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Fabricare '21 stacks the deck in Vegas

Many drycleaners have waited for much longer than a year to attend an industry event in person, but that wait is finally drawing closer to an end.

Later this year, the California Cleaners Association (CCA) will host its Fabricare 2021 convention from Oct. 2 to 3 at the Sahara Las Vegas.

The event is slated to coincide with several in-person meetings held by various groups on Oct. 1, including the Drycleaning and Laundry Institute, America's Best Cleaners, GreenEarth Cleaning Affiliates, SPOT POS User Group, Management Concepts-12, Maverick Drycleaners and the Southwest Drycleaning Association.

The association will also offer tabletop exhibits and it has stacked the deck with a full slate of educational programs.

Following breakfast/vendor time on Saturday morning, Kevin Dubois from

Fabricare '21
Create a winning hand

A Full House in Las Vegas?

The California Cleaners Association is gambling that drycleaners are ready to meet again in person for a trade show in Las Vegas during the first weekend of October. Speakers will include (clockwise from top center): Dave Coyle from Maverick Marketing, Jennifer Marquardt of The Route Pros, John Rothrock of Yale Cleaners, Christa Hagearty of Dependable Cleaners and Chris White of America's Best Cleaners.

Clean Franchise Brands will examine "Keeping the Entre-

preneurial Focus on Your Business" at 9 a.m.

Other speakers and programs on Saturday will in-

clude: Christa Hagearty of Dependable Cleaners in Quincy, MA, will cover "Employee Retention and Engagement" at 11 a.m.; DLI CEO Mary Scalco and National Cleaners Association Executive Director Nora Nealis will ponder the "Future of the Industry" at 2 p.m.; and Jennifer Marquardt, recently hired by the Route Pros of Kansas City, MO, will explore the topic of "Customer Service Excellence" at 3 p.m.

Rounding out the day, Chris White will host an America's Best Cleaners Leadership Forum at 4:15 p.m.

There will also be plenty of time throughout the day to speak with vendors firsthand. That evening, there will also be a Fabricare reception from 5:30 to 7 p.m. where people can socialize the old-fashioned way... without a computer monitor.

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Suppliers are struggling to meet demand

For manufacturers and distributors, the pandemic has proved to be a perfect storm of chaos for well over a year, and the maelstrom of inventory turmoil will likely continue in the near future.

Covid's chokehold on the population last year tightened, wreaking havoc by afflicting much of the workforce with illness and forcing shutdowns to protect public health. This caused

supplies for all industries to dwindle even as demand resumed unabated, resulting in higher prices and less available resources. Cleaners have certainly felt frustration trying to keep stocked with items like cleaning chemicals, poly materials and hangers.

"The problems we're having, I don't think are different from any industry in the country," noted Mike Ross of Aristocrat Supply. "The big

issue right now is shipping, to be honest with you. We buy a fair amount of our hangers overseas, as does most of the country. A year ago, I would pay \$5,000 to get a container load of hangers over here in freight. I just approved a container costing \$20,000. Even at that, the availability of them is next to nothing because who is going to get the hangers? Walmart, or me?"

Alex Atwater of A-1 Prod-

ucts has seen his own shipping costs rise similarly. "Ocean freight has gotten more expensive, in some cases going from \$3,000 to \$15,000 for a container," he explained. "Since the beginning of the new year, there have been seven poly increases. They've got another one coming this week, as a matter of fact."

For now, the best thing drycleaners can do is to stay

on top of their inventory, be patient and be willing to accept substitutions.

"People are upset. They order a black shirt hanger and I send them a gold one," Ross said. "They order four cases of 500-pack struts. I send them two cases of 250-pack."

"If everybody's on the same page of what's going on, I think we can get

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THE ORIGINAL ROUTE PRO John Wilhelm Peuster, great grandfather of James Peuster, is pictured with two horses and a buggy he used to deliver clothes that his family cleaned in their home. For the full story, see page 14.



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Putting the "sir" in service

"Sir" Francis Forte struggled with his business and sanity last year, but he found an unusual way to cope.

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Boiler alert!

What is the best way for you to retrieve water samples to test your production water quality?

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Everything about cleaning shirts is specialized and overly complicated.

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Virtually spotless

DLI recently held the first-ever spotting class online and plans to host another one soon.

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Overall through, the country keeps moving closer to the pre-pandemic days of frequent social events and a steady diet of professional business attire. Fortunately, positive signs are one thing that has not been in short supply lately. Many cleaners already managed to survive for a while without customers, which, we imagine, is much harder than surviving on a few less boxes of supplies.

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Be sure to visit www.nationalclothesline.com, for additional coverage and news from the drycleaning industry

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How Many Dry Cleaners Has Your Insurance Agent Handled? One or Two? Three?

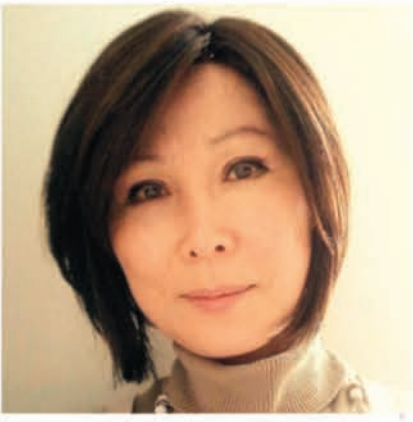


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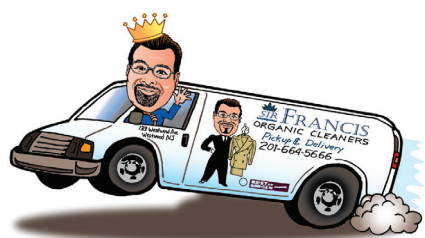
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Singing his own tune

While most drycleaners were trying not to lose their business during the pandemic, the owner of Sir Francis Cleaners in Westwood, NJ, simply tried not to lose his mind.

"I had my best year ever in 2019," explained Francis Forte. "We had some really good years up until the stock market crash back in 2007. Then, it took about ten years to get it back up to where we were really cruising again... and that was 2019 and 2020. Up until March we were having great weeks, and then it came down to zero in one week."

When Bergen County businesses were forced to close down, Francis actually caught a lucky break by catching a mild case of COVID-19.

"I got covid in March of 2020, right when it hit. As a matter of fact, I was closed for two weeks and that was [also] the time I had to be quarantining, so it actually worked out quite well," he recalled. "By the time I got my results back, I had no symptoms."

Four weeks later, his presser caught the virus, causing another setback. With business down as much as 82%, though, there wasn't much work to do for an "essential" business anyway.

Like most drycleaners, Francis spent several months cutting costs, adjusting business hours and filling out an endless number of government forms.

