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Cleaners nix care label rule repeal

Reactions were generally negative in the first batch of comments to the Federal Trade Commission about its proposal to repeal the Care Labeling Rule, a nearly 50-year-old regulation that requires all gar-

ments sold in the United States to carry a label that provides information on its care.

In a June announcement, the FTC said it believes the rule may not be necessary to ensure that manufacturers provide care in-

structions, may have failed to keep up with a dynamic marketplace, and may negatively affect the development of new cleaning technologies and care symbol revisions.

The deadline for submitting comments

on the proposal is Sept. 21. By press time, 14 comments had been received including many from drycleaners who said the rule should remain in place, perhaps with some changes.

Details of the FTC proposal and instructions on how to submit comments are available at www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/07/23/2020-13919/trade-regulation-rule-on-care-labeling-of-textile-wearing-apparel-and-certain-piece-goods.

Typical of several drycleaner comments were those of Mike Sitz, owner of Holiday Cleaners in Grand Junction, CO, who noted that good drycleaners are usually able to determine the appropriate care process for a garment but added "We need the care label in some cases when customers demand a particular process that is not appropriate that could damage the garment."

Most customers have little knowledge of drycleaning and are sometimes tempted to try "absolutely incorrect information that compounds the problem."

"Why would the FTC want to take away one of the tools for us to do the service we are asked to do to the best of our ability with the knowledge that it gives us?" asked Gary Granato of Quality Cleaners in Stuart, FL.

"We need this information to give our customers the best possible service," he added. "It is absolutely crucial that we are familiar with proper method of cleaning."

"In my personal experience it would be a big setback to the consumer and cause problems that all will occur to the consumer and garment care specialist in removing proper care label," he said.

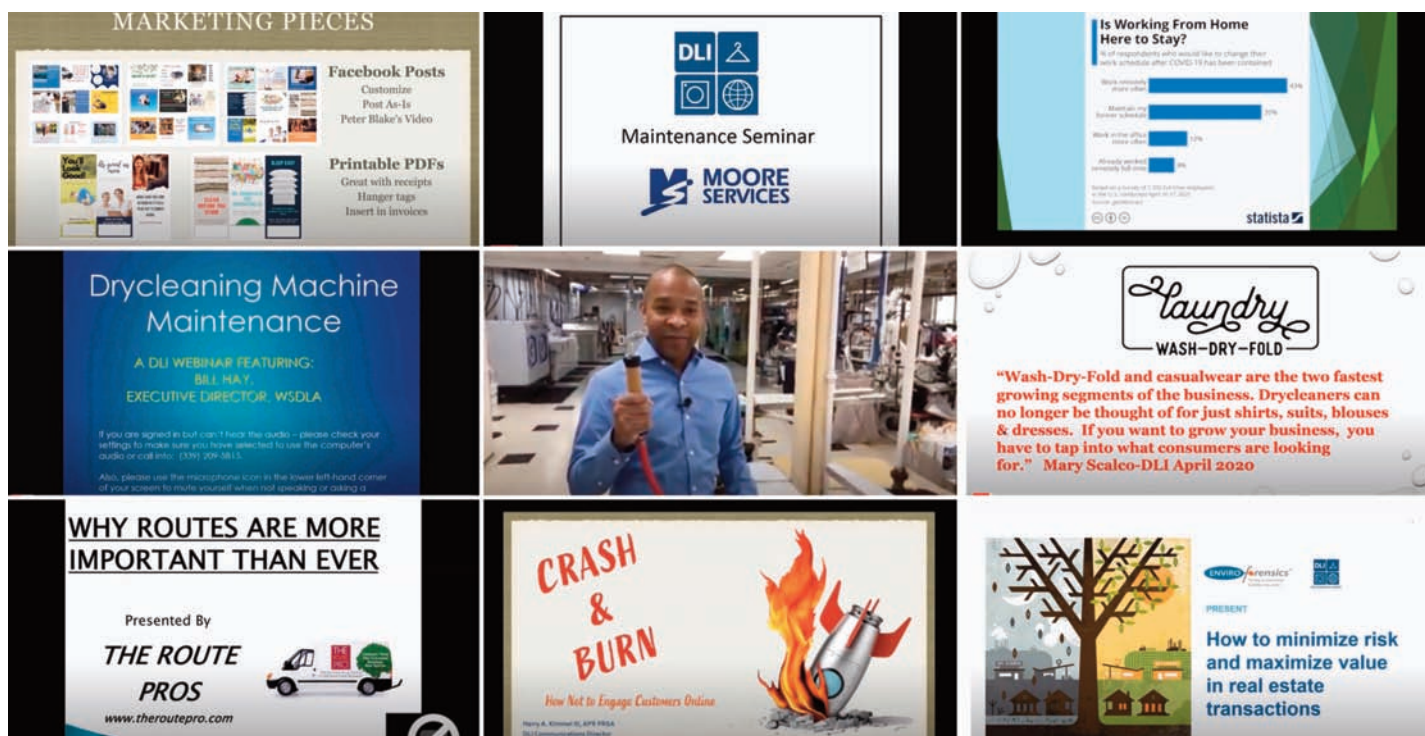
In its proposal, the FTC noted that most European Union nations and Canada have voluntary care instruction systems and manufacturers in those markets voluntarily provide cleaning instructions. Market demand for care labels in the U.S. would motivate garment makers and sellers to provide them without a government requirement, FTC said.

A comment from David Arbit of Oakland Cleaners in Oakland, NJ, pushed back on that point.

"As a drycleaner of 30 years, I tell my customers not to buy clothes abroad," he said. "Most countries don't have care labels or just boiler plate labels. In turn, cleaning those garments is always unpredictable. Colors bleed, trim melts, etc. In the US manufacturers are held to a higher standard in all industries."

"A repeal of this act will just degrade the quality of our clothes and protect manufacturers from liability from poorly man-

Tools to survive the pandemic



A few screenshots of training and management webinars hosted by DLI to help drycleaners survive the COVID-19 pandemic. DLI has produced several webinars each week since mid-March when the pandemic spun out of control. All webinar recordings are available on DLIonline.org.

Everything changed as Spring was starting. The novel coronavirus epidemic bloomed into a full-blown global pandemic and the economy stalled. Drycleaning sales across the U.S. and world dropped as much as 85 percent virtually overnight.

The industry has since been in a long, slow recovery and the downturn is lasting longer than most drycleaning business owners first imagined.

From the start of the pandemic in mid-March, the Drycleaning and Laundry Institute began an ongoing effort to offer a host of COVID-19 updates and links that all of the professional cleaners DLI could reach, members or not.

DLI decided that COVID-related information was too important to the public health to restrict to members only and should be openly shared with the entire industry.

