



National Clothesline



December 2021

Volume 60 Number 3

www.nationalclothesline.com

Industry balancing act to continue in 2022

As cleaners prepare to close the door on 2021 (and perhaps throw away the key), the last 11 months have proven to be another arduous challenge, harshly punctuated by shortages of every imaginable kind: hangers, plastic, com-

puter chips, steel and other metals, lumber, packaging materials, zippers and even clothing, to name a few.

More troubling than having less new garments manufactured (and, thus, less in need of cleaning in the fu-

ture), however, has been the dual-edged sword of customers and employees being in frustratingly short supply.

Those conditions have lead to a significant reduction in the number of cleaners in the country, while many who still remain open have often done so by achieving a delicate balancing act of cutting costs, raising prices, improving efficiency... while adding or emphasizing the services that have been in highest demand in their marketplace.

Shellshocked and exhausted, drycleaners have still displayed considerable resilience by working together over a protracted period to eradicate one shortage, at least: information. Industry members and associations alike have

stepped up in a big way during times of upheaval, including the 138-year-old Drycleaning and Laundry Institute, which might have had its busiest year ever.

DLI has released over 150 ready-made social media designs for members; sent out 50 *Monday Morning Marketing News* articles written by Dave Coyle of Maverick Drycleaners; updated its hanger recycling publicity materials; and have produced and archived more than 75 training programs for its members which cover a wide variety of topics such as diversification, maintenance, man-

agement and business sales and acquisitions.

Additionally, the association hosted its first three sessions of the new Virtual Stain

Removal course plus more than 75 peer-to-peer Zoom meetings, launched a Marketing Lab program allowing non-competing members to share

marketing strategies, as well as its Inner Circle management group coordinated by Diana Vollmer.

DLI hopes to build on that momentum and offer eight live in-person seminars at Clean Show 2022 in Atlanta, GA, from July 30 to Aug. 2.

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DRYCLEANING & LAUNDRY INSTITUTE INTERNATIONAL

AN OUTSIDE PERSPECTIVE



BY PETER BLAKE

Looking through to '22

Light always follows darkness

It has been a long, interesting and challenging 18 months, to say the least.

I know I have never worked harder or more hours than I have during the past year and a half. I also know I am not alone, and almost everyone reading this article can probably say the same.

Over the past several weeks I have heard from business owners and managers who are working hard in the trenches — more than I have heard about at any point in my 35 years in the industry. The pressures of the pandemic have given birth to a host of new challenges we will all need to answer, and a plethora of opportunities that you can capitalize on.

I talk to people up and down the Eastern Seaboard and constantly hear how people are tired, frustrated and overwhelmed. Let me assure you — you are not alone. Everyone echoes your feelings and we are all dealing with the same issues. The lack of an available labor pool has stressed out our entire economy. Rapidly rising pay scales are driving inflation on everything. The main cause of the supply chain crisis is the significant lack of a labor force. There are simply not enough workers to unload the container ships, transport stock or to finally deliver the goods.

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Creating a media circus



Paul Bodin, former owner of Life Cleaners in Yonkers, NY, uses a brush to clean a baby elephant from the visiting Ringling Brothers Circus troupe. It was a PR ploy he used when he branched out his business to include self-service car washes in the 1960s. Read how today's owner Ross Bodin and previous family generations have adapted Life over the years — a battle that seems to have gotten more difficult during the pandemic. For the story, see page 6.

Cleaners stretched too thin to attend

FallFest EXPO pushes date back

Even though interest for FallFest EXPO remains high, many cleaners are too short-staffed and overburdened to spend three days devoted to it in early December. As a result, the North East Fabricare Association, the South Eastern Fabricare Association and the Pennsylvania and Delaware Cleaners Association have pushed the event back until Jan. 19-21. Also changing is the name: WinterFest 2022. However, the

scheduled lineup of speakers plans to remain the same.

"While we had a strong registration and interest level, there was growing concern for these registrants to fully participate in the event," said

Peter Blake, executive director of NEFA and SEFA. "With owners and managers

stretched so thin in this labor market — sometimes to the breaking point — they were concerned about their ability

to get the maximum value from the program."

"We really weighed the needs of the attendee with the Return on Investment for the sponsors and attendees alike and realized it was in everyone's best interests to move to January when the holiday pressure will be less," added Leslie Schaeffer, PDCA executive director.

All registrations will transfer automatically to the new dates and registration links will not change. For updates, visit nefabricare.com or contact Leslie@pdclean.org.



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Santa has let him down before, but Don Desrosiers has whittled his annual wishlist down to just one item.

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He was a key figure and executive for DLI for over 30 years before he passed away at 94 years old.

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There are plenty of reasonable arguments to hide that 2021 book away and

Then, in October, a packed house full of visiting cleaners attended the California Cleaners Association's Fabricare 2021 conference in Las Vegas, and later that month, DLI reopened in-person classes at its School of Drycleaning Technology. If that isn't enough reason to feel a bit of optimism, consider this: Clean 2022 has sold 90% of its exhibit space and it's still about half a year away. The industry continues to strive forward — albeit excruciatingly slow at times — but small steps in the right direction are better than big steps in the wrong one. Good luck in 2022.

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Be sure to visit www.nationalclothesline.com, for additional coverage of the drycleaning industry.

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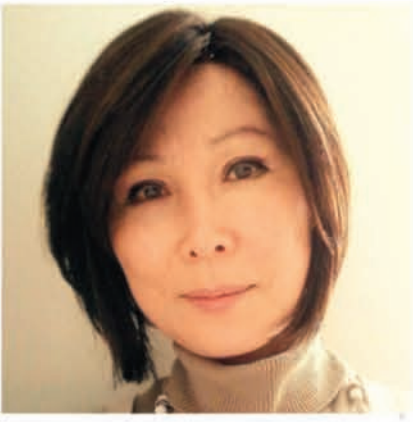


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Life goes on

For the Bodin family, starting a cleaning business in Yonkers, NY, was an opportunity for a clean slate. Before that, 12-year-old Paul Bodin and his father, David, had been forced to flee their native country during the Russian Revolution (during which the family business in Kiev was confiscated). An old article from the *Herald Statesman* noted that the young man “came to the city in 1923 with \$1 in his pocket.”

With no capital, Paul and his father started a business the following year called Glenwood Laundry, creatively operated on a shoestring budget. They bought shelving and fixtures from a shoe store that had gone out of business, and Paul’s night school teacher used his connections to get them connected with NY Telephone and Con Edison without paying deposits.

In order to make extra money on occasion, Paul repaired equipment at Yonkers Perfect Laundry, a local linen business. Over time, he became friends with one of the owners who convinced him to buy his partner out. Eventually, Paul bought that friend out and was sole owner of Yonkers Perfect Laundry.

“This is the folklore,” explained Ross Bodin, the fourth generation of his family to operate the business. “In 1963, Yonkers Perfect Laundry burned to the ground. My grandfather was at the Playboy Club in Manhattan. What I’m told — I guess normally the insurance adjusters would always think it was a fire set by the owner, but my grandfather had no debt in the business. When he came back to see the fire and so forth, his friend Father Anthony Pucci came up to him and said, ‘From these ashes will come life.’ So, in 1964 — when they rebuilt it — they renamed it Life Cleaners.”

Not one to give up, Paul endlessly promoted his business, and he derived a few fun ways to expand his cleaning services.

“Way back in the 1960s, my grandfather started a company where he would install these self-service car washes next to gas stations,” Ross recalled. “My grandfather was a phenomenal marketing guy. Every year that Ringling Brothers would come into town — however he would get it done — he would get a baby elephant to come to Life Cleaners and they would give it a car wash. Then, they would give out tickets to the circus.”

In 1965, Ross’s father Murray joined the family business and it shifted from a linen company to drycleaning and shirt laundry. In fact, each generation of the family has brought something new to the business.