"To stay in business, I did the PPP [Paycheck Protection Program]. I did the SBA [Small Business Administration] loan," he said. "Immediately when I was able to open up, I opened a couple of days a week... but I always called my delivery customers and, for some reason, those were the people who had clothes. Those were the people who needed the work because they were used to getting things delivered."

Month after frustrating month, Francis discovered that he had more and more time on his hands at the plant and he was tired of his mind racing about whether or not his company would be able to survive the pandemic.

So, he took guitar lessons — rekindling an interest he had as a kid — and improved to the point where, on a slow day at Sir Francis Cleaners, he'll sing classic 1970s hits from the likes of Bob Seger, John Lennon, America and Bread. Ultimately, he believes his pandemic hobby helped save his sanity.

"I can pick up the guitar. I can play a song and I can feel better," he said.

Francis began taking Zoom guitar lessons learning jazz and blues from an instructor in the Philippines because the 12-hour time difference met his schedule. In June, during a slow summer lull, he decided to compose a song specifically for all of his customers who have not picked up their cleaned garments from the business yet and post it on Instagram.

He sang: "Come and pick up your clothes / You left them here so long ago / We cleaned and pressed them / and now they're ready for you to come and get them and bring them home / I know things are crazy now / You'd think you'd have the time / I would gladly go deliver them to you if you don't mind..."

"I'm not going on the road anytime soon, trust me," he laughed.

As for the road to get where he is today, it began without a clear destination in mind. After graduating from Manhattan College with a degree in Health and Physical Education, Francis soon decided that he could make the most money working for himself.

of his caricature to the van, he became more and more recognizable. "It was corny. My head was huuuuge," he laughed. "It was the whole side of the van, but you know something? Everyone always said to me, 'I saw your van. I saw your van.' How could you miss it?"

The service has grown in popularity over the years even though it isn't free.

who gives these kinds of crazy numbers off?" he asked. "Nobody does this kind of stuff. Only drycleaners give away their businesses in percentages. You don't go to a liquor store and buy 10 bottles and get 30% off."

"Who does these stupid things? We've done them for years, but the time has come," he continued. "Rents are so

sirfranciscleaners.com



Francis Forte

In the Fall of 1993, he purchased Fine Line Cleaners of New City, NY, where he was trained by the owner and the Neighborhood Cleaners Association (now the National Cleaners Association) and began making industry contacts.

As his cleaning acumen improved, he made quite a lasting impression on new customers by making a point of remembering their names for their second visit.

"I take very good care of my customers. They have my personal cell number, as well as my store number which is a cell as well so they always get me," he noted. "It's that kind of relationship. Although it is not highly duplicatable, it's highly successful because I am able to connect with people usually like no other business can on a very personal level."

Francis owned the business for less than seven years, but made a big impact before he sold it in 2000. It was grossing about five times more than when he purchased it, but he had become exhausted at that point.

"I wanted a break. What I probably needed was a month off," he said. "I was burned out. I decided to sell it."

In 2002, Francis decided to buy another drycleaning business, but this time he wanted something scaled down a bit with less employees. He bought Dundee Cleaners and changed the name to Sir Francis Cleaners (Sir Francis being a fun nickname bestowed upon him by a friend). Completing the makeover, a logo featuring a cartoon caricature of Francis was added to a delivery van... once the business started offering the service, that is. The service first began once a customer asked for it. Before long, it climbed to 26 altogether, then 180 after a pair of postcards were mailed out.

Francis spent lots of hours growing the route in a time when he had to calculate his own path on an ancient device called a roadmap. After adding a wrap

Francis doesn't understand why so many drycleaners are willing to offer the service without fees.

"You know why I started charging a delivery fee? When I realized my gardener — every time he came — he charged me a dollar for gas, or whatever," he explained. "I said, 'You know what? I'm the only schmuck here doing free delivery. The pizza guy charges \$2 for delivery. I'm coming twice a week to some people's houses and doing it for free? Why?' Why are drycleaners so archaic in the stone age when it comes to charging people?"

Like most of his ideas, Francis tested the waters first. So far, he hasn't lost any customers.

"I've been charging a delivery fee for about five years now — a dollar. I charge a dollar every time I pick up at your house," he said. "It's not a lot of money, but at the end of the year, it is a lot of money. The insurance of the van is over \$4,000 because it's a commercial vehicle. Now, I get a dollar every time I come to your house. I'm defraying that cost."

Adding a delivery fee wasn't the only big decision Francis has wrestled with in recent years.

"Another thing I did differently with my business is I went to pay-in-advance," he said. "I'd rather have the money now and I need it in order to keep my business going."

The change was first enacted during the pandemic and it only had "a little kick-back from one customer." On the plus side, the business now has better cash flow and hopefully it will result in fewer serenades to customers who have left their garments at the plant.

Regardless, Francis can't wrap his head around the fact that drycleaners aren't willing to embrace trends from other businesses and industries.

"It came to me I'm the only business out there that's not with the times. We do free delivery, or we offer 50% off —

exorbitant — and fees, everybody has their hands in your pocket for a fee... from the local government to everything being delivered to your local supplier. Everybody except *you*. *You're* the only person who is above it."

These days, Francis continues to focus on taking very good care of his customers, although, remembering their names has become more challenging.

"I think I know everybody's first name. It's a little harder to remember everybody now with the masks," he said. "I'm usually very good about it. Part of my process is staying in complete contact with them all the way."

In the old days, he called route customers the night before. Then, he would text them. Today, he offers updates to concerned customers.