Almost immediately after regional shutdowns started, DLI worked with others and advocated to public officials that drycleaning and laundry services are essential and should not be closed as industry services

help destroy viruses. Health and safety guidance on handling items for cleaning was quickly collected and shared through all of DLI's communications channels.

"DLI is doing an excellent job keeping us informed during the pandemic," said Gary Maloney of Nu Yale Cleaners in Jeffersonville, IN. "With things moving very fast, DLI stays connected and communicates the changes almost daily."

DLI's efforts did not stop there. The association moved to mobilize all available resources to create a constant flow of vetted and verified information and business assistance tools.

"This has been like no other time in our history," said Mary Scalco, DLI's CEO. "The industry as a whole needed DLI more than any other time I can remember. We understood pretty much right away that the only way to get through this is by pulling everyone together. Our mission at DLI is to help cleaners succeed and we're proud of what our team has accomplished in just a few short months."

By the end of March, when "normal"

became a thing of the past, DLI launched a new initiative to help industry professionals share ideas. DLI also started producing a stream of management and training videos, conference calls, employment guidance, video updates, and more.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, DLI produced and archived the following resources:

- More than 60 member-to-member Zoom meetings for sharing ideas, challenges, and opportunities.
- Fifty-seven ready-made social media and print marketing designs (three more added weekly).
- More than 25 COVID-related links and bulletins on the association's website, DLIonline.org.
- Nineteen business development webinars ranging from marketing and branding to critical maintenance.
- Developed an online Facebook Community connecting more than 850 DLI members.
- Sixteen webinars sifting through small

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John Curry is fighting to make sure the 76th year of his family's business won't be its last.



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We have been following with interest the weekly postings shared by SPOT Business Systems on the Drycleaning and Laundry Institute's Facebook page that track drycleaning sales this year compared to the same period a year ago.

What SPOT has been reporting squares up with what we have heard from other cleaners, so we think their numbers are fairly representative of the industry as a whole. Those who have not seen these charts may want to take a look. Or maybe you don't. It's not pretty, but at least you'll know you are not alone.

Here it is in a nutshell. Through the first week in March, same store drycleaning sales were basically unchanged from a year ago. You know what happened next. As fear of COVID-19 raised its ugly head, sales fell off a cliff. By the end of March, retail counter sales were off about 75 percent from a year ago. Route sales fared a bit better, off “only” about 60 percent. The decline continued, bottoming out at almost 80 percent in the first week of April. Again, route sales suffered not quite as much, falling to about 70 percent of the year ago sales.

And then what looked like a light at the end of the tunnel appeared. Sales began rebounding, an upward climb that was steady if not as steep as the fall. By the Fourth of July, retail counter sales had improved to about 40 percent off and 30 percent for routes. Things were looking up, you might say.

But that recovery stalled. In fact, it fell off again, down to about 50 percent off for both routes and counter sales. And there it stayed for the the next month. By Aug. 15, both counter and routes sales seemed to stabilize at about 55 percent off their year ago amounts.

If this is the new normal, we don't like it. We can hope that as cooler weather comes so will more business. It's a typical pattern to see an uptick as people shed their summer shorts and T-shirts and dig out their fall wardrobes. Maybe people will be dressing up to go out to restaurants or to shows and concerts and even, maybe, back to the office. But nothing has been typical of this year so far. We can just hope.

Meanwhile, we have to ask how long can you survive on half of the revenue you had last year? Or maybe the question should be simply how can you survive on that? Be realistic: much of that old business may never come back. You will have to reach out to new customers with new services like wash-dry-fold. As some cleaners close up shop, you may be able to pick up some of those customers. In any case, looking back to last year won't help. You will need to adjust to the present and look to the future, uncertain as it is.

“All you need in this life is ignorance and confidence, and then success is sure.” — Mark Twain

Back in early May, the CNBC/Survey Monkey Small Business Survey Q2 2020 registered a score of 49 out of a possible 100 in small business confidence, a 12-point drop from the previous quarter and the lowest monthly figure since its inception.

When the same survey was released for Q3 2020 in early August, the outlook has reversed slightly. Small business confidence trickled up from 49 to 53 in the span of three months though it still sits at the second lowest value in the survey's history. (By way of comparison, it was at 59 in Q4 2019.) It is a positive sign, but it certainly suggests that confidence is still in short supply right now, as is the case with consumers. The Consumer Confidence Board noted that the confidence index was 92.6 in July, which was down from 130.7 in February.

It seems that everybody is in the same boat — and if we had to hazard a guess, it would probably be called the Titanic. Many are treading water, hoping not to sink in a sea of personal or business debt, or succumb to the ravages of a relentless virus. For months, businesses all across the industry have battened down the hatches, looking for a life preserver. Some lucky businesses took part in the Payroll Protection Plan while others had to close down. Others remain adrift with destinations unknown.

Normally, evolution is a slow process of minute, incremental changes, but 2020 has greatly accelerated the process and businesses have had to adapt quickly or become extinct. This was evident recently when Rent the Runway recently announced it would permanently close all of its retail stores to refocus on the digital aspect of its business, including a bigger drop box presence. Hundreds of mom-and-pop shops are undergoing similar transformations, trying to emphasize the services that are selling today. You really don't have a choice in this matter. As James Peuster points out this month, "The industry limped past 2008 without losing more than 10 percent of the cleaners. This year looks to be 25 percent in my opinion."

Don't be part of that 25 percent. Peuster advises cleaners to go after market share now because it is shrinking rapidly. That means providing customers with the services they want or need — if you don't know what that is, ask them. It also means providing a safe environment for employees whose job just became a lot more stressful. And, it means just trying to stay open long enough for customers to find you or gain confidence again. That's easier than it sounds.

This month's profile is about John Curry of Savannah whose family business, despite being in its 76th year, has struggled like everyone else. He had put everything into the business just to keep it open. We're guessing his story is very similiar to many others out there. Here's hoping for a happy ending. Good luck. Stay safe. Stay open.

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Staying open

Most people are likely to guess which city in America hosts the biggest St. Patrick's Day parade each year — New York. However, fewer would likely give the correct answer to which city holds the number two spot: Savannah, GA.

Its parade tradition began in 1824, making it almost two centuries old. It annually draws in an audience of over half a million people who watch hundreds of bands, soldiers and floats pass by on the streets.

For a drycleaner like Jim Curry, owner of Savannah's Curry Cleaners, it makes for a busy time with so many uniforms, green suits and other drycleanables. It's a lot of work, but Curry would never complain because it's very good for his plant's bottom line.

This year, however, was different. "Right about the end of February, I could tell that things had dropped off," he said.