“It changed with every owner,” Ross noted. “With my grandfather, he was super social and he knew everyone so he was able to meet and greet, get into a lot of different businesses into the cleaning area. My father was a technician. He was great at running the operation. I’ll say I will look at the industry and try to pick and choose what I feel is different than where the masses are going towards. What’s great about that

is there is no right answer.”

For Ross, the right answer was not Life Cleaners — at least, initially. After earning a BA in Economics and an MBA in Finance, he worked as an importer and exporter of photo-related items with Photo World Distributors in 1990.

porate stores in Winchester inside major companies such as Texaco, Shop-Rite and Mastercard. For a year, he gave them his best sales pitches. Unfortunately, he came up empty.

“If the company has no complaints from their current supplier, they’re not looking for a new one,” he said. “So, I found out who, in my opinion, were

There are some cleaners out there that are doing OK, but I think most are struggling, as am I. I think I’m a relatively smart guy, but I don’t think the answer is going to be in the way that it’s worked in the past. I haven’t figured out what I need to bring in more volume from other industries. I don’t know yet.”



Ross Bodin

Life Cleaners
Yonkers, NY

“It was just a blast. The business was constantly changing,” he explained. “It was a very competitive business. One of the decisions I made was to expand our picture frame business. I went off to the Orient and started purchasing picture frames from China, Taiwan, Thailand — and then I’d bring them back to the U.S. to create a catalog within our photo industry.”

However, the following year Ross believed he was ready to run his own business just as his father happened to be in the process of retiring. By that time, much of the equipment had become outdated and Life Cleaners was in need of some new air being pumped into it.

“For the first couple of years, I actually went out and visited other plants to see what other operators were doing,” Ross said. “Based on that, we redid the whole production area and changed what my father had done, and made it much more efficient. We ran with that for a number of years.”

A handful of years into his tenure as owner, Ross had an epiphany. For years, he had read industry publications touting delivery routes as the future, but he didn’t want to do that. So, he made the routes come to him instead.

“I figured as regulations were going to go up, some of these operators were not going to be able to upgrade their equipment and pay their rent and so forth,” he explained. “So, my epiphany was I created areas within my plant where these operators could set up their computer system, pick up orders, do their own routes — bring it into my plant and write it up. Then, we would do all of the production and give it back to them in a certain area.”

Doing wholesale work without having to transport the garments was a great niche, but Ross also continued to experiment with the idea of having cor-

porate stores in Winchester inside major companies such as Texaco, Shop-Rite and Mastercard. For a year, he gave them his best sales pitches. Unfortunately, he came up empty.

“If the company has no complaints from their current supplier, they’re not looking for a new one,” he said. “So, I found out who, in my opinion, were

While the corporate stores provided a steady stream of high end attire cleaning, Ross never stopped looking for rare opportunities. When a film crew for *Seven Seconds* rolled their cameras in Yonkers about eight years ago, he visited the production company office, introduced himself and mentioned his cleaning resume. Again, nothing happened... well, not until the last day of shooting when the crew arrived with an order that needed a quick turnaround.

That first step into the door steamrolled into opportunities in Brooklyn, Manhattan and all over New York. “Some of the stuff that comes in is just so out of this world,” Ross laughed. “It’s very time sensitive and you have to do it right. If they are going to reshoot a scene, that garment has to look *exactly* as it did the first time.”

The film and television work grew to include between 10 and 15 productions a year, including *The Greatest Showman*, *Homeland*, *Limitless*, *Bull*, *Succession*, *The Photograph* and *White House Plumbers* (an HBO series starring Woody Harrelson that hasn’t been released yet).

Before the pandemic, business was indeed booming and Life Cleaners employed about 30 people. Then, the two niches Ross had spent years pursuing and perfecting literally disappeared overnight in March of 2020.

These days, Life Cleaners’ staff has been cut in half and the incoming work has dwindled down. It has been a struggle and, making matters worse, there is no visible finish line.

“New York was hit harder than most, from what I’m told. It’s difficult,” Ross admitted. “There is no answer for what’s going to make you successful.

After almost three decades in the industry, Ross is still looking for new niches for the business.

“I’m keeping the business going. I’m looking for opportunities,” he said. “I couldn’t have done this when I was younger. I guess as I’ve gotten older, maybe I’ve gotten smarter — but over the last four or five years, I’ve become friends with a lot of the drycleaners in the area whereas when I was younger, I was all about competition. Now, this guy and I have lunch every now and then and we share what’s going on with our businesses and it lets us know that it’s not just us... it is the area. That is worth so much because it lets me know that it’s not something I’m doing.”

After a lifetime in business, Ross has come to the conclusion that there are only so many things in his control, which isn’t always easy to accept.

“One of the things I’ve learned — it’s finally been beaten into me — is that I may think I’m smart and so forth but I’m not going to recreate the world,” he noted. “The way that I look at my business right now is we’re trying to run it as efficiently as possible using as minimal of staff as possible, because what I knew to be a great business to me has been devastated and there’s nothing I can do to bring back my corporate division. It’s totally out of my hands.”

With no fifth generation waiting in the wings and an unstable business climate, life for Life Cleaners is anything but rosy. Still, perhaps there is a chance for Life to rise from the ashes again.

“The future holds so many things. Drycleaning will be a part of it to a degree,” he noted. “I know it’s a tough road ahead, but my only message to the industry is that we really need to help each other out, more so. We all need to be sources of information to each other because you never know what you’re going to gain by being helpful to who you think of as your competitor.”

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AN OUTSIDE PERSPECTIVE



BY PETER BLAKE

Light always follows the darkness

Continued from page 1

Turn back the clock 15 months ago and we were all struggling to find out where we were going to get the volume to help sustain our businesses. All my efforts and columns were on how to get new business, where to look for more revenue. The good news is we have done a pretty good job at identifying those areas, and members and cleaners throughout the country have expanded their menu of services to focus on the needs of today. Wash-dry-fold, pickup and delivery, households — all of these segments of our industry have seen dramatic growth.

Fast forward to today and the discussion has changed from how to get volume to how to handle the volume you have. Now, the challenges are getting the production needed to service the volume you have picked up.

I honestly cannot remember a time when I have heard so many businesses turning away work or referring it to

competitors just because they know they can't get the work done. Plants are working four-day weeks to maximize the production of the employees they do have. Adjustments are being made

Look at where you are. Then, make a vision of where you need to be in 2022. Look at the things you are learning today — your experiences — and build on those in a positive direction.

I believe we can all find solace in one basic truism: Light always follows the darkness.

constantly in how we do business. I didn't foresee the issue being production.

As we look to turn the page on an eventful 2021, we can only wonder what 2022 will have in store for us. As I look ahead, I believe we can all find solace in one basic truism: "Light always follows the darkness."

The coming year will undoubtedly bring us more challenges that we will need to face and overcome, but it will also bring us new opportunities. Stop. Take a breath.

For those of you battling in the trenches of production, think about how your employees feel knowing that you are right there with them working side by side. Understanding their workload can go a long way in mutually understanding the hardships you feel. Getting to know your employees better is a strength that will undoubtedly help you build a stronger team moving forward.

While our business constantly changes as styles, fab-

rics and fashion trends dictate — the true fundamentals do not. People will always wear clothing and will always need to have that clothing cared for. Our job is to help them realize the benefits of having us do it for them.

Saving time, protecting the investment in your wardrobe and making you look good are still the cornerstones of what we offer. We just have to make a shift in how we make that impression. Years ago, drycleaning was synonymous with fashion. Your good clothes were brought to the drycleaner — your church clothes, business clothes, the clothes you wear for entertaining. That has shifted now.

With the blending of fashion and fabrics and the casualization of society, drycleaning is more often seen as unnecessary. We need to change our message to be more inclusive. We need to reeducate our potential customers to understand we are here to care for the fabric of their lives. We are no longer just shirts and skirts, dresses and suits. We are: "If you wear it, we can clean it." This is a popular mantra right now. We need to go even beyond that to include all the fabrics, including linens, sheets, comforters, etc.

