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Cleaners prepare for opportunities in 2022

Industry experts and members recently gathered virtually for WinterFest EXPO 2022 to discuss a more positive future with business opportunities ahead.

Most notably, economist Chris Kuehl of Armada Business Intelligence predicted the Gross Domestic Product this year should steadily rise 3 to 3.5%, a significant step forward. "Three to three-and-a-half percent growth two, three or four years ago would have been looked at as good. Our normal 20-year pattern of growth annually is around 2.5%, so anything above 2.5% would have been seen as pretty good," he said. "Now, however, we are comparing it to the blistering pace that we set in 2021, so it feels slow."

While high energy costs and labor shortages have sparked a



surge in wages and a rise in inflation, those figures should flatten later this year.

Perhaps the best signs of economic life came from the American consumer who, after

spending mostly on goods in 2020, spent more on services again last year, leading to a better balanced and stronger economy.

"The experience of 2021

showed that once consumers were allowed to get back to their old ways, they went back quickly and the assumption is they're going to do it again," Kuehl emphasized.

With demand for services rising, Kuehl noted that the labor shortage will likely continue creating chaos, depending on a variety of factors.

"There are 6.3 million unemployed formally, and almost 12 million job openings at the same time — twice as many as there are people unemployed," he explained. "A lot of those 6.3 million are just not relevant. They don't have the skills that are in demand."

Additionally, Baby Boomers — a generation known for its reticence to retire — are now in their high 70s and low 80s and have been leaving the workforce at a rate of 10,000 a day for the last several years. "That's taking about 3 million people out of the workforce every year," Kuehl said. "Then, there's the women. It's hard for

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In-person events set to make a comeback

After a long drought from in-person industry events that only recently ended last Fall, drycleaners now face a steady stream of upcoming events in the next few months.

First up on the horizon will be the Southwest Drycleaners Association's annual meeting set to take place March 4 and 5 at the Menger Hotel in San Antonio, TX. In addition to featuring the election of its new board members, the weekend will include a tour of Culpeper Cleaners with their new automation technology and an opportunity to network and socialize with other cleaners.

Also, there will be golf on Friday morning. The meeting

is free for SDA members and costs \$100 for non-members.

SDA has secured a discounted rate of \$159/night at the Menger Hotel. The link to make reservations is available at the association's website at www.sda-dryclean.com.

During the following month, the Textile Care Allied Trades Association will host its 2022 Educational and Management Conference from April 3 to 6 at the Wild Dunes Resort in Isle of Palms, SC.

While the theme of the conference is "Creating a Path to the Future," the association also will honor its past by celebrating its 100th anniversary, albeit two years too late due to

the pandemic. Another highlight will be keynote speaker John R. DiJulius, III, president of the DiJulius Group.

Conference registration has been reduced to \$700 for the first attendee and \$650 for additional attendees from the same company. For more information or to register, visit www.tcata.org.

Most notably, of course, will be Clean 2022 that is scheduled from July 30 until Aug. 2 later this year in Atlanta, GA. Show organizer Messe Frankfurt announced that exhibit space at the Georgia World Congress Center is over 90% sold and should sell out.

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Better late than never, the Textile Care Allied Trades Association will finally be able to celebrate its 100th anniversary in April as the association will host its 2022 Educational and Management Conference at the Wild Dunes Resort (above) in Isle of Palms, SC.

Tidying up garments in Green Bay

For over 75 years, the Mohr family has cared for Green Bay garments, beginning in 1946 when Ray Mohr and Bill Neverman started Tidy Didy Diaper service until today when the business is known to customers as Tidy Cleaners and Laundry. It's owned and operated by Jim Mohr (pictured right), who, along with his brother, Dennis, have both logged in over 50 years at the company. For the full story, see page 6.

Photo by Greg Bates



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Cleaners must look to the numbers, not the past

For almost two years now, drycleaners have had to overcome shortages of customers, employees and a variety of supplies, all while trying to improve their operations amidst a harsh, unstable business climate. At one point, much of the industry lost over 80% of sales in 2020, only to see them climb mostly back up last year — even as plants became short-staffed, making it difficult to handle the increasing volume. While we would love to say all the shortages will soon end, that is simply not the reality. However, for the first time in what feels like forever, factors have aligned to indicate a stronger economy with opportunities ahead.

Recently, the industry virtually gathered for WinterFest EXPO (WFE) 2022 to examine how it handled the once-in-a-lifetime challenges the pandemic presented, as well as offer a forecast of what 2022 may have in store for everybody and what they can do to best improve their chances for success. As Toran Brown of SPOT Business Systems noted during the EXPO, today the industry remains, on average, about 20% down in terms of overall sales. However, that percentage would likely be much higher if many had not raised prices in order to offset their sales volume deficit. While many such cleaners have testified that it proved to be a wise move, much of the industry remains hesitant to do the same.