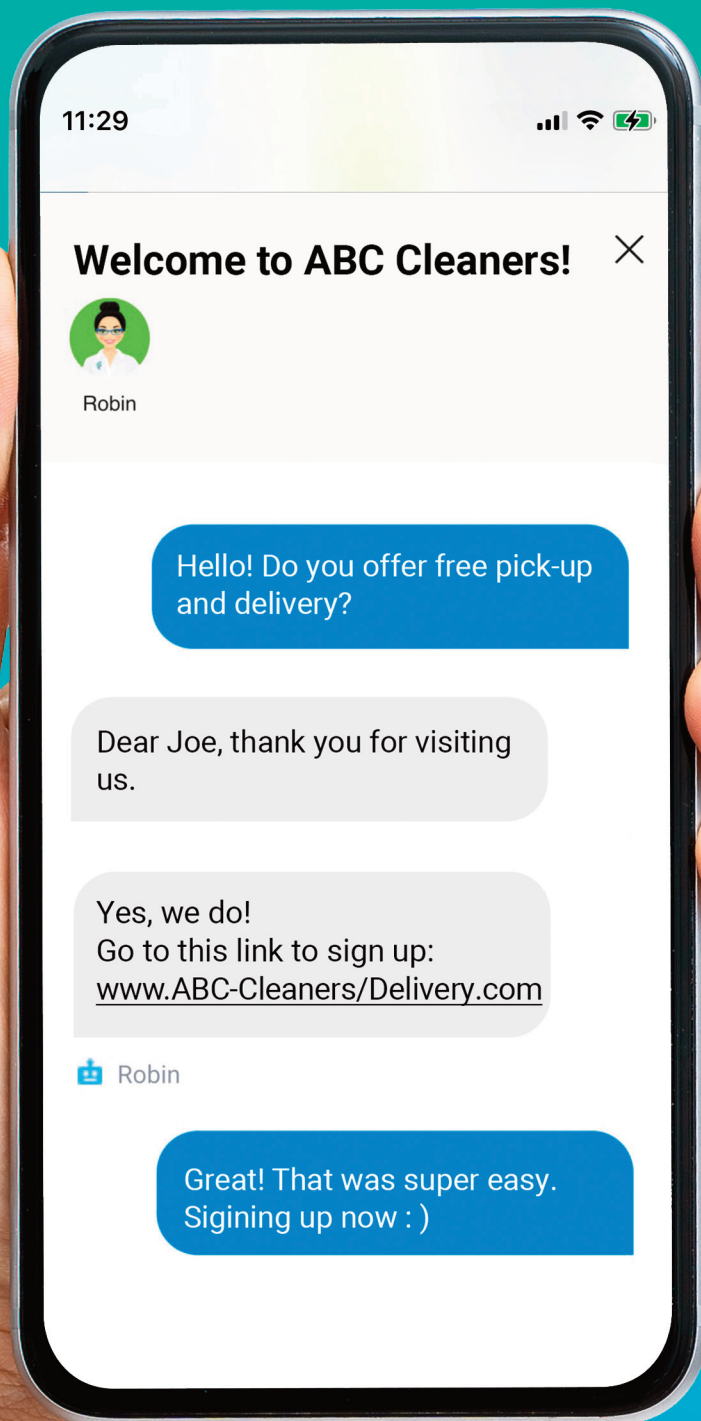
"If there is a really bad stain on a gown and they are concerned about it, I may spot it one time, finish it and text it mid-way through with a picture, saying, 'I just want you to know, the gown isn't ready yet but the stain is gone.' And I'll send it off to them," he said.

He still adds a personal touch, but he misses the in-person aspect of his job that he really enjoys. "I like what I do. I like drycleaning, but the thing I miss the most is seeing customers, shaking their hands, hugging them," he said. "I hope it's getting better."

With business now down about 45 to 50% from pre-pandemic numbers, Francis still has more time on his hands than he would prefer, but, fortunately, he now has something to keep those hands occupied.

"When things are slow, my mind starts racing with 'Oh my god, what am I going to do? How am I going to make it? Am I going to be one of the guys who goes out of business? Am I going to be like them?'" he said. "So, I play my guitar and sing songs. It gives me a lot of enjoyment and something to put my energy and fear into."

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BUILDING VALUE



BY KERMIT ENGH

Increase your business value by 71%

How much did your home increase in value last year? Depending on where you live, it may have gone up by 5 to 10% or more.

How much did your stock portfolio increase over the last 12 months? By way of a benchmark, the Dow Jones Industrial Average has increased by around 13% in the last year. Did your portfolio do as well?

Now consider what portion of your wealth is tied to the stock or housing market and compare that to the equity you have tied up in your business. If you're like most owners, the majority of your wealth is tied up in your company. Increasing the value of your largest asset can have a much faster impact on your overall financial picture than a bump in the stock market or the value of your home.

Many of you know that I have been part of Methods for Management for many years, both as a member and as the facilitator for the past seven years. During the past eight months, it has been my desire to expand the offerings of MfM into business coaching as well as the bureau format. As a result, MfM is now certified

as a Value Builders coach and as a Five Steps to Freedom coach. These platforms provide proven processes to address the three primary areas business owners deal with — that of Time, Team, and Money.

Let me introduce you to a statistically proven way to increase the value of your company by as much as 71%. Through an analysis of 6,955 businesses, it has been discovered that companies that achieve a Value Builder Score of 80+ out of a possible 100 receive offers to buy their business that are 71% higher than what the average company receives. This is calculated as a multiple of EBITAL or owner's discretionary income.

How long would it take your stock portfolio or home to go up by 71%? Years — maybe even decades. This value growth is achieved by tracking the overall score on the eight key drivers of company value. Like a pilot working his instrument panel, you can quickly zero in on which of the eight drivers is dragging down your value the most and then take corrective action. These drivers of value

include:

1) Financial Performance: your history of producing revenue and profit combined with the professionalism of your record keeping.

2) Growth Potential: your likelihood to grow your business in the future and at what rate.

3) The Switzerland Structure: how dependent your business is on any one employee, customer or supplier.

4) The Valuation Teeter Totter: whether your business is a cash suck or a cash spigot. We all know what 2020 was.

5) The Hierarchy of Recurring Revenue: the proportion and quality of automatic, annuity-based revenue you collect each month.

6) The Monopoly Control: how well differentiated your business is from competitors in your industry.

7) Customer Satisfaction: the likelihood that your customers will repurchase and also refer you. We have discussed Net Promoter Score previously as the best way to measure this driver.

8) Hub and Spoke: how your business would perform if you were unexpectedly unable to

work for three months. Remember: "Fire Yourself."

Let's assume you've gone down the path to increase the value of your business. This creates the possibility of hitting your Freedom Point. What is this? Now what are your options?

When was the last time you calculated the percentage of your net worth tied to your company's value?

When you started your business, its value was probably negligible. In many cases there may have been value, but zero equity based on how the business was purchased. In my case, both companies purchased were with none of my own money. Unless you purchased or inherited your company, it wasn't worth much when you opened your doors, but over time, the proportion of your assets tied to your business may have crept up.

Let's imagine a hypothetical business owner named Tim who starts his company at age 30. He has a little bit of equity in his first home and a small retirement fund. When he starts or purchases his business, it's worthless or has no equity, so it doesn't yet factor into Tim's net worth calculation.

By the age of 50, Tim has built up \$600,000 worth of equity in his home, his retirement nest egg has grown to \$400,000, and his business has blossomed and is now worth \$4,000,000. Tim's company has crept up to represent 80% of his net worth.

Tim knows the first rule of investing is to diversify, which he is careful to do with his retirement account. Still, he has failed to achieve overall diversity given the success of his business.