Then, it became official in early March: due to health concerns from the COVID-19 virus, the event was cancelled for the first time since the 1940s (then because of World War II).

"We lost all that revenue," he added, before continuing with the list: high school and college graduations, Mother's Day, Easter, weddings, funerals, parties, sports uniforms, church clothes, professional work attire — all these things had provided a constant flow of incoming work for the business during its first 75 years. Then came the 76th. John and his wife, Lisa, faced the same stark realization echoed across the country.

"We never thought we'd see anything like this ever," he said. "It's just incredible how fast the water got turned off."

Jim made a decision early on during the pandemic that he was not going to close his doors. Even though the future was unclear, he felt he had to find a way to keep the business open even though so little was coming in. That meant a few drastic measures.

"Had it not been for the PPP [Payroll Protection Program] kicking in, we would have been closed already now," he admitted. Prior to that relief in April, the Currys kept the business open by borrowing money against life insurance policies.

"It took everything we had just to get through until the PPP came. Now that it's gone, we're just on a wing and a prayer that everything picks up," he added.

Many years ago, John's grandfather, H.Y. Curry, was a talented tailor who decided to open a business so he could clean many of his own custom creations, which have proved to be quite durable over time.

"I still know like one or two guys today who have suits that he made. He's been dead for 50 years," John noted. "They still have the suits that he made. I know them about once a year. I don't clean if they wear them anymore, but it's pretty cool."

The company's motto has always been "When you care, it shows." H.Y. cleaned garments with the same care he had applied while making them.

It was a good formula for the busi-

ness that moved locations a few times over the years but continued to grow. When H.Y. became ill, his son (and John's father), Herbert James, bought the business and manned the ship for almost 35 years. He passed away in 2009.

Today, John is the third-generation family owner of the business, which

go away that's unhappy, guess what? They're probably not coming back."

When it comes to minding his own business, John is a professional. Truthfully, he isn't concerned much with the competition.

"I try not to worry about what the other guy is doing," he said. "I've got

for the rest who need more time to be ready.

"People are staying home, so you may pick up some wash and fold business because they're in t-shirts and shorts, but our main thing has just been being here and being available 24 hours if they need me," he noted. "My cell number's on the door."

www.currydrycleaners.com



John Curry

has more than 20 employees, two locations and runs delivery routes. It's a role he's comfortable in, probably because he may have been born to do it. Both of his grandparents worked at different cleaners before they met.

"My dad's dad had H.R. Curry Cleaners. My mom's mom worked for Harry Loper, who used to own Custom Drycleaners and that's kind of how they met," he said. "My grandmother on one side worked for one drycleaners and my grandfather on my dad's side had his own, so it's kind of in the blood, I guess."

John had grown up around the plant, but he became a full-timer when he was 17.

After graduation, it didn't take long for him to marry Lisa, his high school sweetheart, who he met back in kindergarten.

"The business was growing like crazy, leaps and bounds, back when we added the shirt laundry and started doing our own shirts. It was a good time in the industry, too, so Lisa came to work for us. We've both been here 38 years. This is all I've ever known," John said. "I didn't have much choice in what I was going to do, let's just say that."

While he spent many years cleaning clothes for his father, the aspect of the industry he enjoys the most is the customer interaction.

"If I got out of this business, I would have to go into sales," he said. "Seeing happy customers, whether it's something that people thought you could never get a stain out of, or restoring a christening gown or a wedding gown — just dealing with people over the counter. That's probably been one of the most enjoyable things."

Like the two generations before him, John takes great pride in his work. "My name's on the bag and when it goes out here, it's showing who we are," he explained. "Stick behind your product. I think a happy customer will continue to do business with you. If you let one

to worry about myself. I've got to worry about keeping my product right, keeping my customers happy, and that's my main focus.

Lately, just keeping the business open seems exhausting. Looking back over the 76-year history of the business, the revenues of the industry have been dropping for a long time. He recalled the 1980s and 1990s when business was booming.

"We don't have a problem trying to find a place on the racks now," John said, remembering that their system used to be so bottlenecked that assembled bundles waited for open racks. "It was really good back in those days. Then 2008 kind of pulled the carpet out from under us, when the market crashed and everything else. And this right here — this COVID — has probably knocked that almost in half from where we were. It's tough right now."

Overall, he estimates that business is back up to "about 40 percent" right now, much better than months ago but it still needs to grow. Still, he is sure that the decision to stay open has proved to be the right one.

"We did have people coming from other cleaners in town because they were closed down," he noted. "We were there."

"Right when it first hit, when it went to just about zero, my wife and I would be here every day, with a lady out front and my daughter," he said.

With business so slow, Curry Cleaners cut its hours back and at least had a break from the punishing summer Georgia heat that doesn't feel any better in the back of a drycleaning plant. In time, the work trickled in slowly.

"Now, we're operating five days a week again," he said. "I really think what helped us more than anything else was probably staying open through all of it."

The important thing is that they were there just in case customers needed them, and they hope to be there

Fortunately, Curry Cleaners had a few systems in place that have helped it adapt. "Wash and fold — thank God, we already had it established for the most part," he said. "We do a pretty decent little wash and fold business."

John also noted that having routes in place also proved to be invaluable.

"We've had an established truck route service since 2008. That helped a lot," he said. "People who were coming in have gotten on that, so it's grown a little bit."

When public schools in Georgia opened in early August, that meant the possibility of ROTC garments, and clothes from headmasters, principals and teachers for Curry Cleaners. However, within a week of opening, one district required a quarantine of over 900 students, teachers and staff amid fears of COVID-19 exposure.

When more business is coming is anyone's guess, but until then John plans to keep addressing his current customers, including making sure they feel safe if they choose to take advantage of walk-in service.

"We did jump on those things from the beginning and went by every CDC guideline, whether it was sanitizing the building, sanitizing the equipment, hand sanitizers and face masks and social distance and six-foot mark-offs, sprays, handy wipes — everything we could possibly do to maintain a safe place for everybody," he said, adding the decision was a "no-brainer."

For now, he is trying to remain hopeful. "It's picking up. Some weeks it may be back up to 50 percent of where we were before, but then in the next week it seems to be back down to 40 percent," he said.

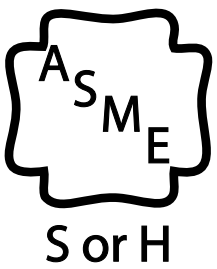
"With election season upon us and all this other mess, I really don't see it picking up before the end of this year," he said, adding that he doesn't like saying it. After a pause, he continued, "I hope I can make it through the rest of the year."