“At the end of the day, if you are having trouble finding people, one solution is to start paying them more and the only way you’re going to afford to do that is by raising prices,” Brown emphasized. “I think that has been a challenge in our industry, given our pay scale, but I think it’s something we have to address and it’s going to come in the form of price increasing.”

At this time, American consumers have come to expect some price increases without too much pushback during the pandemic, so the opportunity is there. As economist Chris Kuehl explained at WFE, the Gross Domestic Product of the U.S. is projected to continue to grow (he believes it will go up 3 to 3.5%, which is higher than the U.S. 20-year average), and inflation is expected to cap this year (4% core and 6% real). With the pandemic expected to be downgraded to endemic status later in 2022, that could also provide a big boost to the thinning labor pool.

Kuehl logged several reasons why the employee shortage has been so severe — currently, there are now almost 12 million job openings for the 6.3 million who are “formally” unemployed, he noted. However, many of those unemployed lack the

necessary skills needed in jobs that are available, plus about 8 million women have not been able to return to the workforce because of frequent home schooling and childcare issues. Baby Boomers are also leaving the workforce in big numbers (retiring at higher ages) and millions have flocked to the “gig economy” where they offer goods and services through the internet, including new competition in the wash-dry-fold arena with companies such as Sudshare, which utilizes a network of freelance workers for laundry services in Uber-like fashion.

Fortunately, the drycleaning industry is primed and ready for that rising challenge. “I think that we’re going to start seeing this industry become more sophisticated than it’s been in the past,” Brown added. “We’re transitioning from being operators to being business people as an industry.”

Another WFE speaker, James Peuster, was tasked with sharing what some of his clients have been doing to keep their businesses profitable, which he did while voicing one concern: “Leaders have been working so hard they’ve taken the foot off of the accelerator to run the business and it’s running you,” he said.

Those who are too busy working in their business have no time to stay on top of its key performance numbers, which he compared to driving a car without a dashboard. Ultimately, doing so leads to speeding tickets and running out of gas (in this case, perhaps it leads to *claim tickets* and *running out of profit*). Peuster’s advice is to develop systems that help you work smarter, not harder — a strategy he’s not alone in advocating. Several speakers at WFE noted that staying on top of key business metrics have helped them become more profitable because it allows them to determine precise production costs, which, in turn, helps them price appropriately to ensure profit on every piece. Tracking numbers is the key to the future for the industry, but even so, perhaps it should be done with a clean slate.

As WFE moderator Peter Blake noted: “At some point, we have to make a decision to stop comparing things to the past and just start taking a look ahead. We need to focus our energies — rather than on pre-pandemic/post-pandemic — to the fact that we’re going to have to live with this now and this is the reality that we are in and we’ve got to start forecasting the future and build our businesses up from this point forward, rather than going back to what life used to be like, or what things used to be.”

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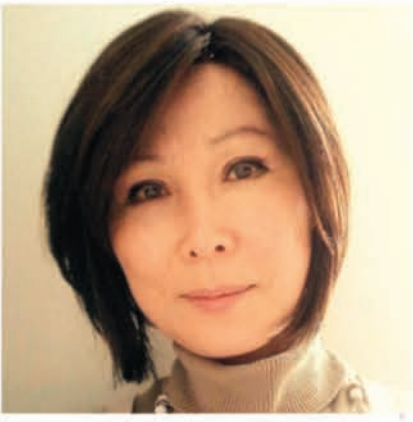


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CLEANERS & LAUNDRY

A laundry legacy

Times were a lot different when Ray Mohr first started the Tidy Diaper Service with his childhood friend, Bill Neverman, in 1946, in Green Bay, WI. Prior to that, Mohr was a merchant marine, had worked as a CNW Railroad station agent, and served during World War II as a radio officer — none of which suggested a future cleaning cloth diapers.

"I don't know where they got the idea to open a diaper cleaning service," said Jim Mohr, Ray's son and the current owner of the business today. "Back then, most of the wives stayed home. The washing machine wasn't really invented back then. So, at the time, it was good."

In the early 1960s, Mohr and Neverman paid for the construction of a new building that still houses the business, not long before the business had to undergo quite a few changes to keep up with changing trends.

"Between the washing machine coming out and people doing diapers on their own and more and more wives working — and then the disposable diapers — that just shut everything down slowly, but surely," Jim explained.