What's more, he may have unknowingly passed something called the "Freedom Point," which is when the net proceeds (i.e., after taxes and expenses) of selling his business would garner enough money for him to live comfortably for the rest of his life. Your lifestyle determines your Freedom Point, but when you pass it, it's worth considering the risk you're taking.

If this pandemic has taught us anything, it is that nothing is for sure, and a thriving business one day can turn into a struggling company overnight. When your business makes up most of your net worth and selling it would garner enough money to retire, there's no financial reason to continue owning your business. You may enjoy the challenge, the social interactions, and the creative process of building a business, but keeping it may be unnecessarily risky.

When you've crested the

Freedom Point and want to diversify — but still don't want to retire — you have some options:

• **Sell a Minority Stake.** In a minority recapitalization, you sell less than half of your shares. Often sold to a financial investor such as a private equity group, a minority recapitalization allows you to diversify your net worth while continuing to control your business.

• **Sell a Majority Stake.** In a majority recapitalization, you sell more than half of your shares to an investor who will most likely ask you to continue to run your business for many years to come. You get to diversify your wealth, keep some equity in your business for when the investor sells, and continue to run your company.

• **Earn-Out.** When you sell your company, you'll likely have to agree to a transition period of sorts. One of the most popular is called earn-out, where you agree to continue to run your company as a division of your acquirer's business for a specified period of time. Your earn-out may be as little as a year or as long as seven, but the average is three years. Therefore, if you're past the Freedom Point and can see yourself wanting to step down in the next three to five years, an earn-out may be worth considering.

• **Transition Management Ownership.** This is where the ownership is transitioned over a specific period of time to one or more senior employees as a way for you to realize the value you have built over time but to "cash out" your equity over time. A close friend of mine through Methods for Management successfully did this about five years ago. When family does not want to continue the ownership within the family, this is a great option.

Building a successful business is rewarding, but when your personal balance sheet gets out of whack, it may be worth considering the risk you're shouldering and the options you have for sharing some of it.

Until next time, enjoy building value.

Kermit Engh has been an owner/operator in the drycleaning industry for over 28 years and has been a Methods for Management member for over 24 years. His current position as managing partner with MfM and as a Certified Value Builders Coach allows him to share his extensive background in strategic planning, finance, process improvement, packaging and branding, employee training programs, profitability, cost analysis, acquisition analysis and succession planning. Contact him at kengh@mfmi.com.

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One of the first purchases I made in my business was the 24-hour drop box from Iowa Techniques. Sixteen years later, that drop box is still working great and has never needed any kind of repair or service.

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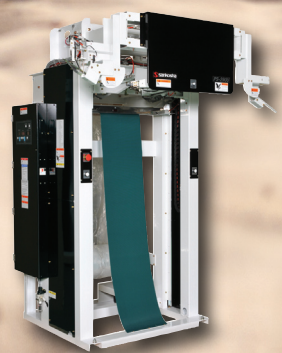
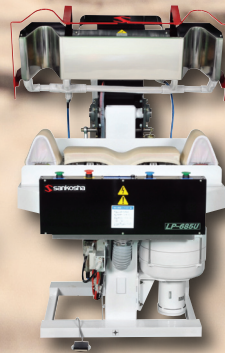
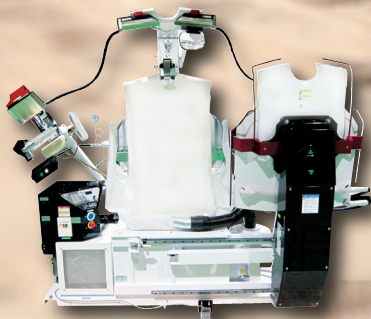
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By BRUCE GROSSMAN

WRENCH WORKS

Boiler water testing — Part III

Some words of caution to preface this month's topic: *Never attempt to obtain samples from a boiler under pressure.*

Plan on obtaining a water sample when starting up in the morning before the boiler is pressurized. Here's what you're going to need:

1. A cup or wide-necked beaker to collect the water sample.
2. Eye protection if the boiler is hot.
3. A pair of leather gloves if there is a chance the decanted water is hot.

An easy way to accomplish the sampling for the boiling water is to use a small ball valve located at the lower end of the sight glass fixtures as the boiler is beginning to heat up.

Allow some water to flow through the valve to flush any impurities before taking the sample. (If there is not a ball valve in the lower sight glass fixture, it is advisable to install one.)

There should also be a valve installed somewhere on the return tank to enable sampling from the return tank.

Collect about an inch of water in a clean cup or another wide-mouthed beaker.

Using the Meters

The meters required are for measuring TDS and pH. They are inexpensive and easy to use. We can supply a kit containing both of these meters

and the collection beaker — all enclosed in a protective storage case.

The procedure for using both the meters is similar and as follows:

1. Remove the cap covering the sensing electrode.
2. Rinse the electrode in distilled water.
3. Turn on the meter by pressing the on/off switch.
4. If the TDS meter has multiple scales, select the scale that measures TDS in ppm.
5. Immerse meter in solution up to immersion line.
6. Stir gently and wait 30 seconds until the meter stabilizes.
7. When finished, rinse electrode in distilled water. Turn off meter and replace the cap.

Evaluating Results

Results of testing the water samples will determine what steps need to be taken to bring the water treatment into balance with not only current boiler operations, but eliminate the ill effects of past, improper water treatment.

We will be testing both for TDS and pH values. There are three locations at which water needs to be tested and the scale used to run these tests is the ppm scale on the TDS meter.

Because turning water into steam is a series of events, it's important to run these tests in the order shown, as well as applying the remedies in the order suggested.

1. Testing the city water entering the return tank. For this test, obtain a sample from any faucet. The reading we are interested in here is the TDS measured on the ppm scale of the TDS meter. If the test results are **greater than 250 ppm** and you do not have a water softener, you should get one. The cost of the softener and the chemicals to operate it will be significantly lower than the increased costs of boiler compound, wasted fuel, production downtime required for breakdowns and repairs — all these costs are incurred correcting problems caused by hard water. If you're already using a softener, check its operation and salt level. If those are OK, then increase its regeneration frequency.

2. Feedwater in the return tank. Find a convenient fitting to withdraw water from the return tank and measure the TDS value (TDS measured on the ppm scale of the TDS meter). The reading should be **less than 300 ppm**. If the reading is high, check your water softener. If it's OK, then look for a leaky ball valve (a very common problem that often goes unnoticed) and/or the check valves between the return pump and boiler water inlet that may be leaking.