Join the Discussion

I will say, I am very proud of the work that DLI and all

of its affiliate associations have been doing to support our members to help them through these challenging times. I can honestly say there has never been a better or more useful time to be an association member than now. If you are a member, join in the weekly peer-to-peer calls when we discuss all these issues and much more. It is a great way to learn what is happening in the industry and to talk to people from around the country and learn how to take advantage of the opportunities out there.

If you are not a member, then join in some of the other groups out there that have similar programs, like chambers of commerce, business networking groups or local business coalitions. Our challenges are not unique to our industry. All small businesses are feeling it.

As you look forward, the best thing you can do is to keep your mind and ears open.

There are tremendous opportunities ahead. Together we can all learn how to make them work for all of us.

Peter Blake serves as executive director of the North East Fabricare Association, the Southeastern Fabricare Association, and the MidAtlantic Association of Cleaners. He can be reached by email at peteblke@aol.com or by phone at (617) 791-0128.

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(Pictured left to right) Cody Delonge from Curtis Cleaners of Lowell, MI, Zack Wehde from Five Corners Cleaners of Glen Ellyn, IL, and Angel House from Puritan Cleaners of Richmond, VA, display their certificates for leadership and management training which officially make them Route Pro Leaders. They attended Route Pro University, located in Kansas City, MO, in October.

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SHIRT TALES



BY DON DESROSIERS

Don’s wishlist to St. Nick: 2021 edition

Happy December! It is that time once again for my annual Christmas Wishlist. Every year, I send a plea to the great St. Nick for products that do not exist yet, but I believe they should. These are products of my imagination that, in my view, would help plant operators run more efficiently. These are products that would fill a real need. Some of the products that I have imagined have, indeed, come to the market; but, most

have not. With that in mind, my wishlist this year is a bit different. I still think we need a better way to present folded shirts and a better way to package them overall. When you unfold a shirt that has been “professionally” folded, the

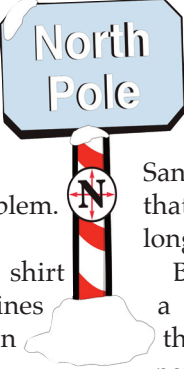
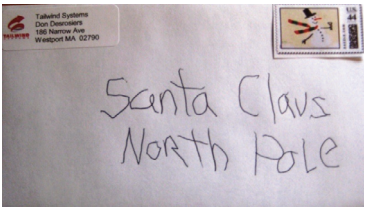
perfectly folded shirt is horrific. There has got to be a way to do that better. I still think that there needs to be a handheld button-sewer that isn’t a toy. The industrial button sewers cost \$1,000 to \$2,000 or more. There’s got to be a better way. I still think that shirt presses need to be kinder to buttons. The pads that are near buttons should be made of memory foam or something like that. Nobody wants smashed buttons.

I still think that it would be very slick to have a shirt press that makes hangers “to order.” As the shirt is pressing, a hanger is being folded from a spool of wire and ultimately “handed” to the presser. I’m told that this would be an engineering nightmare. That’s Santa’s problem. I’m the imagineer. I still think that shirt pressing machines should have built-in

“pace-setters” that would challenge the presser to keep pace and improve productivity. I still think that a shirt body press should be height-adjustable. Operator comfort is important. When a presser is short, they struggle. Back in 2006, I asked Santa Claus for a shirt presser that doesn’t call in sick! I still long for that. But, then again, when I was a kid, there were a lot of things that I asked for that I never got. I never got that minibike. I never got that train set. I had to buy my own car. Santa — I know that you’re going to whine about supply chain issues and about how 20% of your elves didn’t want to get vaccinated — so, I’m going to guess that you aren’t going to cough up any of my much-coveted goodies this year. However, I do only have one single item on my wishlist for 2021. This year, I wish for a return to normalcy. We, as citizens of the world, need to put Covid behind us. These past two years need to become the past. The sooner this plague gets lost in our collective rearview, the better we all will be. The economy needs to get back to normal, our businesses need to get back to normal and our lives need to get back to normal. So, Santa Claus — you haven’t exactly been a whiz kid when it comes to all things needed for the drycleaning and laundry industry. Let’s see if you can pull a rabbit out of your hat this Christmas and make it happen. We all need a break!

“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 phone (508) 965-3163, or email to: tailwind.don@me.com. The Tailwind web site is at www.tailwindsystems.com.



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BUILDING VALUE



BY KERMIT ENGH

Why companies use subscription billing

We have discussed recurring and subscription revenue in the past as many operators have started subscriptions for WDF, drycleaning, household items, etc. One could argue route sales fall into recurring revenue, but our focus is on subscription revenue. Creating that automatic customer is a principal factor of developing value in your business. Could you offer a subscription plan to your customers? Here are six reasons to consider it:

1. Predictability. With subscribers, you can plan what your business needs in the future. For example, the average flower store in America throws out more than half of its inventory monthly because it becomes rotten. At H. Bloom, a subscription-based flower company for hotels and spas, they say they throw out less than 2% of their flowers because they can perfectly predict how many flowers are needed to fulfill orders.

2. Eliminate Seasonality. Many businesses suffer through seasonal highs and lows. Mister Car Wash, which offers a subscription for unlimited car washes, now receives revenue in Nov. and April even though few in the northeast wash cars in rainy months (also true in the midwest dur-

ing ice/snow season).

3. Improved Valuation. Recurring/subscription revenue boosts your business's value. While most small companies trade on a multiple of profit, businesses often trade on a similar multiple of revenue.

4. Trojan Horse Effect. Once you subscribe to a service, you become much more likely to buy other things from that company. That's one reason Amazon is keen to get you to buy subscriptions for Prime or Subscribe & Save. They know you will be more likely to buy other products from them. Not only are we trapped by the convenience, but they are hoarding the available workers in many markets.

5. The Sale That Keeps on Giving. Unlike the transaction business model where you stimulate demand with advertising, a subscription-based model is sold once and it keeps giving every month.

6. Data and Market Research. When a customer subscribes, you see their spending and consumption habits. This data is the ultimate in market research. It's how Netflix knows which new shows to produce and which to kibosh.

Recurring Revenue Almost Every Business Can Adopt

A service contract is an

agreement to provide an ongoing level of service in return for a regular payment. It can be a way to transform an ordinary service company into a predictable subscription business. Most small businesses begin with the "break/fix" model where a customer has a problem and they swoop in with a solution. This may make you feel valued as a problem solver, but it comes at a cost. In the break/fix model, you must create demand, sell your product or service, deliver it, and then *start all over again*, which is why acquirers place a lower value on transactional businesses compared to subscription-based companies.

A service contract can create an ongoing income stream with potential to grow the lifetime value of a customer dramatically. When you can accurately predict how much money you receive from subscribers, you can invest more in wooing them. Also, adopting a recurring revenue model can impact your company's valuation. Recurring revenue can be worth more than twice of transactional revenue, depending on industry.

Create a Recurring Revenue Appealing to Customers

The first step has nothing to

do with your billing platform and everything to do with your target customer. The secret to turn your business into a recurring revenue juggernaut is to niche way down.

At Peloton — the fitness company that started with a souped-up stationary bike and now offers classes on everything from yoga to running — they adopted a subscription model. Customers buy the bike (or the treadmill) and then subscribe to Peloton's content package. To make their subscription sticky, they didn't just target people who wanted to get fit. Instead, they targeted affluent people too busy to go to the gym. While the single young adult sees a spinning class at a local gym as a chance to connect with like-minded people, Peloton knew the forty-something mom with three kids often doesn't have the time to go. So, they defined their target customer as relatively affluent fitness enthusiasts who don't have time for the gym — *a niche of a niche*. Year to date for 2020, Peloton's share price has more than tripled. In order to come up with a model that works for you, segment your customers based on what makes them buy from you. Then, determine if one of your niches has a recurring need for something you sell. For a recurring revenue model to retain subscribers, it must provide an outlandishly attractive value proposition to customers who agree to continue with the service over time. In other words, you must find a pain point where a group of customers feels uniform. That only happens when you niche way down.