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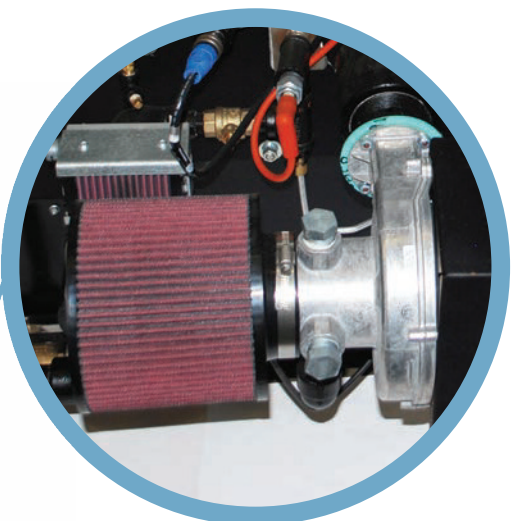
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KEEP IT LEGAL



BY FRANK KOLLMAN

A few basic rules for the workplace

James Madison, fourth president of the United States and Father of the Constitution, said: "If men were angels, no government would be necessary."

As we all know, employees are not angels either.

Humans need rules. You may not think you need rules, but you do. Without rules, the carnage on the highways would be far worse, criminal activity would be rampant, and chaos would be the normal state of affairs.

Rules are, however, "made to be broken" as the old adage goes. A red light on a deserted street at 3 a.m. is begging to be violated, legislatures change rules all the time when there is a change in the majority, a rule that no one enforces is no rule at all, and circumstances change that make old rules no longer warranted.

Laws, by the way, are just fancy rules.

The workplace definitely needs rules, from the most mundane to the most complicated. Starting and quitting times are rules; timekeeping requirements are rules; and

performance standards, no matter how mushy, are rules. Employee handbooks contain lots of rules, although lawyers go to great pains to state that employee handbooks are not binding, enforceable contracts (although in many cases they are). And in those handbooks, there is normally a section called "Rules" that contains a list of conduct that can result in discipline, especially discharge.

Are those rules required to discipline somebody? Does there really have to be a rule against "stabbing an employee" to take action against an employee who sticks a knife into his supervisor because he was asked why he was late? Actually not, but in practice, government discrimination agencies, courts, and juries frequently want to know if the employee had notice that his misconduct would result in discipline.

While fairness is not a legal requirement, fairness is the standard that is used by agencies, courts, and juries under the guise of enforcing the law. If the discipline appears unfair,

then they conclude that there had to be improper legal motives for taking that action. The absence of a rule creates the possibility that a disciplinary action will be viewed as unfair.

the company's separate attendance standards.

5. Violation of a safety, fire prevention, health or plant security rule.

6. False, fraudulent or mali-

nation notice to another employer.

18. Failure to work for any reason for a period of three months.

19. An arrest, the filing of a

Adopt workplace rules to avoid assertions that your employees were never told that such behavior could get them fired.

This does not mean that every possible instance of employee misconduct must be listed in a set of workplace rules, but there should be generic rules that cover most instances. For example:

1. Failure or refusal to carry out orders or instructions.
2. Unsatisfactory work performance.
3. Failure to fulfill the responsibilities of the job to an extent that might or does cause injury to a person or substantial damage to or loss of product, machinery, equipment, facilities or other property.
4. Chronic or habitual absenteeism or lateness, under

cious statements or actions.

7. Falsification of hours worked or company records and/or omission of information requested on company records or documents.

8. Unauthorized use of, removal of, theft, or intentional damage to the property of the company, an employee, an independent contractor, or a customer.

9. Threatened or actual physical violence or profane or abusive language.

10. Carrying any weapon on company premises without authorization from the company.

11. Bringing onto company premises, having possession of, being under the influence of, or consuming on company premises or while on company business, any intoxicant.

12. Violation of the company's drug policy.

13. Gambling, disorderly, or immoral conduct while on company premises or business.

14. Performing work or services for a competitor of the company.

15. Excessive garnishments, to the extent permitted by law, except that no employee will be discharged because of garnishments for any one indebtedness.

16. Absence from work for two consecutive scheduled workdays without notifying the company during the absence of an illness or accident preventing the employee from working (as evidenced by written certification of a medical doctor if requested by the company), or other satisfactory reason for such absence, as determined by the company.

17. Failure to return to work within the three consecutive scheduled work days after registered or certified mail notification of recall from layoff status by the company without notifying the company during such three-day period of an illness or accident preventing the employee from working (as evidenced by written certification of a medical doctor if requested by the company); or a minimum of two weeks termi-

disorderly person or criminal complaint, or the return of an indictment against an employee for any alleged wrongful activity may result in an indefinite suspension without pay, subject to discharge depending on the particular circumstances and the offense charged. (All employees are obligated to cooperate with the company by notifying their supervisor of any arrest or charges filed involving them, to provide and assist the company in obtaining all relevant information needed to enable the company to consider the allegation, and to provide current status information on the arrest or allegations as required by the company.

20. Violation of company policy on removing property from the premises.

At least the above is a start. Occasionally, you will find that an employee has figured out a way to do something wrong that is not clearly covered by the above rules.

In those instances, consider including the specific behavior as an "including, but not limited to" example to a more generic rule. A separate rule banning spitting on the floor is not necessary (see Rules 5 and 13).

Finally, an unofficial rule I sometimes include is "in the absence of a rule, use common-sense; in the absence of common-sense, ask someone to draft a rule." It sums up my feelings about rules completely. But adopt workplace rules to avoid assertions that your employees were never told that such behavior could get them fired.

Frank Kollman is a partner in the law firm of Kollman & Saucier, PA, in Baltimore, MD. He can be reached by phone at (410) 727-4300 or fax (410) 727-4391. His firm's web site can be found at www.kollmanlaw.com. It has articles, sample policies, news and other information on employee/employer relations.

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Lifelines of help during pandemic

Continued from page 1
business relief programs including PPP, EIDL Loans, Main Street Lending Program, Employee Retention Credits, and Workforce Opportunity Credits.
• Eight live technical training webinars on spotting and finishing.

• Five live stain removal trainings webinars in Spanish.
“Learn from the best and build strong relationships from smart, friendly competitors,” said Michael Shader of Milt & Edie’s Drycleaners & Tailoring Center in Burbank, CA. “There is always someone in our industry doing it

better, faster, stronger.”
Recordings of each DLI webinar are available on DLionline.org. Each week, DLI continues to produce and share more webinars and ready-made marketing materials.
“Business is recovering slowly,” Scalco said. “DLI is fo-

cused on helping cleaners survive until we start seeing better days by banding together and sharing as much information as we can as quickly as we can. And as we move into those better days, and they will come, we will continue to be there for industry.”
Said Randy Parham, CEO,

Acme Cleaners in Orlando, FL, “You’ll be glad to be a member.”
“The wealth of resources and information pooled together and put out to members, at what seemed like an instant, was amazing. Everyone at DLI should be proud of what they did.”