Run a test of the pH value. It should be **between 9-11**. If it is lower, you're in the acidic range which will lead to metal corrosion in the boiler and

BOILER WATER TESTING

TDS TESTING

THE TDS OF THE RETURN TANK WATER- LESS THAN 300 PPM
THE TDS OF BOILER WATER- 400-2,000

PH TESTING

THE LEVEL THAT THE METER IS IMMersed IS THE SAME FOR BOTH TDS AND Ph TESTING

THE PH OF THE RETURN TANK WATER- 9-11

throughout your steam and return systems. Look for a leaky ball float valve or lack of boiler compound entering the return tank.

3. Boiler water. Take a sample of the water from inside the boiler. First, test for TDS. If the reading is **above 2,000 and the previous tests were OK**, it indicates the blowdown procedure needs to be adjusted and/or the amount of boiler compound being used requires adjustment. The easiest solution to try is extending the

blowdown times in 50% increments. Wait two weeks and see if there is any change. If not, increase the volume of boiler compound by 20%. Wait two weeks and see if that changes anything. If not, try adding another daily blowdown and see if that makes a difference. If not, call our office. Second, test for pH value which should be between 9-11. If it's low, try increasing the volume of boiler compound by 15%. Wait two weeks and see if there's a difference. If not, call our office.

The rule of thumb is (provided there are no mechanical problems with the boiler and return system): if the TDS reading is high, increase blowdown time, number of daily blowdowns, and/or the volume of boiler compound. If the pH value is low, increase the volume of boiler compound and check the operation of the ball float valve.

Bruce Grossman is the chief of R&D for EZtimers Manufacturing, the manufacturer of the Tattler steam trap tester; Drop In The Bucket and Sahara line of high purity separator water mister/evaporators and the new EZ Level line of return tank level and temperature controllers. The EZ Level replaces the problematic ball-float valve in your boilers' return tank, helping to eliminate boiler damage and lost production caused by boiler down time. See our ad in this issue and for further information on the EZtimers product line or visit www.eztimers.com. Address any questions or comments to bruce@eztimers.com or call (702) 376-6693.

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KEEP IT LEGAL



BY FRANK KOLLMAN

A breakdown of wage and hour laws

In 1938, Congress passed the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), establishing a minimum wage and a forty-hour workweek as the legal basis for overtime. While the concepts of overtime and minimum wage seem simple, the FLSA is perhaps the most complex labor law in the land. I guarantee that your company, no matter how sophisticated and careful, is violating the Fair Labor Standards Act in some way.

Many years ago, a large securities firm agreed to pay more than three million dollars to its discount brokers (includ-

ing former employees) who regularly worked through their lunch hours. Certainly, a large company such as this should have known that nonexempt employees must be given at least a 20-minute non-interrupted lunch break if the company does not want to pay them for the time.

Last night on *Jeopardy*, the Final Jeopardy question was "What is coffee break?" It got me thinking about smoke breaks, coffee breaks, and other short periods of time when an employee is not performing any work. Because these breaks are typically less than 20 minutes,

an employer has to pay the employees whether they punched out, left the premises, or locked themselves in the bathroom. Then again, an employer does not have to give employees breaks at all, unless they are minors or state law mandates them (common in retail establishments in many states).

The two biggest areas of contention in the wage and hour arena involve (1) hours worked and (2) exemptions. With respect to the hours-worked issue, employees must be paid for such things as:

1. Interrupted lunch hours.
2. Time worked both before

and after a shift.

3. Time worked at home.
4. Time spent laundering uniforms (instead of taking them to the drycleaner).
5. Travel (though not usually commuting time).
6. Training.
7. On-call time, except under certain circumstances.

Ironically, an employer can fire an employee for punching in early or punching out late, but he cannot refuse to pay the employee if work was performed. As to the exemptions from overtime and minimum wage, there are regulations of the Department of Labor that

are as complex as the Internal Revenue Code. First, the exemptions vary: some employees are exempt from minimum wage and overtime, some only overtime. Second, there are various tests that employees have to meet to be exempt. Third, exempt employees can lose the exemption, either temporarily or permanently, depending how they are actually compensated. Fourth, the exemptions are based on what the employee does, not how much he or she is paid, or how he or she is paid.

One thing about exemptions is relatively clear: hourly employees are rarely, if ever, exempt, unless they are computer programmers making nearly 30 bucks an hour. Exemptions are for salaried employees. As one might imagine, salary issues arise all the time:

1. Can I dock a salaried employee without losing the exemption?
2. Where do commissions come in?
3. How much must the salary be?

Hourly employees making 200 thousand dollars a year may be entitled to overtime while salaried employees making 50 thousand may not.

Employers should stay on top of the wage and hour laws for a variety of reasons. Employees and former employees can sue for back pay up to three years, an equal amount in liquidated damages, and attorneys' fees. Further, employees cannot agree to accept less than the amount they are entitled under the Fair Labor Standards Act, even if the wage arrangement was the employee's idea. And employees cannot settle wage and hour claims for less than the amount they are entitled to receive, even if they settled with the advice of an attorney.

In other words, an employer can settle a wage and hour case, then be sued again because the settlement amount was insufficient. Employers would be wise to have their wage payment practices reviewed periodically to ensure compliance. The cost to the company of a Department of Labor audit or an FLSA lawsuit can be devastating. The new Biden Administration has embarked on various programs of enforcement at the Department of Labor. We can expect government audits of payrolls to increase. Do your best not to become a Labor Department statistic.

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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Fabricare '21 stacks the deck in Vegas

Continued from page 1

On Sunday morning, Dave Coyle of Maverick Marketing will present the first program of the day. It is called “The ONE TOOL Required to Be in the Top 5%!” It will take place at 9:30 a.m.

John Rothrock of Yale Cleaners will conclude the

speaker schedule for the weekend with a program on “Generation Now: Can Drycleaning Deliver?” starting at 11:15 a.m. Also on Sunday, CCA will host its board meeting from 1 to 3 p.m.

The cost to attend the event is \$199 per person.

There is a link on the

show’s official website, www.fabricareshow.com, to register, as well as to book a room at the host hotel, the Sahara Las Vegas. It is recommended to do so as early as possible.

Current rates at the hotel are \$114 plus tax nightly for a room in the Marra tower with

either a king or two double beds.

The Sahara Las Vegas previously operated under the name SLS Las Vegas. Since then, however, it has completed \$150 million worth of renovations including an updated casino floor, renovated hotel rooms, suites and corri-

dors, an upgraded spa and a new hotel lobby. It now features over 1,600 rooms and nearly 60,000 sq. ft. of casino space. On its website, the hotel currently notes that “Per CDC guidelines, fully vaccinated individuals are no longer required to wear a mask or socially distance.”

Suppliers are struggling with demand

Continued from page 1

through,” he continued. “It’s not a good feeling to walk into a building that’s usually filled with hangers and products and see you have nothing and know that you have orders to fill. It’s very disheartening. We put a lot of effort in what we do.”