Fortunately, Ray had seen the writing on the wall and converted his diaper-cleaning business to a full service drycleaning and laundry facility by the end of the 1970s. Then, Ray and his wife, Patricia, bought out Neverman in the mid-1980s.

"My mom worked here about 20 years. She mainly took care of the office, checking in garments and dealing with customers. My dad basically took care of everything else," Jim recalled. Then, the business added more Mohrs: Jim and his brother Dennis began work during their teenage years.

"He's three years older than me and we've both been here for over 50 years — I didn't get my watch yet," Jim laughed. "We were more geared for laundry then. Back in those days, you had small nursing homes and small hospitals. Now, all of that work is often done in-house and it's a whole different ballgame."

Both Jim and Dennis began acquiring stock in the family business as early as 1985. Over the years, their responsibilities increased until the business made the transition to the second generation.

"When my dad retired at the end of 1993, we [Jim and Dennis] both had 15% interest in it, so he said to us, 'You guys buy me out and that's it.'"

For 47 years, Ray Mohr had guided the business along, converting from diaper cleaning to drycleaning and was always on the lookout for new ways to keep the business going.

"For a while, most of the cleaners in town did not do their own shirts back in the 1980s, so we did shirts for pretty much all of the cleaners in Green Bay back then," Jim recalled. "But, they got smart. They put their own equipment in and did it themselves. I don't blame them. So, then you move on. If you don't change, you're done."

These days, Jim prefers avoiding the

instability of relying on big accounts all the time.

"Back in the day, we had a lot of huge accounts and when you lose one of them, that really hurts," he said. "I'd rather have 100 medium accounts because if you lose one or two of the huge accounts you're hurting, but if you've got 100 of them — not that you want to

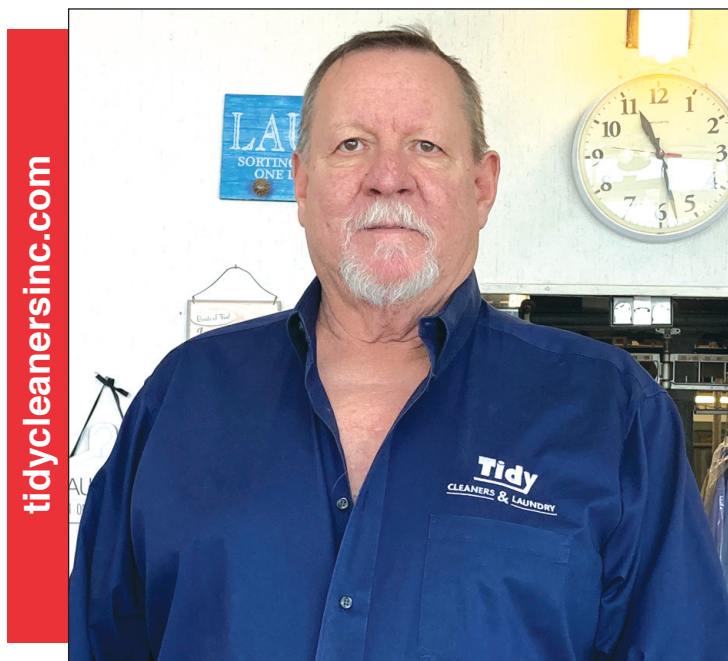
After struggling to keep afloat for almost two years during the pandemic, Jim hopes the worse is behind him.

"We had to cut back and buckle up — I can't lie," he explained. "We were able to get some of the PPP loans from the government. I don't want to leech off of the government, but they kind of

until a newspaper reporter writing a story on the company pointed the milestone out.

While drycleaning volume remains difficult to keep up these days, Jim is overall encouraged by recent signs.

"We're not quite where we were, but we're going in the right direction," he said, noting that it's nice to see cus-



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Jim Mohr

Tidy Cleaners and Laundry
Green Bay, WI

lose any — but if you lose a couple of them, you can fill that back in."

The Mohr brothers owned Tidy Cleaners together for just over a decade, but it became clear that things were too slow for both to remain owners. A decision had to be made.

"I was a little more gung-ho than he was so when the time came when we were slow, I said, 'Look, we've got to do something,'" Jim explained. "It worked out well for him, too. He still works here. He's a very good worker. He doesn't have any of the pressure of anything. He's my older brother, so just because he works for me doesn't mean he'll listen to me, right?"

Fortunately, Dennis has listened very well to customers, haven taken care of the business's delivery routes for much of his life. For Jim, there's no substitute for having someone he can trust out in the field.