The New Measuring Stick

One challenge of building a subscription business is the need to relearn the basics of how to measure progress. Traditionally, you've probably measured your business using a profit-and-loss (P&L) statement, which counts the total money you make after paying expenses plus the cost to make what it is you sell. With subscriptions, instead of selling a finite offering, you are essentially renting access to your product or service over time.

In a subscription business, understanding your financial performance requires new operating statistics. The foundation of your subscription business is built on your monthly recurring revenue (MRR). This is the recurring revenue listed on your company's P&L every month. The next number you need is the lifetime value (LTV) of a subscriber. LTV is calculated by multiplying your MRR by the number of months your customer stays with you, less the cost of serving them during that lifespan. If your average subscriber stays 30 months, then the LTV of a subscriber is

$30 \times \$99.00$ for a W-D-F service of \$3,000.

The next data point you need is your customer acquisition cost (CAC). This is how much you spend on sales and marketing to win a new subscriber. If your total expenditure on sales last month was \$2,000 and you acquired 25 subscribers, your CAC would be \$80 during that period (\$2,000 divided by 25). Your true CAC will be revealed after you pick the low-hanging fruit. Your friends, family, and best customers will likely subscribe to new offering out of loyalty. You need to discount them in your calculation.

Arguably, the most crucial factor contributing to your subscription business viability is the rate at which customers quit subscribing; this is known as your churn rate. To calculate your MRR churn rate, take your MRR at the start of the month and divide it by the amount of lost MRR that month. You can calculate your monthly customer churn rate by taking the number of customers who leave you in a given month and dividing it by the total number of customers you had going into the month.

Another number you need to know is the cost of serving each new subscriber. Considered part of your cost of goods sold, this varies based on how many customers you bring on. For most subscription businesses, it includes the salary and other costs of staff you hire to get new customers and serve them over time. A big decision is how you plan to win new subscribers. The more complex your offer, the more you will need to rely on humans to sell it. Here's a few sales approaches often used by subscription businesses (from most to least expensive):

1. Field salespeople. These are the people who visit customers face-to-face.

2. Telesales. Salespeople who contact customers remotely — telephone and email — work over shorter sales cycles.

3. Self-serve. Subscribers don't need direct access to salespeople in this system. Many operators allow customers to sign up on their site.

Either way, there is one more essential ingredient you'll need. Cash is to a subscription business as oxygen is to humans. If you don't have it, no matter how healthy you are on other measures, you're dead.

Until next time, have a wonderful holiday season, and enjoy building value.

Kermit Engh has been an owner/operator in the drycleaning industry for over 28 years, a member of Methods for Management for over 24 years. To receive your Value Builders Score, visit: mfmbusinesscoaching.com.

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Industry balancing act will continue in 2022

Continued from page 1

General booth sales opened up in early April and the floor space currently stands already at about 90% of exhibit space sold.

It is also important to note that the deadline is July 7 for the discounted block of rooms.

Numerous hotel options are available, including the Atlanta Marriott Marquis (which will serve as headquarters for DLI), the Omni Hotel at CNN Center, the Renaissance Atlanta Midtown and a half dozen others nearby. Rates range from \$175 to \$259 nightly, plus taxes.

For more information or to make hotel reservations, visit the *Planning and Preparation* section at cleanshow.com.

Live Aid

There is no doubt that virtual offerings have immensely aided the industry — including SpringFest and FallFest by the North East Fabricare Association, the Pennsylvania and Delaware Cleaners Association and the South Eastern Fabricare Association, as well as America's Best Cleaners' Leadership Forum series.

However, the Fabricare 2021 conference hosted by the California Cleaners Association early in October at the

Sahara Las Vegas Hotel, provided an emotional turning point for many attendees who clearly missed conversing in person with their colleagues.

It was the first live industry event since late 2019, and the response was enthusiastic. A full house of energized entrepreneurs all gathered together to share some business strategies and stories of how they combatted the chaotic economic climate conditions caused by the aftermath of COVID-19.

Hopefully, that event's success will carry over to the Clean Show in 2022 as a sign of better times ahead.



THE TUCHMAN ADVISORY GROUP met in person for the first time in two years at Reid's Cleaners of Austin, TX, in early November. Pictured at the event are: (back row, left to right) Lee Makepeace (Medlin-Davis/North), Ben Combs (Judi's Cleaners), Bob Singer (Flair Cleaners), Richard Thum (Five Star Cleaners), Erica Billoni (Colvin Cleaners), Grant Carson (Martinizing-Alameda), Heath Bolin (Sparkle Cleaners), Drew Singer (Flair Cleaners) and Karl Schulte (Reid's Cleaners); (front row, left to right) David Makepeace (Medlin-Davis North), Dana Boudin (Sparkle Cleaners), Paul Billoni (Colvin Cleaners), Ellen Rothman (Tuchman Advisory Group), Veronica Cruz (Reid's Cleaners), Jana Janssen (Martinizing GreenEarth) and Mary Combs (Judi's Cleaners).



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Obituary

Charles Robert Riggott of DLI

Charles Robert Riggott, formerly of Silver Spring, MD, and a key figure and executive for the Charles Riggott Drycleaning and Laundry Institute for more than three decades, passed away on Oct. 17. He was 94 years old.

During his professional tenure with the organization, he served as the head of engineering from 1956 to 1972, when it was known as the National Institute of Drycleaning. He then worked a short stint as assistant general manager before stepping into the role of general manager in 1976. By then, the organization was called the International Fabricare Institute.

He served in that position until 1993. The following year, DLI honored him with its Distinguished Service Award. Following his death, the association posted on its Facebook page: "DLI mourns his passing and wishes his family and many friends strength and light."

Riggott is survived by his wife of 73 years, Loretta Riggott; a son, Tim Riggott (Jane) and a daughter, Beth Healy (Rick). He also leaves behind two grandsons, Chad Riggott (Beth) and Drew Riggott, as well as two great-grandsons, Ryan and Allen. He was preceded in death by his parents, Miriam Hardy and Charles Stephen Riggott; his sister, Evelyn Egley; and son, Charles Jeffrey Riggott.





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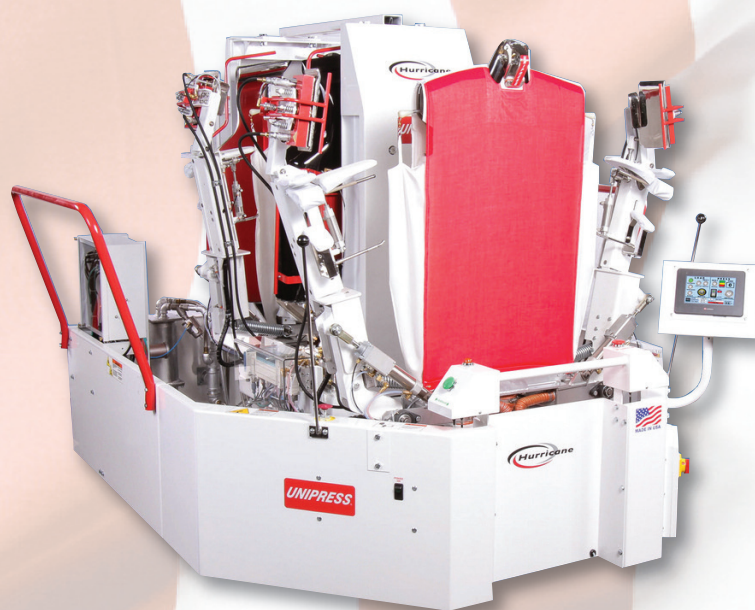
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WRENCH WORKS



By BRUCE GROSSMAN

The Drycleaner's Toolbox — Part I

This month's article is the first in the Drycleaner's Toolbox series, which will cover the qualities and use of commonly available repair items every drycleaner should have on hand and learn to use. It may save you big money by making small repairs — instead of paying for them.