Cleaners not fond of care label proposal

Continued from page 1
ufactured garments, he added. “I support this act because it protects consumers and cleaners. And I rely on true labels to properly clean the garments.”

Another commenter suggested the FTC go a step further in its care labeling requirements. Sid Chelsky, executive director of the Canadian Fabricare Association, told the FTC, “We would hope that you would continue to make the manufacturers provide a care label, but due to increased technology and new systems to care for these items (i.e. wetcleaning) that you make it mandatory to add all new methods that will properly care for the items.”

Other commenters seemed to agree with the FTC that the market would determine how care labels are implemented.

“Whether or not to add care labels to clothing items should not be a legal mandate,” said Joe DiPaolo of Florida. “Free markets should determine if their clientele needs or wants care labels on their clothing.”

“In the event special care is needed for a garment and the manufacturer does not add a care label, it could be assumed they will have many returns or unhappy clients,” he argued. “Both outcomes would have financial consequences for the business. Why regulate everyone the same and add costs to every type of clothing? Repealing care labeling is a good idea.”

Other said they favor reduced care labeling requirements.

“I’m in favor of reducing many of the requirements under this rule and simply maintaining the symbols for consumer informational purposes,” said Gurpreet Singh Nanar from the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign.

“If we do not have this rule in place, it is expected that manufacturers of lower cost textiles will not provide consumers with any instructions on the care of the textile, which will likely lead to a reduced textile life. A consumer who purchases a lower quality textile is already expecting a low life, thus they may already not pay too much attention to the care of the textile, whereas, high quality textile manufacturers will ensure to continue providing care information in order for consumers to be satisfied with the longevity of the textile,” he said.

Other commenters suggested using only symbols to indicate care methods with one suggesting that QR codes could be added to the label instructions to provide more information to professional cleaners, such as wetcleaning.

ABC plans on-line Leadership Forums

A series of monthly Leadership Forum Zoom webinars will be offered online by America’s Best Cleaners beginning this month.
The series is free and open to all in the drycleaning and laundry industry. For registration and more information, visit America’s Best Cleaners website.
“Now, more than ever, the need for our industry to work in harmony has never been more critical if we expect to overcome the challenges of today and tomorrow, ABC said in announcing the series. “The America’s Best Cleaners Leadership Forum is a place for our industry’s thought leaders to come together and share how they have managed and reacted to the current business environment, and what steps their businesses are taking to plan for the future ahead.”

The first will be on September 16 at 4 p.m. EST.
Panelists will include Richard Fitzpatrick, vice president, Kreusler Inc.; Wesley Nelson, president of Sankosha; Dave Troemel, partner in BeCreative360; Tom Beidle, general manager of Spot Business Systems; and Sasha Ablitt, CEO of Ablitts Fine Cleaners & Launderers.
The second forum will be Oct. 14, also at 4 p.m. EST. Scheduled panelists are Victor Williams, vice president of Union Dry Cleaning; Harry Caranza, president of Select Risk; Jeff Schapiro, president of Cleaners Supply; Ryan Leutzow, owner of Leutzow Industries, and Dan Miller, CEO of Mulberrys Garmentcare.
Forums are also planned for Nov. 11, Dec. 9, Jan. 13 and Feb.



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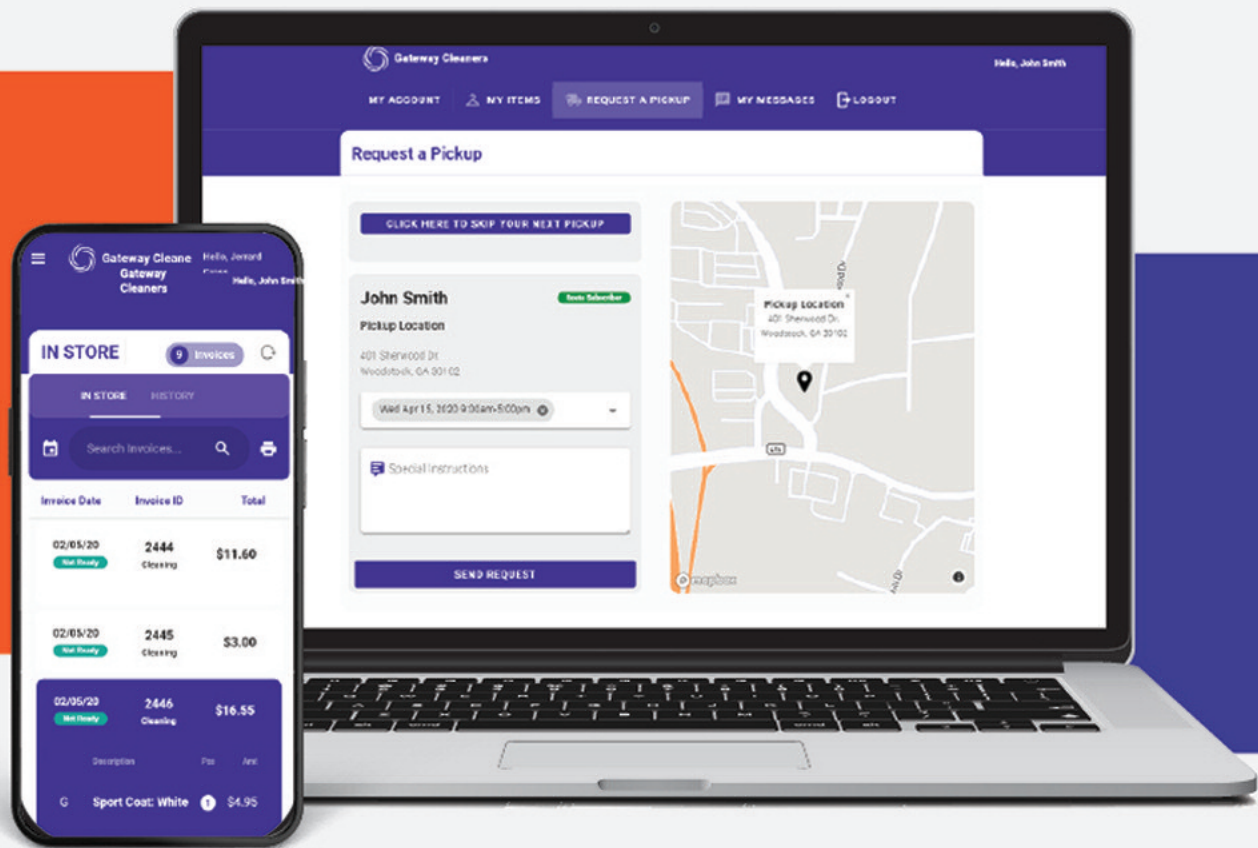


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WRENCH WORKS



By BRUCE GROSSMAN

Tracking the circulation of steam

I am using the example of the type of return system found in almost every drycleaning/laundry operation — it's called an "open loop return system."

