplier for a dollar on a case of hangers. Why? Because labor does not appear to be out of line. Everybody is working, and

when there is one person out sick, pandemonium rears its ugly head. We certainly conclude that our labor is at rock bottom. We essentially prove it when we have a skeleton crew.

When we hear about PPOH, even before we figure out what ours is, we conclude that we are surely within the envelope of respectability because of the obvious fact that we have few employees and all of them work and, in fact, work very hard. Perhaps we think that we understand how to calculate it, but we just may second guess ourselves later.

Let me illustrate with an example. Let's imagine a double-buck shirt unit operated by two employees.

This unit feeds two other "post-press" employees — an inspector/touch-up and an assembly person. They, in turn, send off completed orders to be bagged. The person who bags drycleaning does the shirts as well.

Our hypothetical plant does 2,500 shirts per week. It averages 80 to 85 shirts per hour, working about 37 hours per week. To complete the fantasy, let's say that you've just returned from your local DLI affiliate meeting where they talked about PPOH and stressed 25 as a good goal in the shirt department.

When you figure out yours in the manner that was explained, you are flat out floored. It simply can't be. Then you begin backing out certain labor hours until you have a palatable number — one that you won't be embarrassed to admit to your peers.

The truth is that you are lying to yourself. Here are a few ways to improperly calculate PPOH, and then I'll show you how to do it correctly.

An honest PPOH number is never a spike, it is a global average. A common mistake then, is to actually include all of the labor hours that you should but select a small window of time to calculate it. Let's say that the plant that we described a minute ago has an equipment failure during the week.

Consequently, there are still 220 shirts to do at two o'clock on Friday afternoon. Your employees are used to going home at that time, but they hang in there and press like they have had way too much coffee. They finish at 4, they've done a good job on the shirts, and they have finished much earlier than mathematics led you to believe at 2 p.m.

You are pumped up from a combination of too much coffee yourself, last night's pep talk about PPOH and the fact that your pressers finished an hour earlier than you thought that they would.

They've pressed at the rate of 110 shirts per hour. Two pressers plus two support people, each working two hours (between 2 p.m. and 4 p.m.) for a total labor hour usage of eight. They did 220 shirts using 8 hours of labor, which is 27.5 PPOH ($220/8 = 27.5$ PPOH).

You may reason: "Hmm, 27.5 PPOH! I rule!

"Nobody I've talked to is doing that

well. Well, actually, I'm not doing 27.5. My pressers really kicked butt this afternoon. If they pressed at their normal rate, I'd probably be at 25 PPOH." The next time that someone asks you about PPOH, you will probably tell them that you are right at 25, maybe a hair under, "...but we do a quality shirt..."

Everybody says that. There are so many things wrong with this all-too-common scenario.

- PPOH is a global average. Citing the performance during a small window of time is meaningless. It only allows you to justify clutching onto a money-wasting system and never allows you to see the desperate need to make a serious change.

- It is remarkably easy to calculate PPOH, but so often the accepted formula yields an offensive number. The conclusion is that "you did it wrong." The result of that, remarkably, is to tweak the formula until its product is more like what the guys at the meetings tell you it should be.

Nothing could be more wrong. Nothing could be more costly.

- Let's go back to our hypothetical plant with two pressers and two other employees for a minute. Who washes the shirts? Who marks them in?

Who packages the completed orders? If these tasks are being done for "free," then you and I need to have a heart to heart meeting. Commonly, one reason that these chores are done by someone else and therefore their labor cost is not relevant, or the task itself is done for "free." This is wrong.

First, let's consider the packaging duties. They are being done by the person who bags the drycleaning. Half of her labor hours MUST be charged to the shirt department.

Disagree?

How can it possibly make sense to charge her labor to the drycleaning department? It doesn't matter that "that department can afford it." You are only kidding yourself. If the labor cost belongs to shirts, it belongs to shirts. Period.

You could argue that if she didn't bag shirts, she'd still have to be there all day, so therefore it's being done for free. That's not such a foreign thought. But that is when you would have to play manager and combine the drycleaning bagging duties with another "part-time" job that takes all day, like perhaps inspection. Only you can answer that because it will differ in virtually every plant.