According to Atwater, drycleaners can expect the hanger shortage to worsen this summer. “We’re about to

hit the worst part. Hangers are really going to be scarce in the months of June and July,” he said.

With shipping woes worsening, it puts the spotlight on M&B Hangers, the only domestic commercial hanger manufacturer left.

“Since the pandemic’s been easing and the lockdown’s have been easing and with virtually zero — or very few — containers coming

from Asia, we’ve been asked to fill our normal orders and everybody else’s orders, too,” said Magnus Milton, owner of M&B Hangers, whose company is working hard to produce more hangers now.

“It’s frustrating for us to be able to take care of all the people who depend on us right now and we just can’t do it because everybody is getting busier,” he added.

“We’re producing more but it

just can’t fill the void left by zero containers coming in overnight.”

Milton urged suppliers not to let customers overbuy hangers now. “All it does is create more shortages for everybody else,” he said.

While his “fuzzy” crystal ball can’t see when the problem might end, Milton did trace it back to its roots.

“All this started 20 years ago when unfair trade prac-

tices from China caused virtually every domestic manufacturing plant to shut down in a matter of four or five years. We closed one of ours. Cleaners Hangers closed their plant. Laidlaw closed their plant. United Wire closed their production facility. Midwest closed theirs. Nagel closed theirs. Unfair trade practices caused this and will continue to cause this.”

Tracing back a mystery to an old route pro

Like many mysteries, this one began in an attic. James Peuster, a.k.a. the Route Pro, was sifting through a box of family memorabilia one day when he made a startling accidental discovery.

“It all started when I found a typed-out letter my dad had created about the history of his heritage,” he explained.

“I noticed that my great grandfather, John Wilhelm Peuster, had owned a pickup and delivery company of laundry.”

After contacting his mother, Betty, to verify the information, she found a photograph of him with two horses and a buggy (see front page). The business itself was

unusual in that the family ran it out of their home on 18th St. in Kansas City, MO. At the time, family members who chipped in had an easy commute; much of them lived in other houses on the street, as well.

“We lived down the street from them,” noted Nelda Chapman, granddaughter of

John W. Her grandfather bought the business and kept it as Jackson Laundry.

“I remember they did the laundry down at the house and my mother mended the clothes when he brought them in, and, of course, helped with the ironing and such,” Chapman said. “My mother’s name was Leona, and there was also Esther, the second daughter. They both helped. My nana [Mabel] Peuster, I’m sure, did the washing of the clothes. You know, they all pitched in wherever it was needed.”

Overall laundry.”

It is not known whether this is the same business. One thing is clear, though, it was a special time for the family who loved to socialize once the day’s work was all completed. As Chapman explained, “We all got together so much and played games. We played croquet out on the lawn. We just had a wonderful time. I wish families could do that now.”

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Eager for more information, James Peuster continued researching his family legacy and found more details.

He knew that John Wilhelm Peuster was born in 1876. What he didn’t know was that his great grandfather’s World War I draft registration card had listed his present occupation as a “Route Foreman” for Jackson’s Laundry.

During the early 1920s, when John Wilhelm became sick with cancer, his son Arthur H. and three of his daughters (Leona, Esther and Viola) quit high school in order to help keep the family business running. Looking back, Chapman believes the name of the business stemmed from its proximity to nearby Jackson St. However, the mystery remains what exactly happened to Jackson’s Laundry. John Wilhelm died in 1936 at the age of 59. Many years later, his wife Mabel passed away and was listed in a death notice as “the widow of John W. Peuster, owner of the John’s

Overall laundry.”

It is not known whether this is the same business. One thing is clear, though, it was a special time for the family who loved to socialize once the day’s work was all completed. As Chapman explained, “We all got together so much and played games. We played croquet out on the lawn. We just had a wonderful time. I wish families could do that now.”

For the Route Pro himself, the discovery proved to be inspiring. “I still get emotional thinking of what life was like for my great grandfather and his family. To think of how they bonded together to serve others with free pickup and delivery almost 100 years ago,” James said.



Jackson’s Laundry ran out of the Peuster family home in Kansas City, MO. When owner John W. Peuster fell ill with cancer, his children quit school to help him with the business, including daughters Leona (left) and Esther.



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SHIRT TALES



BY DON DESROSIERS

Why are shirts such a pain for cleaners?

Shirts are a pain because the equipment necessary to do them is expensive and specialized. There probably is one singular thing that is more frustrating than dropping \$50,000 or more on a shirt unit and that is finding out that you can't do as good of a job as the "professionals" at the trade show once you get that shirt unit into your store. I thought that we were the professionals?!

It is indeed aggravating to need to buy a new shirt unit so that we can make no money on them. Although we may not ever use our legger for anything but pressing pants, there is a comfort zone there in our hearts that says we could use it to press anything if we really had to. Not so with the shirt unit. Try as hard as I might, but I still

can't press a dress on the shirt unit. It is for shirts only. Period.

Imagine if each type of garment that you process needed a separate, specialized piece of equipment to finish it? What a nightmare that would be! Admittedly, it's not the norm, but the smallest drycleaning plants have one singular press with which every garment is finished — except shirts. Gotta sub those out because we don't have a shirt unit.

Delegating shirts to a third party lends to the annoyance that they have become. We either have our own shirt equipment, or we don't. Either way, the very fact that shirts require this specialized equipment makes them a pain.

With our own equipment, we either have a shirt area

that takes too much space or takes just a little bit of space and is jammed into an otherwise useless corner of the plant.

When it's the former, we thankfully never bother to calculate profit by square foot of real estate used. If we did that, surely depression would set in. If we shoved our shirt equipment into the corner, we would reason that while it is not the ultimate in efficiency, doing shirts on the premises is better than using a wholesaler. Hmm. I wonder.

In the drycleaning department, we can make equipment contributions. We can buy a couple of new all-steam irons. We can finagle a way to get a new Cindy-Lou in there. Puff iron's had it? No problem. You can pick one up at the trade show next weekend.

Thinking about tensioning equipment? You can change over the pants station first, or one pants station at a time. After you get comfortable with it, you can complete the change over at your own pace.

All this isn't true in the \$@#&*% shirt department. No wonder they're such a pain! When it comes to the equipment in the shirt department, it's all or nothing. Sure, you can trash your sleeve and body press for a rotary unit and keep the collar and cuff machine, but it

still costs tons of money to do that. It isn't the same as buying a puffer for a few hundred bucks.

Buying shirt equipment is a major investment and not one that we want to make over and over again. In fact, more often than not, this investment is delayed until our back is against the wall. This lends to shirts being a pain. The equipment that we have is patched up, bandage over bandage in an effort to stall the purchase of replacement equipment.