One of the most versatile repair products in your toolbox are Teflon products. Teflon has four wonderful qualities that are especially suited to our industry. First, its temperature range is from -50° F to around 400° F, thus allowing its use on the steam piping in a normal drycleaning/laundry operation. Second, it is chemically resistant to just about anything you can slop on or over it, including any of the solvents you may be using, in either a liquid or vapor form. Third, it has self-sealing and self-lubricating qualities which seal leaks and allow for easy future disassembly of whatever it's being used on. Last, but not least, it comes in several forms — each well suited to a particular leak stopping and/or assembly application. I'll give a quick list of the types of Teflon, then their uses.

Teflon tape. By now, you are all familiar with Teflon in the form of a tape. Teflon tape comes in various widths and

thicknesses. I use 1/2" wide, dense, white-colored tape for wrapping pipe threads, making valve packing, and wrapping screws and bolts to keep them from locking up from dirt or corrosion. These tapes not only act as sealants; additionally, Teflon's self-lubricating qualities allow the pipe to screw into the fitting without *galling* — meaning friction grinding metal chips off the pipe and fittings, freezing up the assembly before a good seal is accomplished (also, galling makes it impossible to disassemble the pipe and fittings without damage).

Teflon pipe dope. This paste-like material comes in a can with a brush built into the lid. It is used to coat the threads in on pipe and in fitting before assembling these parts.

Teflon string or round packaging. Resembling spaghetti, this round form of Teflon is used to pack valves and to form seals and gaskets between flanges or other flat surfaces.

Starting with the Use of Teflon Tape

1. For sealing pipe threads. Wind at least three turns of tape around the circumference of the pipe; it is important to wind the tape in the correct direction, which is clockwise when facing the end of the pipe. This distrib-

utes the tape evenly and pulls it into the threads when a fitting is screwed onto the pipe (wound in the wrong direction, the tape will be pushed out of the threads and bunch up on the outside of the fitting). For extra sealing reliability, use Teflon pipe dope over the tape on the male end of the fitting and in the treads on the female fitting.

2. For preventing nuts, screws and bolt from freezing together or locking up. Wind two turns around the threads in a clockwise direction, same as with the pipe threads, and pull the tape tight.

3. Creating thin string packing. You will often find small valves leaking at the stems. The shut-off valves at the top and bottom of boiler sight glass fixtures are a perfect example of this kind of leak. After completing the packing procedure and tightening down the packing nut, remember this type of valve will seat with the valve completely open. **(Do not do any maintenance on a pressurized or hot boiler.)**

Compression fittings leaking steam past the compression nut is another common leak of this type. An unusually effective method to stop these leaks is to install extra Teflon packing behind the

SELECTING TEFLON PRODUCTS

WHEN PURCHASING TEFLON TAPE BE SURE IT IS MARKED AS HIGH DENSITY. SOMETIMES IT'S DIFFICULT TO FIND IN BIG BOX STORES BUT PLUMBING SUPPLY AND INDUSTRIAL HARDWARE STORES WILL USUALLY CARRY IT



WHEN PURCHASING TAPE OR PIPE DOPE (THREAD SEALANT) BE SURE IT CONTAINS TEFLON OR THE ABBREVIATION PTFE

NOTE: THE ITEMS PICTURED ARE NOT MEANT AS AN ENDORSEMENT OF THE PRODUCT OR MANUFACTURER.

WRAPPING TEFLON TAPE



ALWAYS WRAP TEFLON TAPE CLOCKWISE FACING THE NIPPLE

packing nut on valves, or the compression nut on fittings. You can quickly make this packing by taking a 12-inch length of Teflon tape and, holding one end while "spinning" the other end between the thumb and forefinger of the other hand until it forms a soft round string. Then, unscrew the leaking nut and slide it up the valve stem, or down the copper tubing in the case of a compression fit-

ting nut. Hold one end of the string and wind several turns around the valve stem or copper tubing, pulling it taut. Now, while holding tension on the string, push the packing nut or compression nut onto the valve or fitting body and screw it down. The beauty of using Teflon like this is that the nut will cut through the soft Teflon so you needn't try to cut the ends of the string, losing the tension on the packing in the process.

Well, that's all I've got time for this month. Next, we will continue to build your toolbox in articles in the following months.

Bruce Grossman is the chief of R&D for EZtimers Manufacturing, the manufacturer of the new EZ DOSE boiler compound manager and return tank level control which replaces that troublesome ball float in the condensate return tank and automatically adds the correct amount of boiler compound to the return tank preventing oxygen corrosion and scaling. Our SAHARA and DIB-M high purity separator water mister/evaporators provide a thrifty, legal method to get rid of the separator water generated by your drycleaning machine. See our ad in this issue and for further information on the EZtimers products visit www.eztimers.com. Address any questions or comments to bruce@eztimers.com or call (702) 376-6693.



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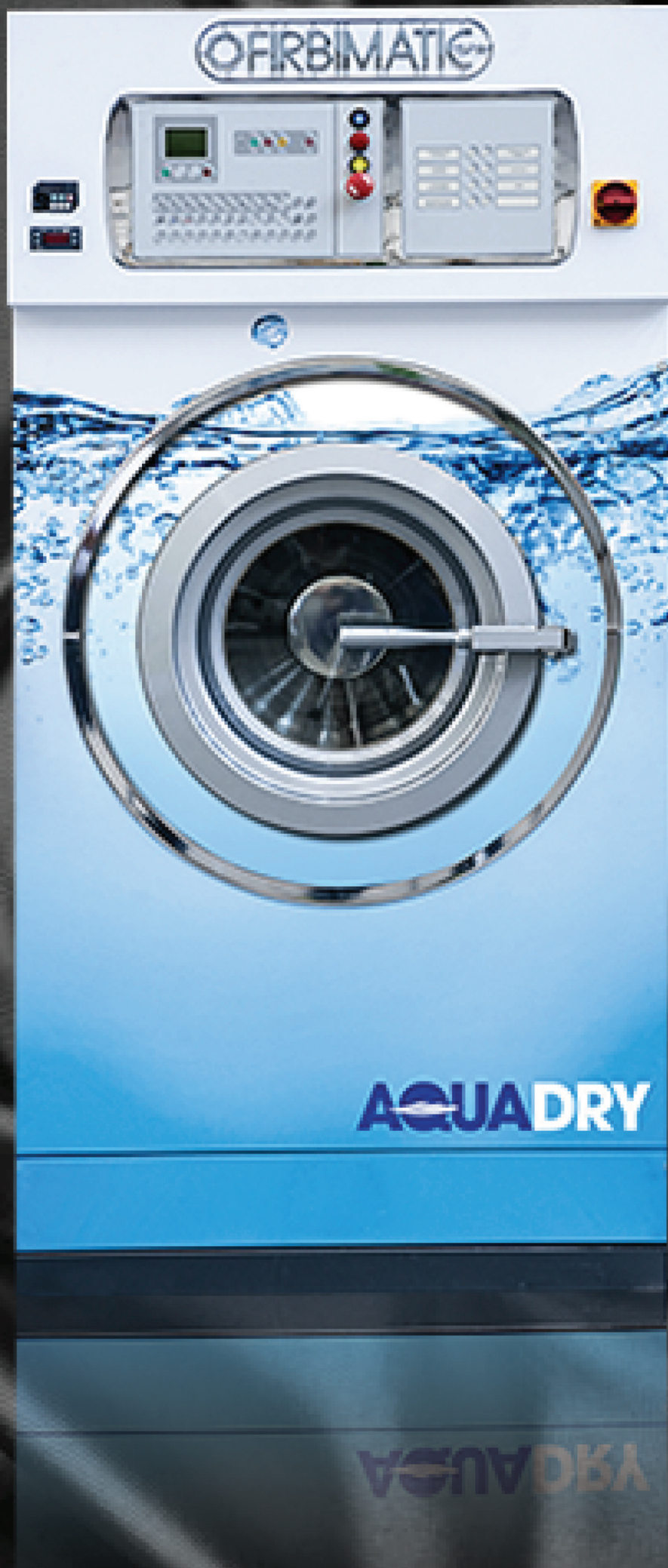
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A Tribute to James Peuster

Kudos to 20 years of consulting cleaners

By Mark Albrecht and Jennifer Whitmarsh

As we round out 2021, let’s recognize an achievement of a familiar personality in our industry... James Peuster. JP (as many know him) begins his 20th year consulting teams across America (and internationally) and is in his 14th year as a *National Clothesline* columnist.