In any case, packaging labor can not be ignored, even if for no other reason than to compare yourself with your peers. If your total number of shirts is approximately equal to your number of drycleaning pieces in any given time frame, then half of the bagger's hours must be charged to shirts.

All of these words are also true for washing labor (which may be done by your drycleaner/spotter) although it may be only five to ten hours per week.

I look at mark-in labor from the other side of the fence. It is generally consid-

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Don Desrosiers

The cost of miscalculating PPOH

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ered acceptable to charge the cost to tag or mark-in to the customer service department. The best justification for doing so is that, for the purpose of comparison with your peers, everybody does it that way.

Arguably, shirt productivity is being measured and shirts have not begun their time in “production” until they have arrived at the washing arena. If you wish to compare yourself to a peer who has a central mark-in area, like perhaps a wholesaler, you should attempt to figure the amount of time that your customer service staff actually uses to mark-in shirts. An accurate figure will be tough to tabulate. But never consider mark-in to be free.

If you need to prove this to yourself, you will do so if you invest in one of those tagging machines that will require you to perform central mark-in. With that, you will not save labor. You will create a new job instead. When I had my last wholesale shirt laundry, I was at 28 pieces per operator hour — but that had to include mark-in, as all of the business was wholesale.

I now have clients who have a PPOH of over 30.

In order for me to compare his performance to my own, I would need to recalculate my historical figures and exclude the mark-in hours. He has a couple of stores where the counter personnel do the mark-in chores.

Incidentally, suppose you have a full-timer plus a part-timer at a store (say, 8 hours plus 4 hours), and you are able to calculate that 1/3 of their time is used to mark-in shirts.

That is probably far too many hours, but it serves to illustrate this point.

Would that then mean that if they did not mark-in shirts, you could then eliminate the part time position? Very unlikely. Much more likely is that the part-timer is there to keep customers from waiting during the busy time between 7 a.m. and 11 a.m.

In the final analysis, it is perfectly acceptable, in fact recommended, that mark-in hours not be counted, unless central mark-in is the rule. In which case, the mark-in hours would be backed only for the purpose of comparison with others.

• At our hypothetical plant, how can they be averaging 80 to 85 shirts per hour if they work for 37 hours? You argue that you pay them for breaks and rest room visits and maybe even lunches. Nice try. The fact is you are paying for 37 hours per employee. Like it or not, you are doing 67.5 shirts per hour. Mortified? You should be.

Defensive, perhaps? No surprise. You explain that they actually do process 80 shirts per hour, it’s just that they have to help the assembly people or do some folds after they’re done pressing.

That doesn’t fly. The fact is, we are not calculating how

many shirts we can press per hour, we are calculating a productivity figure. Press a thousand shirts per hour if you wish, but they aren’t ready to return to the customer until all of the necessary processes are complete. Or, press a thousand shirts per hour if you wish, but if you need a hundred people to do it, you will be broke before you finish reading this publication.

• So, whether you like it or not, our hypothetical plant isn’t even close to that 25 PPOH. In actuality, there are two pressers who each work 37 hours (74), two post-press people who likely work a little more than that (but we will be conservative and count them as 74 hours, too, for a sub-total of 148).

Seven hours for washing labor (155) and let’s say 16 hours for bagging. That is a total of 171 hours for 2,500 shirts. The

PPOH is simple to calculate: 2,500 divided by 171 labor hours = 14.6 PPOH. Ouch!

This hypothetical plant may or may not be your plant, but I think that you get the picture.

Can it be saved? Of course it can! But it requires that scary thing that we call management.

The pressers are probably not lazy; they simply have not been trained to effectively produce 90 to 100 shirts per hour while maintaining top quality.

Good chance that the workflow rhythm in the plant is such that it generates relative confusion in the inspection and assembly theater and the need for two people rather than one.

Even without added production from the shirt unit, shirts per hour remaining at a lowly 67.5 PPOH would be increased to 18.6 with the reduction of one employee.

As much as that is — a savings of over 25 percent in labor dollars or roughly \$13,500 per year — it is still a far cry from what is possible.

It is easy to actually double those savings without increasing shirts per hour from the shirt unit even one bit! A reasonable goal, by the way, would be 29 PPOH for this scenario. And this is done everyday, everywhere.