This leads to sub-par press quality, which in turn, contributes to shirts being a pain. The shirts don't contribute profit, but they surely contribute problems and aggravation.

Sometimes we replace our equipment with used equipment. While this is surely not always a bad thing, it is possible that you are simply trading away the problems that you're having with your equipment for the problems that someone else was having with your "new" stuff. We loathe even more the thought of replacing that equipment anytime soon. All this solidifies the resentment that we have for shirts and the equipment that they require.

The only way to get around all this is to be certain that the cost to replace your equipment and the cost to maintain it are built into

the retail price for shirt service. This doesn't mean charging just enough to cover the mortgage payment. It means charging enough to cover all of your operating costs — labor, supplies, utilities and everything else — plus any and all amortization costs, **plus profit**.

Add to that some sort of reserve so that when your equipment does need replacing it can be done easily and painlessly. If your equipment is paid for, you really need to be escrowing a substantial portion of your revenue for the inevitable replacement of your equipment.

If this simple statement convinces you that you need to raise your retail price per shirt, say, 20 cents to save up for new shirt equipment, that's great, but you're only halfway there.

You must take that 20 cents and let it accumulate so that after doing 2,000 shirts per week for the next 52 weeks, you'll have over \$20,000 saved up for new equipment. This isn't profit. Don't spend it on something else!

If you tell your maintenance man and your pressers and your touch-up person that a new shirt unit is in the relatively near future, they will feel a whole lot better about the problems that they may be having with the breakdowns and the press quality.

You make shirts a real pain when you charge \$2.25 for shirts — because that is what others are charging — with the genuine hope that this income level is adequate to cover all of your expenses. It really is a bad way to arrive at a retail price.

"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 40 Winchester Ln, Suite #5, Fall River, MA 02721, by cell (508) 965-3163, or email at tailwind.don@me.com. The Tailwind web site is www.tailwind-systems.com.

Shirt Tip: How to get "free" shirt equipment

If you think that you need shirt equipment but are sure that you can't afford it or you just don't want to spend the money... check this out. You may already be paying for new equipment in the way of downtime and lost productivity. Keep accurate hourly shirts per hour production records. Whenever there is a breakdown, make an explicit note describing it. Let's say that the collar/cuff machine broke down for one hour. This caused five people to hang around and watch each other's hair grow for, collectively, five hours. This cost you \$50 or more. Add to that the maintenance man's times and parts and multiply it by the number of times that this happens in a month and you may find you're already paying for that new shirt unit that you want so badly. Do the math. It may surprise you.

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THE ROUTE PRO



BY JAMES PEUSTER

Ten questions you should ask yourself

Our world changed and we did everything in our mind, power and limited budget to adjust. Piece counts were already down then boom.... anyone who has read *Who Moved My Cheese?* sat down and looked at 2020 as the end. Drycleaners reinvented themselves, pivoted, stepped back or any other cliché we can apply to last year. Now normal conversation

either includes “the new normal” or “the way it used to be.” Now the forums have exploded with best practices, ideas and why not’s. As a consultant, I was on the phone more during the past 15 months than I probably was in the last 15 years. Don’t get me wrong, it wasn’t that I am complaining; it was just challenging to watch those fight to survive as others dropped off.

Yes, the dust has settled but the number one question I hear now is: Should we (fill in the blank)? Following are my top 10 questions that you should seriously ask yourself or use to evaluate your current situation before exploring other avenues.

1. Is it truly scalable?
Not everyone’s demographics are conducive to certain operational changes. Scalable simply means can you grow while your operational percentages decrease.

2. Is it truly profitable?
One thing Al Robson preached is that “The Bottom Line is the Bottom.”

3. Is it sustainable?
Too often things take off but don’t stick. The newness and true customer experience wears off.

4. Is it going to take away my focus on what is working?
Many of you have rebounded nicely.

5. Do my customers truly want this service?
Remember, every market is

different.

6. Will we have to adjust our brand?
Ask yourself if this changes your mission statement or vision.

7. Can we project the ROI of the new or additional endeavor?
This is often overlooked.

8. Does this truly give me a competitive edge?
Will your customers leave if you don’t?

9. Do you have the right team on board to support the changes?

This can make or break the addition.

10. Do you have the right leaders in place to launch?

One of the biggest mistakes that owners make is delegating to other departments that are already overloaded. The bottom line is this: What works for some doesn’t work for others. The easiest way to grow your business is to see what is working in other industries and see if there is a fit for this industry. If you answered “I don’t know” to some of the questions above, don’t worry. You are not the only one.

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.

DLI to host July webinars, zoom meetings

The Drycleaning and Laundry Institute plans to continue to offer webinar programs and membership zoom meetings throughout July. The webinars will be held on Wednesdays at 1 p.m. EST and the Zoom meetings will continue to be held at 11:30 a.m. EST on Tuesdays. However, due to the 4th of July holiday during the first week of the month, DLI will not host any virtual offerings that week. As an added benefit, DLI members gain access to the association’s complete library of videos covering a wide variety of topics. For more information, visit DLI at www.DLIonline.org.



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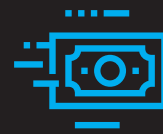
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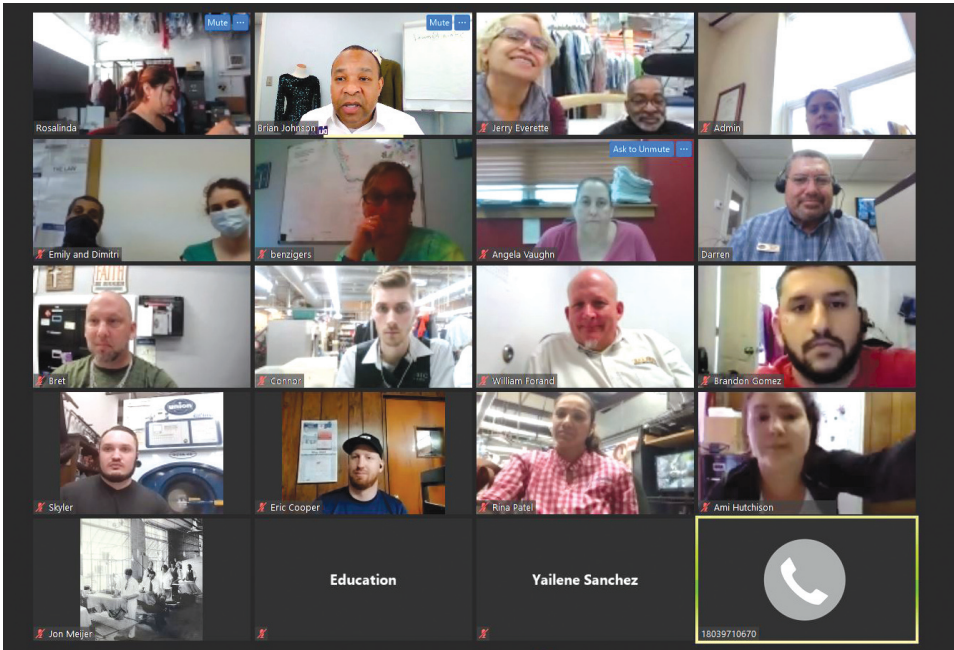
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Eighteen students recently attended the first-ever Virtual Stain Removal course offered by the Drycleaning and Laundry Institute. The association adapted the course to work in an online-only format, adding extra flexibility to help students succeed in the course.