Under the guidance of Al Robson of Biz Builders, James found his niche early on. So many drycleaners have leaned on him for guidance, not just in route development, but also staff development. Early during his travels, JP earned another nickname: *The Knockfather*. He’s worked with thousands of route drivers, and many of them will tell you how fond they are of his face-to-face sales and retention training.

In time, James took his Route Pros’ Member Group to the next level, establishing task-focussed peer groups from within. As our industry has recognized, leadership is more critical than ever. James has run with this, and to this day the Route Pros have a dedicated leadership group of over 75 members strong.

Often the life of the party, JP has often been spotted spearheading great times whether at a Clean Show booth, Route Pros’ Member Conference dinner, or a DLI zoom chat. He usually gets people to laugh and lightens the mood. So James... enjoy some fond words and stories from your peers.

“Never judge a book by its cover. Even though he was not from the industry and he wore a green sweater vest, he was (and still is) a fresh set of eyes always looking for new ideas and opinions to make this industry great again. Working side by side with James for 10 years was an honor. Our thoughts and values were aligned, and I still learned so much and greatly valued my time with him. I consider both James and Peggy (she is the beauty and the brains of the duo) to be good friends. I also consider James a pillar in the industry and a personal mentor in my development as a person.”
— Randy Mearkle
BJC Consulting

“In the spring of 2010, I was the epitome of the term “just a driver.” I thought my customers couldn’t live without me. More importantly, I was terrified of knocking on a stranger’s door to talk about anything, much less try and ‘sell’ them on something. You told me you believed in me. You and I have butted heads over the years. After 11 years of not only being mentored by you — but also befriended — I cannot say where I would be without your guidance. I went from being the ‘blue route’ driver at Art Cleaners to being the GM of four locations, two production facilities and ten routes here in Austin, TX, with Tide Cleaners.”
— Jason St. Pierre
Tide Cleaners

“James, where do we begin??? Having never met you — with only the stories and reputation that preceded — I flew out to Kansas City for Route Pros University. From the moment I met you, I knew I was in for a good time. I left RPU with a whole new set of skills to bring back to our routes and — aside from the killer route training — had an awesome time exploring KC, too! You’re an incredible asset to the industry and have been a great teaacher to me!”
— Rob Parker
Dependable Cleaners

“I met James in Providence, RI, after Al Robson passed. We had coffee together and I asked him if I could join his group. He knew I was fired from the Biz Builders group after I participated in a group led by Rex Carrigan — but he still accepted me to participate. Since I met James about 16 years ago, he has helped us grow our route business and stay focussed in moving forward. Happy 20th Anniversary!”
— Carl Sahady
Diamond Cleaners

“James, congratulations on 20 years! You have the unique ability to see the potential that lies within each of us and find a way to bring it to the surface. You’ve always called it the way you see it. You’ve been supportive in my business and with my personal life. You’ve taught me where to put the right people on the bus and so much more. I’ve learned and grown thanks to you.”
— Debbie Wilson
J. Anton’s Cleaners

“What can I say about the ‘Knockfather’ Peuster? You will not find a more knowledgeable person when it comes to route development. You give him any challenge a route has and, not only will he eliminate it, he will turn that route and driver into a top tier operator in record time. James, you will give us the sweater vest off of your back, tell us where to have it cleaned and sign us up for Free Pick Up and Delivery!”
— Brian Sternheim
Embassy Cleaners

“Congratulations on 20 years! During my time I’ve certainly learned a lot from you and it was a pleasure and honor working and learning from you. Remember, when pitching at the door — if a spouse says I have to check with my significant other, just tell them it’s hard to get a great drycleaner but you can always get a new spouse. Keep up the great work!”
— Mark Torch
DO Summers Cleaners

“James, we are so appreciative of you and your Route Pros’ teammates. Your consulting, guidance and support of the industry has helped Edit TX become one of the country’s most successful home pickup and delivery companies. We couldn’t have done it without you. We’ve been blessed to be partners for nearly two decades and the best is yet to come. Thank your for an amazing 20 years. Let’s keep building new memories and breaking new records!”
— Kyle Nesbit
Edit TX

“In an industry always focussed on *cost*, James is a breath of fresh air with a positive message and is always an injection of energy for our team. James, beyond business, I’ve grown as a person because of what I’ve learned from you. My approach and mindset to managing people both in and out of our company has changed and has helped me to succeed. Thank you for all that you’ve taught us to date and for many great memories along the way. I look forward to many more years of memories and learning to come!”
— Brian Fish
Pier Cleaners

“James, I recall my first time hearing you speak. Your energy and passion immediately caught my attention. Over the years, you’ve become a friend and a trusted advisor. As you’ve added staff and multiplied talents, you haven’t been afraid to share the spotlight. In our industry, it is good to have a friend who has personal and experiential knowledge from the very best operations around the country. And, the awesome thing is, you’ve shared this knowledge and experience with vendors and associations freely so that our entire staff can benefit. We appreciate you friend. We congratulate you on 20 great years in the drycleaning industry!”
— Norman Way
Puritan Cleaners



“I tend to look at thing a little differently sometimes, and while what James does for his clients is terrific, it is often his unselfishness that really inspires me. He is always first in line to help us whenever we need him. He is giving with his expertise, his experiences and his vision. James, I am proud to call you a colleague, a resource and an industry icon. More so, I am honored and privileged to call you my friend, and I am better for it!”
— Peter Blake
Executive Director of
SEFA, NEFA and MAC

“James, Crest Cleaners wishes to congratulate you on your 20th anniversary. Being a part of the Route Pros family has brought us many great memories. From meetings to trainings to sales team blitzes, we find great value in having your team pour into ours. You lead by example with a passion to genuinely help each of us become better in all areas. We truly appreciate the time we spent with you. We look forward to another 20 years.”
— Marlena Calobong
Crest Cleaners

“James, I was new to the industry when we first met in 2013 and was not sure what to expect. I wasn’t expecting the passion you have for route development, but it helped me buy-in quickly. I appreciate your commitment to the industry and the way you always look to the future for new ideas and ways we can improve and build a better relationship with employees and customers. Keep up the great work!”
— Ron Carver
Rogers Cleaners

“About 7 or 8 years ago, I attended Route Pros University in Kansas City. During one of our sessions (with James, Esme & Leon), we were disrupted by a siren. James proclaimed: ‘It’s a tornado!’ Esme and I immediately headed to the basement and hunkered down. While we were busy texting our loved ones, we realized that James and Leon were nowhere to be found. After an hour, we emerged from the basement and — behold, James and Leon pull into the parking lot in the van after chasing the tornado! Congrats on 20 years from our team; keep chasing tornadoes.”
— Paula Kostick
Classic Drycleaners & Laundromats

“James, congratulations on 20 years of outstanding service to our industry! You have coached hundreds of owners, route managers and drivers who owe you a debt of gratitude. You are the personification of determination and a can-do attitude, which we all have benefitted from. Looking forward to the next 20 years!”
— Chuck Anton
J. Anton’s Cleaners

“James, you’ve been a fantastic resource when it comes to route development and implementation. I appreciate your thoughtful guidance and commitment to route development and to excellence. You’ve helped make my company better and more diverse. You’re a super guy and a great friend, as well. I’m sure Randy Unruh is smiling down and riding shotgun with you!”
— Kurt Lucero
The Cleanery



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THE SPOTTING BOARD



BY DAN EISEN

Applying bleaches to remove stains

Bleaching is removing stains by camouflaging. The stain is made invisible by adding or removing oxygen. Bleaches can be accelerated by heat and concentration. Chemical acceleration is used when the normal bleaching process does not work. Chemical acceleration is very effective because the activating chemical enters into the chemical reaction, making the bleach more effective. It will often be noticed that the accelerated chemical may change the color of the stain. This is an indication that the chemical reaction is working. It must also be remembered that the accelerating chemical can also affect the dye on a fabric. For example, when peroxide is applied to a colored silk, no discoloration may occur. When ammonia is added for acceleration, the color of the silk will be affected. When bleaches are accelerated, it also removes the existing bleach from the fabric.