There are other types of return systems but are seldom if ever used for our applications. Similar to the steam delivery system, the condensate return system also has drops between the individual machines and a large main pipe running back to the boiler return tank called the "return header."

Connected to the outlet of

the steam trap is a "check valve" of some sort, usually of the "swing check" family. The reason for the check valve is to prevent the flow of condensate back to the outlet side of the steam trap as well as isolating the trap from high pressure water pulses from other parts of the return system.

There should also be a ball-type shut-off valve after the check valve which will allow the isolation of the return system from the check valve and trap.

Unfortunately, these shut

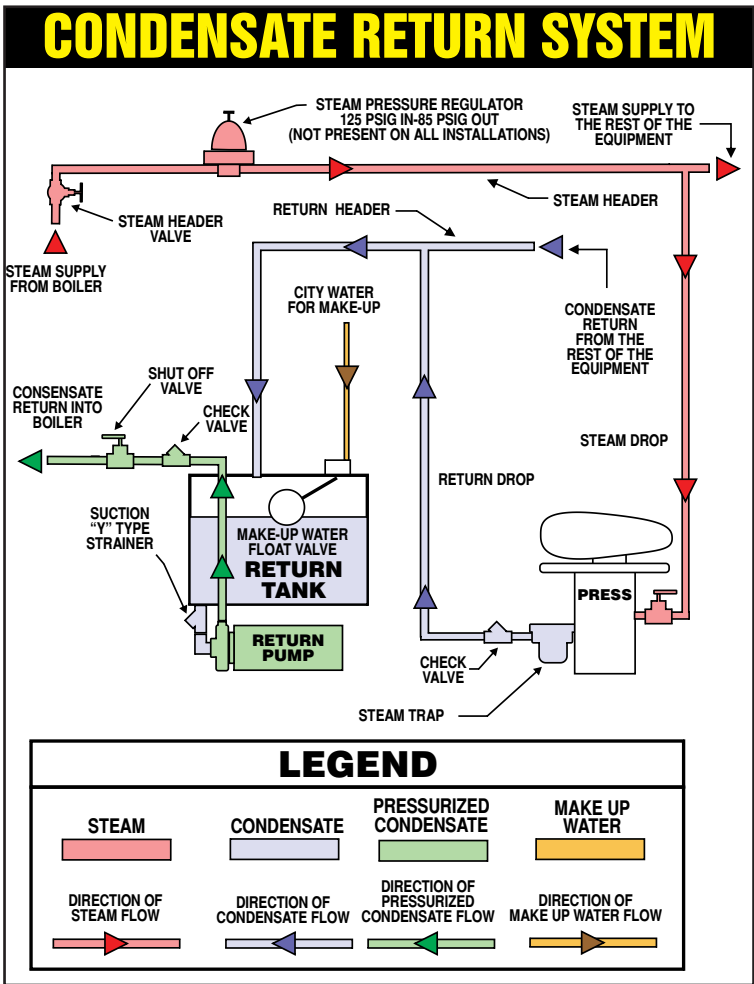
off valves are not present in all installations. If these valves are not currently installed, when you change out a steam trap why not install one? They are cheap, open quickly and are easy to screw on providing a safe isolated environment when changing traps.

From the return header the condensate is pushed back towards the "condensate return tank" by the discharge pressure provided by the opening of the traps.

Condensate return tank

The "condensate return tank" in drycleaning applications is a holding tank which serves many purposes (I will call it the return tank from now on). Some return tanks are cylindrical, others rectangular and some are built around the boiler shell. In laundry and drycleaning operations, condensate return tanks are vented to the atmosphere. A "condensate return pump" (I will call it the return pump from now on) is usually mounted beneath the return tank. The following are the jobs that the condensate return tank performs:

- Acts as a reservoir or catch basin for the condensate coming back from all the steam heated machinery. It provides the water supply to flood the intake side of the condensate return pump which pushes



CERTIFIED DRY CLEANERS SOLUTIONS of Toronto, ON, installed a Columbia cleaning machine using Sensene. Giuseppino (Pino) Leo (left), the owner, is standing with Artur Keyes of Exttox Industries, Columbia's exclusive dealer in Toronto.

water into the boiler.

- Contains a ball float valve or solenoid which supplies water to make up for the condensate lost due to venting, evaporation and the use of live steam in the finishing and spotting of garments. In most cases this is a valve which is operated by a ball-float similar to the float valve in most toilet tanks which is not very reliable

and is prone to sticking either open or closed.

- A convenient mixing and distribution system for the addition of chemicals to the boiler, such as boiler compound and/or other additives which prevent harmful scale from building up which clog the boiler tubes as well as scavenge (trap and bind oxygen which is normally dissolved in water) preventing the formation carbonic acid (H_2CO_3), the same stuff that tickles your nose when you drink soda water (seltzer) too fast.

It may only tickle your nose, but it will dissolve steel and iron (as in pipe, tanks and boilers) over a relatively short period of time.

A preset level is maintained in the return tank by adding city water (water supplied by an outside source) to the condensate already returned by the steam heated machinery back into the return tank.

Water is pumped from the return tank into the boiler by the return pump. The water level inside the boiler is sensed and the return pump is switched on and off depending on this internal level (see the previous articles on boiler controls).

At the outlet of the return tank there will likely be some type of water strainer. The strainer is there to trap particles of scale, rust, corrosion or the occasional nut or bolt

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Bruce Grossman

Tracking the circulation of steam

Continued from page 12
breaking loose and arriving at the return tank.
After the strainer there is usually a “turbine” type of condensate return feed pump. This return pump is required to refill the boiler with water from the return tank maintaining the proper level of water inside the boiler, as the water is turned into steam, which is then distributed throughout the plant.
Turbine pumps are designed to push a low volume

of water against the high steam pressure in the boiler. At the outlet of the feed pump there are a series of check valves (valves that allow flow in only one direction).
On many boilers the first check valve is a stainless steel “spring loaded metal disk” type check valve designed to pass large pieces of debris without being jammed into an open position.
The next check valve is usually a “swing check” or another spring loaded check

made from bronze with a Teflon disk.
The purpose of these check valves is to prevent steam pressure inside the boiler from pushing water back out of the boiler through the pump back into the return tank when the return pump is off.
Return tank maintenance
Unfortunately, as the old saying goes, “out of sight, out of mind” and the return tank is usually far out of sight. It is

also exposed to the corrosive chemistry and high oxygen content of the new make up water added to the return tank.
This cocktail of nastiness leads to the formation of rust, scale and other debris which accumulates on the bottom of the tank.
The water strainer, which I mentioned in an earlier paragraph, traps this debris before it enters the condensate return pump.
Establishing a routine schedule for flushing the re-

turn tank and cleaning the strainer will extend the life of your return tank and pump.
You’re probably not going to like this news, but my experience has taught that just opening the drain valve and letting the tank empty isn’t going to do you much good.
The best way to flush the return tank is to make sure the tank is cold and up to level. Shut off the make-up water supply valve, shut the valve between the return tank and pump, remove the screen from the strainer, then quickly open the valve and let her rip. I know it’s sloppy but you’ll figure out some way of reducing the flooding.