The hazard, and the point of this column, is that if you miscalculate your PPOH and think that you are already at 27.5, you will do nothing about it because you will deduce that you are as efficient as you can be, when in fact you are merely at 14.6 PPOH.

You are leaving a whopping \$29,120 on the lunch table for your employees to take.

That is the cost of miscalcu-

lating pieces per operator hour.

“If you do what you’ve always done, you’ll get what you always got.”

Don Desrosiers has been in the drycleaning and shirt laundering business since 1978. He is a work-flow engineer and a management consultant who provides services to shirt launderers and drycleaners through Tailwind Systems. He is a member of the Society of Professional Consultants and winner of DLI’s Commitment to Professionalism award. He can be reached at 186 Narrow Ave., Westport, MA 02790 or at his office by fax (508) 636-8839; by cell (508) 965-3163; or e-mail at tailwindsystems@charter.net. The Tailwind web site is www.tailwindsystems.com.





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KEEP IT LEGAL



BY FRANK KOLLMAN

When cutting staff size, tell the truth

As I write this, I am in the office, and the governor of Maryland's work restrictions are still in place.

Drycleaners and lawyers, under the governor's order, are essential services. But like most drycleaners, we are working on reduced staff to comply with social distancing recommendations.

I had contemplated writing about the federal emergency leave acts, but that is covered on my firm's website, www.kollmanlaw.com.

We actually have a Covid-19 blog, and we are staying on

top of the legislation and regulations. Many of your questions can be answered there.

Before many of the courts shut down, a few of them published interesting labor and employment cases. One in particular drove home my advice to check state and local employment laws, as well as federal ones, to make sure you are not risking liability.

The United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit ruled in April that even though the federal Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) exempts armored-truck drivers from

overtime under the motor carrier exemption, they still must be paid overtime under New York law. In fact, the lower court had agreed that the drivers were exempt from overtime, which demonstrates that even federal judges have difficulty interpreting the FLSA.

The National Labor Relations Board has delayed new rules regulating elections to determine if employees of non-union companies wish to be unionized.

The current rules, adopted under the Obama NLRB, shortened the time for elec-

tions from approximately 40 days to approximately 20 days. In addition, those rules provided that most legal questions would be decided after the election, not before. The new rules would cut back on the uncertainty caused by the Obama-era rules, but because of Covid-19, the "comment" period was extended.

So-called "essential" lawyers still have time to file interesting (to put it politely) lawsuits.

An employee of Universal Studios in California has sued his employer in connection

with "The Walking Dead" attraction, claiming that he was subjected to assault and sexual harassment by drunken patrons. Universal markets the attraction by telling patrons to "prepare to fight for survival" and to "battle your way" through the attraction.

The employee, a theme-costumed zombie character, claims that Universal, in addition to encouraging patrons to assault and harass him, were making that more likely because of the alcohol served in the theme park.

The employee claims he was punched in the face and stomach, and that female employees were repeatedly assaulted by male guests. Apparently, there have been broken bones and hospital visits.

While the wisdom of the attraction is subject to debate, it does illustrate the principle that employers are responsible for taking action to prevent sexual harassment by their customers toward their employees. Normally, these questions come up with flirtatious delivery personnel or office repair employees. It is unusual to have employers encourage confrontations and physical contact between their employees and their customers.

Finally, because employers in the coming months could be faced with employment decisions like terminations, layoffs, and so forth, it could be a good time to emphasize several cardinal principles of communicating with employees.

First, tell the truth.

Second, do not sugarcoat the truth.

Third, have good, truthful reasons for your employment decisions and communicate those reasons orally, and if appropriate, in writing. Use English sentences. If it sounds like a lawyer wrote it, it's probably terrible.

Fourth, while you might be fine softening the blow of a layoff for lack of work by saying "I'm sorry, but," never try to soften the blow of a disciplinary action. Never say you feel bad having to make a decision that the employee's misconduct caused you to do.

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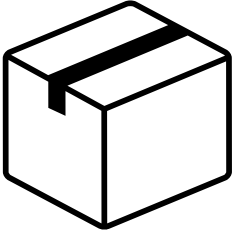
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