“Convenience was a huge factor for the students,” noted Brian Johnson, DLI’s director of education and training. “The students loved it because they didn’t have to leave their jobs and families to come to the school. With the online course they could develop this critical skill without having to be away from work or home.”

“The pandemic hit our industry hard,” continued Johnson. “In our school’s 94-year history we were only closed one other time — during World War II. With this course, we offered in-depth virtual, live training. Demand was very high for this course and we purposely kept the class size small so we could address any issues that might come up but there really weren’t any problems. We’re offering another session for this course starting July 13.”

The course was comprised of six sessions over a three-week period, meeting on Tuesdays and Thursdays for three hours at a time. For information on future DLI offerings, call (800) 638-2627 or visit them online at www.DLIonline.org.



DLI offered its first-ever Virtual Stain Removal course recently. A second session is scheduled to take place from July 13 to Aug. 3.

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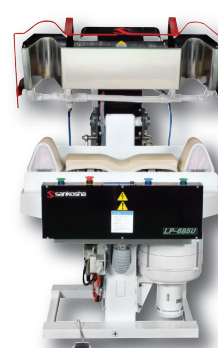
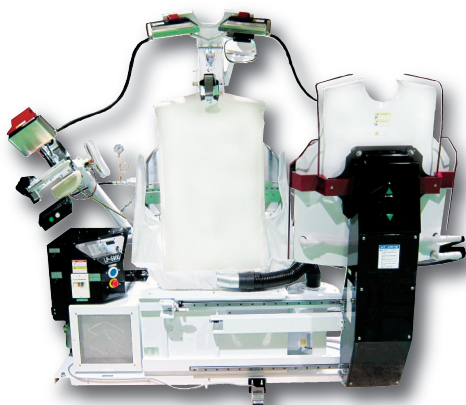
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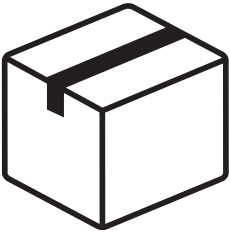
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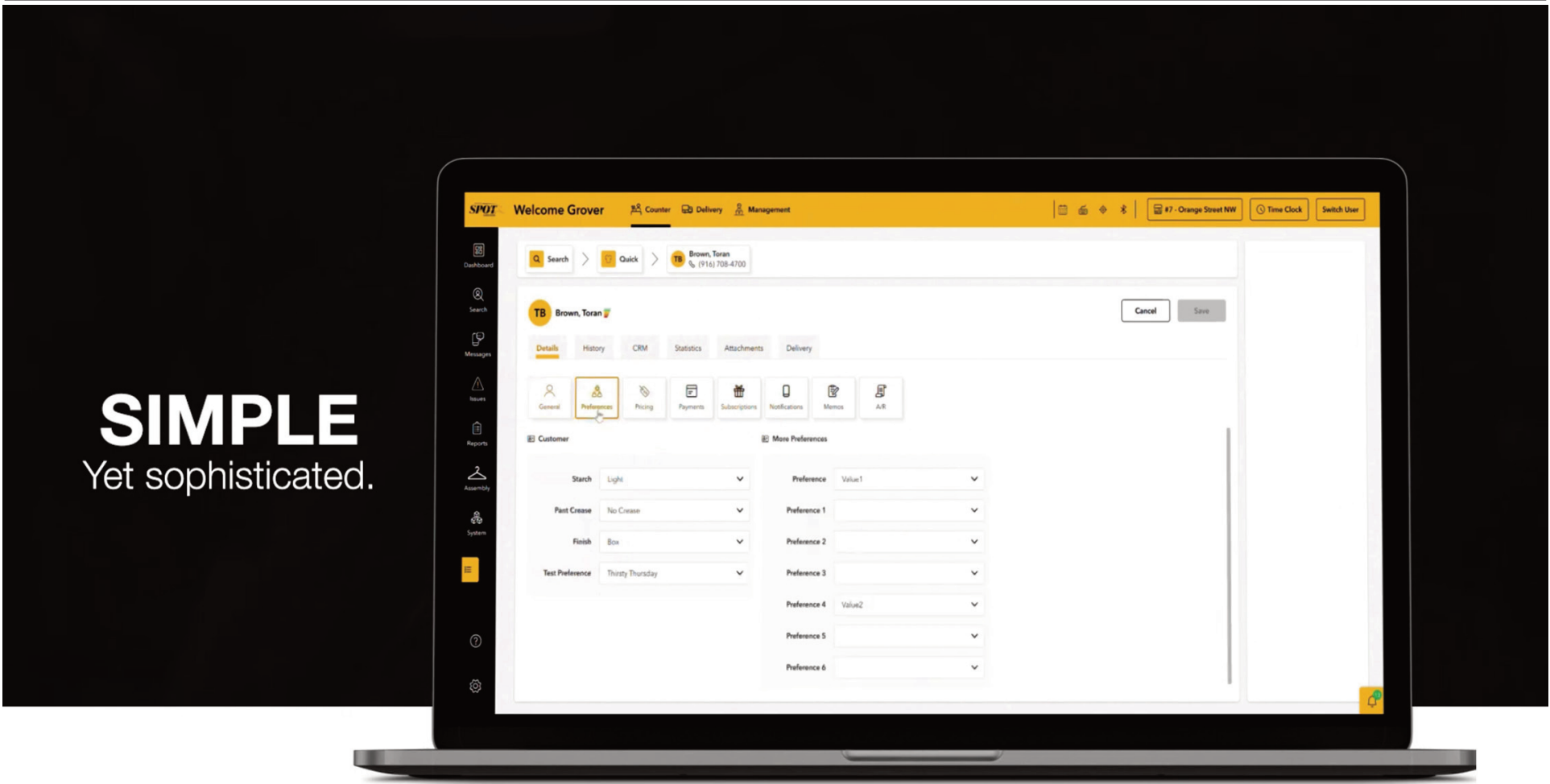
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