Take the screen out of the strainer and use the air steam and air gun at the spotting board to blow out the debris trapped in the weave of the screen.

When you’re reassembling the screen into the strainer, make sure it’s seated properly and use plenty of Teflon tape when screwing the access cap back onto the strainer.

Here’s a subtle problem which has likely damaged more boilers and pipe work than lack of boiler compound and hard water combined. The villain here is that very same pesky ball float valve which looks like it belongs in a toilet.

This relic of the early industrial revolution of the 1700s tends to stick open, or if your water pressure is high enough become unseated.

When these conditions occur, excess new make up water enters the return tank diluting vital boiler compound, leading to scale formation, prematurely exhausting your water softening capacity and adding lots of free oxygen, which forms very destructive carbonic acid.

This acid rapidly damages metal in your boiler and pipework. Observe the overflow pipe from your return tank.

If there’s a fairly constant flow of water exiting this pipe you’ve got ball float valve problems, get it fixed pronto!

That’s it for this month, next month we’ll be getting into troubleshooting some boiler problems you’re likely to experience.

Bruce Grossman is the chief of R&D for EZtimers Manufacturing, maker of the new EZ Dose boiler compound manager and return tank level control which replaces that troublesome ball float valve in the condensate return tank. 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. Address any questions or comments to bruce@eztimers.com or call (702) 376-6693.

Establishing a routine schedule for flushing the return tank and cleaning the strainer will extend the life of your return tank and pump.





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SHIRT TALES



BY DON DESROSIERS

Maximizing your wash formula

I have been writing this column for a long time — more than 20 years — and I don't often discuss wash formulas. That is not entirely an accident.

I usually give the chemical reps all the necessary latitude to program your shirt washer in order to best utilize the chemicals that they sell. However, for some reason, I have seen some quirky formulas out there, so I thought that I should put forth my opinion on this matter.

First, let me outline the basic formula, then I'll go into more depth.

- Break: 10 minutes.
- Wash: 15 minutes.
- Drain
- Rinse: 2 minutes.
- Drain
- Rinse: 2 minutes.
- Drain
- Rinse: 2 minutes.
- Drain
- Sour: 3 minutes.
- Extract: not long

Break: 10 minutes

Some people call this a pre-wash. This is the cycle during which you want to add all of your products. This can be simply an enzyme product or a combination of a built detergent, oxygen bleach and alkaline booster.

Regardless, add all of the chemical in now. And put all of it directly in the drum, rather than using the dispenser compartments.

In days of old, this cycle was used differently. It was cold

water and used to remove blood stains. As you know, blood is a cold water stain. Hot water sets blood stains, so a cold water pre-wash was useful.

These simple steps are the Holy Grail. Your wash quality, press quality and productivity will all improve.

Blood stains on the collar were more common because men shaved with single blade straight razors and nicked themselves more regularly. These days, that particular stain is far less common. You might see one every week or every month.

Cold water is still the proper course of action, but because of its infrequency, it not worth the time and expense. If you fill a drum with cold water, wetting all of the 100+ shirts and making them cold as well, all to remove a perhaps non-existent, blood stain, you will then need a whole lot of hot water in order to make those 50° shirts into 130° shirts.

I have never done the math on this, but without question, it will take more energy to bring these newly chilled shirts up to temperature than if the shirts had been at ambient temperature.

But what about the occasional blood stain? My belief is that a shirt stained with blood,

ink or other similar stain, is a drycleaning item. It should be taken in as such, cleaned as such, charged as such and then finished on a shirt press. Treating them as a routine shirt will

either require a considerable amount of extra work or, even worse, a disappointed customer.

Intermediate drain

As the break cycle runs through, the detergent gets sudsy. Bubbly. These bubbles look good and give you the impression of a good cleaning, but this is a smoke screen. The bubbles are an "air-cushion" that impedes — in fact, adversely affects — good mechanical action. You must get rid of these bubbles with an intermediate drain in order to assure good cleaning.

Wash: 15 minutes

With the bubbles removed and no additional product added, you will be surprised at how much suds you still see. The Break cycle has removed the less stubborn stains and now, during this wash cycle, you will attack those that need maximum mechanical action, which you will get because

you have removed the bubbles and have a 15-minute time span to work at them.

Failure to understand this is the most common mistake made at washing shirts.

Adding chemicals doesn't do much, but understanding and adhering to the science does it all.

The next steps are drains and high-level rinses at decreasing temperatures, ending at around 80° to 90°. I haven't mentioned temperatures here. I will leave that to the chemical manufacturers. But remember that if the chemical manufacturers are looking for, say, 120°, you will need to set your water heater for a significantly higher temperature.

The amount of temperature that the water loses is controversial. The length of pipe between the water heater and the diameter of that pipe, as well as how quickly the water flows through that pipe (water pressure) all contribute significantly to what the temperature will be at the washer, as compared to the temperature at the heat source.

Sour: 3 minutes

If you are using enzyme de-

tergent, the alkali never gets very high so you may not use a sour. But keep in mind that you should have a pH of 5.5 to get the most out of your starch cycle (low level, 100°, 8 to 10 minutes, by the way).

Extract

Through all of this, we have yet to extract, but we will now.

If you have an old-fashioned shirt unit — one that has a sleeve press — and you are getting 95+ shirts per hour, extract your heart out. You will get great quality and great productivity.

However, if you are more typical, with a blown sleeve press, you will need to have 50 to 60 percent moisture retention. This is much wetter than you think and your pressers will probably comment, but your quality will improve dramatically. Do this by weight, not time. Sixty percent moisture retention is when 100 pounds of dry weight weighs 160 pounds after extraction. This is usually accomplished by extracting for only 60 seconds, maybe even less.

These simple steps are the Holy Grail.

Your wash quality will improve (getting rid of those bubbles is key!)

Your press quality will improve (with wetter shirts, you will produce a better shirt, hot off the press. You'll be amazed!)