Lubricants added to a bleach have been found to improve the performances of the bleach. The lubricant softens the fabric and stain and pro-

vides better penetration for the bleach. When spot bleaching, the bleach should be applied when the garment is on a towel to keep the area localized. The bleach should be applied with a q-tip, or it can be applied with the tip of a spatula. We are also adding lubricant for its ability to provide a better flushing action of the chemicals.

Hydrogen Peroxide

This is a common oxidizing agent for spot bleaching. It should be used in 3% or 6% concentration. It is effective for last traces of tannin, protein, ink, dye and scorch. It is activated by alkali. The best alkali to use is ammonia, but protein formulas can also be used.

Procedure

- 1) Wet area.
- 2) Apply lubricant.
- 3) Apply peroxide.
- 4) Apply ammonia.
- 5) Heat.
- 6) Flush.
- 7) Neutralize with acetic acid or tannin formula.
- 8) Flush.

Caution: Test colors.

Sodium Perborate and Sodium Percarbonate

These bleaches come in powder form. The bleaching action is similar to hydrogen peroxide. They are bath bleaches but many experienced spotters like the concentrated bleaching effect on stains. They are alkaline by nature but still accelerated by more alkali. They are effective on the same types of stains as hydrogen peroxide.

Procedure

- 1) Flush.
- 2) Apply lubricant.
- 3) Apply bleach.
- 4) Apply protein formula or ammonia.
- 5) Heat.
- 6) Flush.
- 7) Neutralize with acid.
- 8) Flush.

Sodium Hypochlorite

This is a strong oxidizing agent and is effective for removing mildew, ink, tannin, protein and dye. It can not be used on wool or silk. It should be diluted first by making a 5.25 concentration of bleach into a 1% concentration. Then, mix 10 parts water with the 1%

concentration. I tell my students to purchase a bleach stick at the supermarket for easier usage. Chlorine bleach is accelerated by acid.

Procedure

- 1) Wet area.
- 2) Apply lubricant.
- 3) Apply bleach.
- 4) Apply acetic acid or tannin formula.
- 5) Heat.
- 6) Flush.

Note: The acid applied not only accelerates the bleach but it causes the bleach to be used up, which effectively removes it from the fabric.

Sodium Hydrosulphite

This is a reducing bleach. It is effective for removing dye. It is also effective for last traces of ink stains and some tannin. It is acid by nature, and also accelerated by acid. It comes in powder form.

Procedure

- 1) Flush area.
- 2) Apply lubricant.
- 3) Apply bleach in powder or liquid form.
- 4) Apply acid.
- 5) Heat.

- 6) Flush.

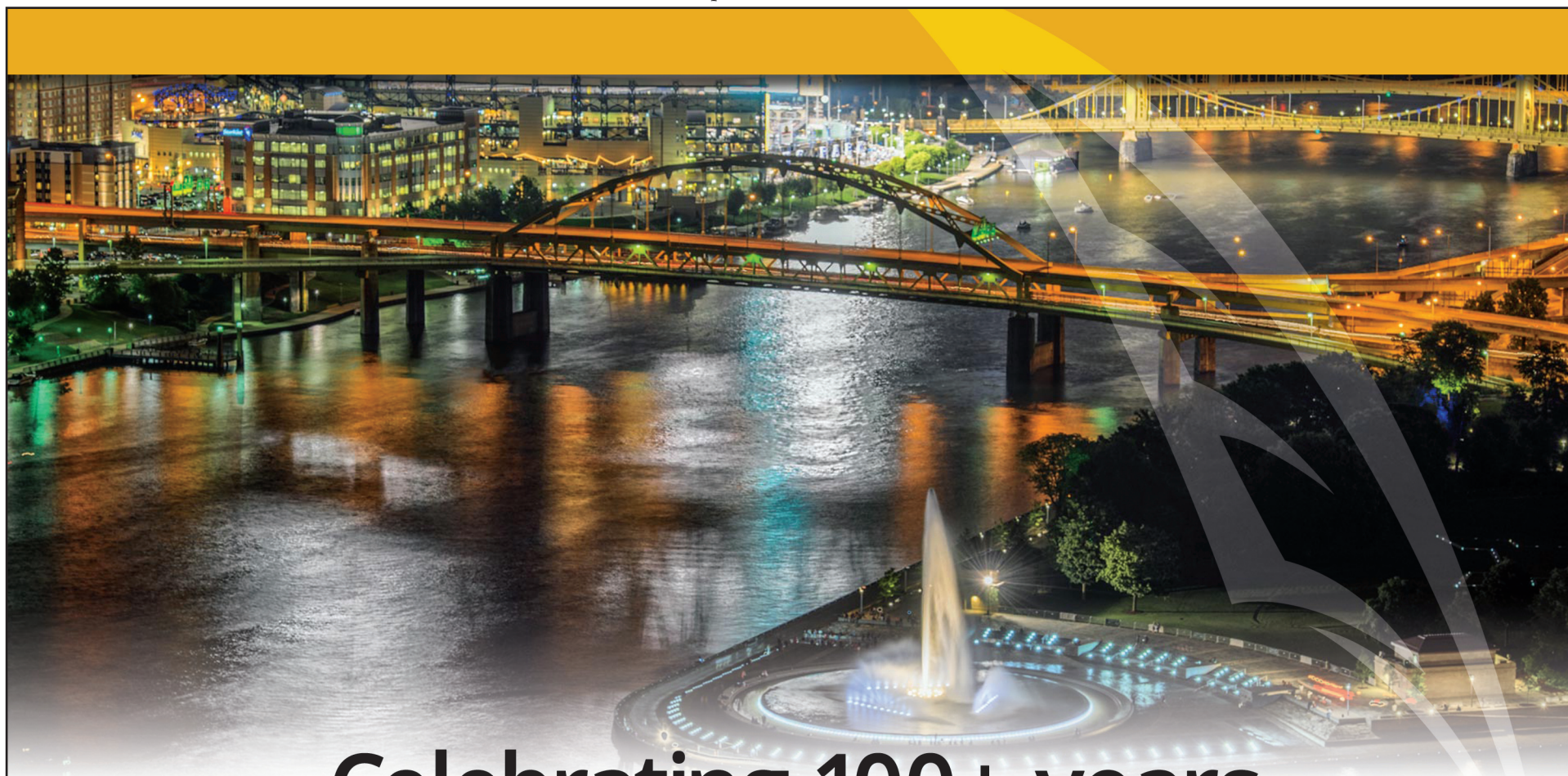
Titanium Sulfate

This is purchased as a purple liquid. It is reducing bleach that is very effective for removing dye, fugitive dye, ink and last traces of some tannin. It may cause some discolorations when used in combination with other bleaches or alkali. The discoloration can be removed by using rust remover (hydrofluoric acid). The hydrofluoric acid is also used to accelerate the bleach.

Procedure

- 1) Wet area.
- 2) Apply lubricant.
- 3) Apply stripper.
- 4) Apply rust remover.
- 5) Heat.
- 6) Flush.
- 7) Apply protein formula for neutralizing rust remover.
- 8) Flush.

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.



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KEEP IT LEGAL



BY FRANK KOLLMAN

When unions create chaos at your plant

President Biden has said he is the most pro-union president in U.S. history. While efforts to make it easier for employees to unionize have stalled in Congress — for now — it might be a good time to see if your business is vulnerable to unionization.