Improved press productivity When your shirts are dry, the pressers often spray the shirts with an atomizer. Along with management help, you can get them to break this habit, resulting in increased shirts-per-hour.

You will save labor (less touch-up + better productivity = lower cost).

"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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“ My favorite things about DLI used to be the **problem garment bulletins** in the back of the magazine. Now, it's the **live spotting web series**. Do it! **It's well worth the money**. ”

Angela Rowekamp

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Angelo Nguyen

British Dryclean Club
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THE SPOTTING BOARD



BY DAN EISEN

Four methods of stain removal

In my last article, we went back to the basics of spotting for several reasons.

The counter people should know what garments need pre-spotting and what ones do not need pre-spotting. They should be able to talk to a customer with professional knowledge.

The experienced spotter sometimes loses the concept of basic spotting, causing some problems in their spotting procedures. I will explain the basics of spotting as I teach it in my spotting sessions.

Solvent action is the concept of using a liquid to dissolve a stain. Water dissolves sugar, salt and starch. Water cannot dissolve dryside staining such as oil.

Dry solvents are liquids with no water. They dissolve oil, grease and wax. The ability of a solvent to dissolve a stain means the stain is a soluble stain.

If that sounds simple, why do we have garments with grease sent for wetcleaning and water-based stained garments sent for drycleaning?

How many times have you heard your spotter say "I

drycleaned this silk blouse with perspiration stains several times and the stain did not come out."

Some spotters still apply wetside chemicals to fabrics and think that the drycleaning solvent will remove the chemical. Many spotters still apply dryside agents and attempt to flush it out with water. I see many spotters use paint removers to pre-spot perspiration and other wetside stains.

These spotters have lost the basic and elementary concept of spotting. Water is the only wet solvent that a cleaner uses. Cleaners have several dryside solvents, which include drycleaning solvent, amyl acetate and volatile dry solvent.

Lubrication is the action of using a lubricant to break up,

emulsify and lift the stain from the fabric.

Lubrication is used with mechanical action, which is tamping and brushing to aid in breaking up the stain. Lubrication also reduces friction, which protects the fabric from damage when applying mechanical action.

I have often seen spotters attempt to remove stains using mechanical action without applying a lubricant. This often results in a damaged fabric. Many spotters still apply dry solvents and lubricants using the steam gun to flush it out.

Proper lubrication will also prevent bleeding and spreading of stains. Ink stains frequently spread because proper lubrication was not used.

Chemical action is forming

a new substance or making a stain invisible by the addition of a chemical. It is often confused with making stains soluble using solvent action.

For example, if I put sugar in water it is still a mixture of sugar and water even though I removed the stain. I changed the physical state of the sugar but nothing else.

A chemical action forms an entirely new and different compound. For example, when I apply a bleach to a stain I change the chemical composition of the stain making it invisible.

When an alkali is applied to perspiration, I chemically convert the perspiration to a soluble soap. This occurs because the fatty acids in perspiration combine with the alkali making a soluble soap.

Different stains react to specific chemicals. Tannin stains react to acids while protein stains react to alkalis. Chemicals also involve the use of bleaches.

Advanced spotters may use many chemicals in their arsenal, including acids, alkali, oxidizing and reducing bleaches. The concept of chemicals requires a careful study of each chemical and how it should be used. Chemicals can react adversely on a fabric and it is important to know what neutralizes it.

Remember that drycleaning solvent does not remove wet-side chemicals from fabric. This is due to the fact that solvents and water do not mix.

Enzymes. The secret of how

the liquid got inside the liquid-filled chocolate cherries is almost as much a mystery as how the cleaner took out perspiration and similar protein or albuminous stains on a red silk beaded gown without losing color.

The process by which chocolate covered cherries with liquid centers are created is an enzyme action that actually takes place after the candy is made. The cherries are put in a solid mold which contains an enzyme. The cherries are then dipped in chocolate.

They are then stored for a period of time under controlled heat. During this period, the enzymes start a digesting reaction in the solid candy center. The enzyme converts the portion of the center to a soluble sugar. This explains how the liquid is made without affecting the covering.

The drycleaner who knows how to use enzymes can also change similar protein and albuminous stains to sugar without using protein formulas, lubricants, alkali and mechanical action which may affect some delicate fabrics or weak sensitive dyes. Refer to my website www.garmentanalysis.com for a detailed explanation on how to use enzymes.

Dan Eisen, former chief garment analyst for the National Cleaners Association, can be reached at (772) 340-0909 or (772) 579-5044, by e-mail at cleandan@comcast.net or through his website at www.garmentanalysis.com.

Lubricants for spotting

The following is a list of the lubricants you can use. **Wet-side lubricants** are used on insoluble stains that mix with water. **Dryside lubricants** work on insoluble stains that have a plastic, grease or wax base.

Wetside Lubricants

Neutral lubricant
Glycerine
Spray spotter

Dryside Lubricants

Oily type paint remover
Drycleaning detergent

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BY JAMES PEUSTER

Increasing the trends and spends

It's just that simple. We are trying in our power to increase the trends and spends of our current customers as well as providing options for new ones.

With all that is going on around us, the choices and decisions we make will dictate our future. Sound familiar? I think it's the number-one broken record many of us have heard during this crisis.

So what are our options? We look at ways to increase sales, decrease costs and find the magic pill solution geared towards finding the path to surviving and then, hopefully, thriving.

It's so interesting that many cleaners

have made decisions based on fears, hope, desperation, and advice. As a consultant company, we have fielded many interesting calls over the past few months and look for the short- and long-term solutions just like everything else. But here is what I can share for sure.

1. Each market has it's own unique challenges, situations and even solutions. Depending on Covid rules, demographics and employment situations, your market is somewhat different than others, so you must take that into consideration before making a change.

2. Each market has one thing in common. Go after market share. The pie is shrinking. Don't just sit there and wait.

3. Customers want stability. Cutting back too much may cost you to lose your long-term customers.

4. The labor pool will improve. You can no longer state that there are no good people out there to hire.

5. We will lose some competition. The industry limped past 2008 without losing more than 10 percent of the cleaners. This year looks to be 25 percent in my opinion.

6. You can make it happen. Sitting back and waiting is not your best bet.

Get creative and get going and growing.

The bottom line is that we are blessed to work with many of the best cleaners who have made the necessary adjustments to keep going. Many have added additional vans during this time. The time is now to make it happen!

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.



Two recent graduates of Route Pro University are shown receiving their certificates from James Peuster. At left is Lurie Coward of New Brand Cleaners in Columbia, TN, who completed customer service training. At right is Bradley Sloma from Curtis Cleaners in Lowell, MI, with his certificate of route management.



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