Before I begin, let me state that I understand many people are pro-union because of background and family. If you are one of those people, by all means, embrace unions.

If you do, however, keep in mind that George Meany — one of the great labor union leaders of the 20th century — was livid when the employees who worked for the union tried to unionize.

He viewed that as a betrayal of the trust he expected.

Reasons Why Employees Unionize

The first thing to understand is that even though wages are important, they are rarely the biggest reason why employees unionize.

For starters, unionization does not automatically mean making more money. Instead, the biggest causes of unioniza-

tion are lack of communication from management, dignity issues like those stemming from abusive supervisors or managers, employee insecurity over their job security, chronic (and unsolved) workplace problems and hostile relationships between employees and the management.

detail, employees must sign authorization cards or a petition to force a government-conducted election on unionization, and, then, at least half of the employees who vote in that election must select the union.

If half the employees vote “no,” unionization must wait

reason; and employees spending more time together in the bathroom.

A really good sign is when employees start using words like “seniority,” “grievance,” “due process,” “arbitration,” “entitle” and “job description.”

They probably have heard those terms from a union or-

ganization. nothing is automatic when a union organizes a company. The company will have to bargain, but there is no requirement that the company agree to anything.

Unionization means the union speaks for employees, not that the company is subject to a contract that it has not negotiated.

Other Factors to Consider

Your supervisors should know some of the do’s and don’ts of talking to employees about unions.

Essentially, they can tell employees the truth and their opinions, provided they do not do any of the following: make promises or threats, spy on the union activities of employees, or interrogate them about their feelings on unionization.

There are a few other restrictions, but these are the main ones.

Most importantly, you cannot fire or refuse to hire someone because of their union sentiments or activities.

You can, however, you make hiring and firing decisions in line with your normal practices, whether the employees are pro-union or not.

If you want to remain union free, provide an employee handbook and talk to your employees.

Do what you can to make sure employees are loyal to the company and believe that they are treated with respect, compensated fairly and kept abreast of developments.

Communicate, communicate and communicate.

Your supervisors also need to know that problems need to be addressed, and if there is any hint of employee discord, it should be reported immediately and addressed.

That would include information that a union is nosing around the company.

Most unions will admit that there are companies where they have no chance of organizing the employees because they are treated well.

Be that company.

Most unions will admit that there are companies where they have no chance of organizing the employees because they are treated well. Be that company.

Some companies are targeted for unionization because of their prominence in the industry, and others get unionized because they hire employees specifically sent by the union to infiltrate their workforce.

How Unions Form in the Workplace

No union can organize a workforce without help from the employees themselves. Without going into too much

for another election a year or more later.

Are Your Employees Considering Unionization?

Some of the signs indicating that your employees might be thinking about unionization are: unusual gatherings of staff members who quickly disperse when a supervisor goes by; an increase in the number of employee complaints; employees arriving to work early or staying late for no apparent

ganizer.

One thing you can do is let your employees know that you are not in favor of unions at the business.

While I am not necessarily suggesting you make a big deal of it, you should be prepared to answer the question: “What do you think about a union coming in here?”

After you say you are not in favor of it, be prepared to follow up with a question on “why.”

Reasons You Can Give for Not Favoring Unions

If the why question is posed, you might respond by saying that better employees are treated like everybody else in a union shop, employees have to rely on the effectiveness of the union to get things they want from the company, and most individual discussions with employees are prohibited.

Other reasons include that wages and benefits will then be based on union negotiations, not by individual merit. Strikes happen in union shops and employees on strike do not get paid and they cannot collect unemployment.

Seniority can be more important than merit in a union shop, union rules could wind up hurting the business, and employees and their unions frequently disagree on what should happen at the workplace.

Unions do not like employers to grant exceptions to individual employees, so exceptions for good employees are less likely to take place. Everyone gets treated the same.

If an employee says that unionization will lead to better wages, you can explain that



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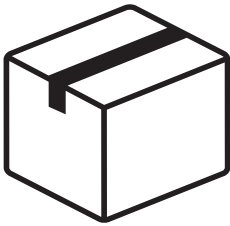
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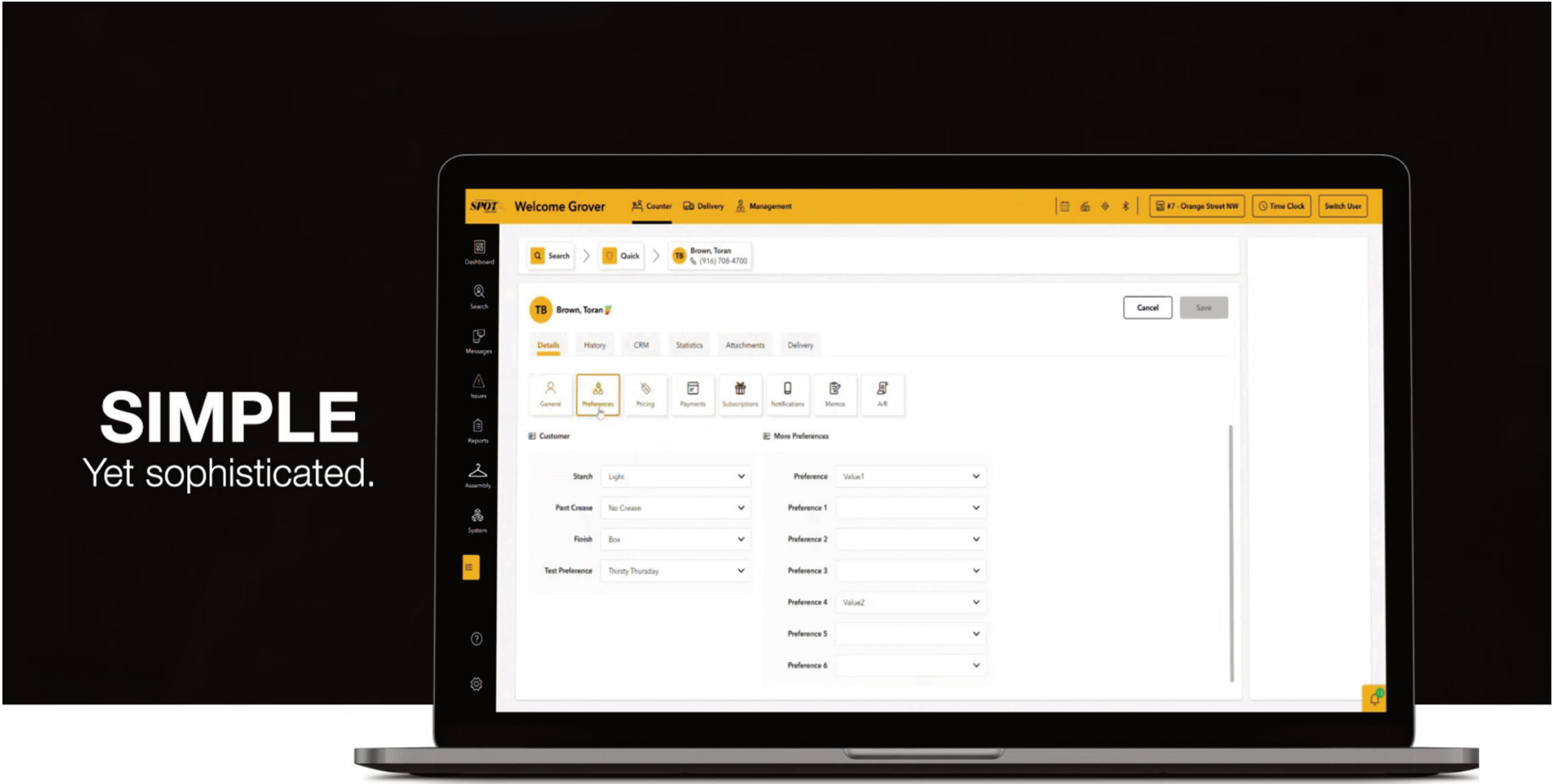
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