"You've got to realize, that truck driver out there represents my company. If he's having a bad day and he tells the customer to *take their laundry and you know what* — it reflects on my business," Jim emphasized. "So, it's very important to me that he does such a nice job and takes good care of the customers. He's just been here such a long time and he has pride in this place, too."

As for Jim, he still typically arrives at 6 a.m. and later locks up at about 4:30 in the afternoon. It can make for a long day, but there's nowhere he'd rather be at this time.

"I don't mind coming in. So many people just hate their jobs," he said. "I'll keep going as long as I can. I'm in no hurry to retire."

With no prospect of a third generation to take over, Jim plans to keep the business open as long as he can.

"I'm here. This is all I've known all of my life," he said. "I'm not going anywhere else."

shut me down so I didn't have a problem with that. That pretty much kept us going."

"What hurt us the most was when the pandemic came through, we were allowed to stay open but everybody we did business with was closed, so basically we were shut down ourselves," he continued. "If you're working from home, you're not going to put on a dress shirt to sit in front of your computer screen."

One factor that helped the company, however, was the collective experience of its employees. Not only have Jim and Dennis logged in over 50 years at the drycleaning plant, Tidy has had one employee for over 40 years and another two for over 30 years each.

"I must be doing something right," Jim laughed. You'd think we'd all get along better. We're a family but sometimes we're a little dysfunctional. But, they're here every day."

At this time, the company isn't looking to hire during the labor shortage, but Jim is quite aware that it will be difficult to replace those who have become so invaluable.

"The worst thing is, we're all getting older. I don't know how to replace them," he explained. "I don't know how it is where you are, but I'm in Green Bay here and live about a mile and a half away and I can see about 15 'Help Wanted' signs on the way. There's just nobody who wants to work."

Times are a lot different than when Jim first began working at Tidy Cleaners.

"When I was young, we used to go through 100 gallons of perc a month. That was just what you did," he recalled. "Now, I go through maybe 50 gallons a year."

Last year, the company logged its 75th anniversary — although Jim admitted he didn't even realize that fact

tomers again. "They're apologizing because they haven't been here in a year. That makes you feel good anyway."

It is that loyalty that Tidy Cleaners depends on as Jim estimates that easily 80% of their customers are repeat ones. "We don't advertise a lot," he admitted. "Word of mouth has been the way it's worked for us."

"Right now, it's a good balance. We're geared for laundry, shirts, comforters and stuff like that — because we have the equipment for that," he noted. "We do drycleaning. It's just not as much as I'd like it to be. But, we do whatever we can get our hands on. We do a little bit of everything."

Despite a business climate harsher than a fabled Green Bay winter, Jim noted that the most rewarding aspect and potentially biggest frustration of his occupation remains one and the same: It's still all about cleaning the clothes.

"I really like it when a customer comes in and says, 'Boy, you guys do good work.' I appreciate it. It means a lot," he said.

The job is never easy and every garment can represent a unique challenge.

"You know how stuff is made in this day and age — and what people spill on them. It's a different world as far as cleaning a garment," Jim added. "When a customer comes in and sees their favorite — whatever — and they say, 'Oh man. You're a savior!' It makes you feel something."

Times may prove to be different in the future, but Jim plans to face difficult times like his father, Ray, did before him... by fostering an impeccable work ethic. "I know he's my father, obviously, but that guy was very well liked and — back in the day when he was the boss — I don't know of anyone who ever said a bad word about him," Jim said. "So, I think he'd be proud that we're still keeping it going."

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THE ROUTE PRO



BY JAMES PEUSTER

Will 2022 be another year like 2020, too?

First off, let me say that it is not my intention to write a political article (nor is it the purpose provided to me by *National Clothesline*). We all know that last year might have been as challenging as the year before, but what does 2022 present to us?

It looks like we'll have another year of debates for masks, vaccines, and what side of the fence you tend to lean toward. But, there's one thing that we need to keep in mind, and that's finding

your sweet spot in your own business.

For the past 20 years, we have always preached profit and growth, but one of the hidden elements is finding that sweet spot where you experience profit but it doesn't destroy your daily rou-

tine as an owner. I know that, during the past two years, many owners felt like they worked harder and longer than ever before, but saw no improvement in their bank account at the end of the day.

This is why the decisions you make from this day for-

ward will dictate whether or not you're in business, while avoiding not being buried in your business.

So, enough with the sermon and let's get to the point. As a business owner, you need to determine what that ideal situation is where you are making a profit, maintaining your sanity, going home at a decent hour — all the while providing a positive work culture for your staff. This is where I bring the spotlight back onto

the routes and the simplicity it provides in our chaotic industry. You can pick the neighborhoods, the customers, the days to operate — while maintaining a profit and easily finding that sweet spot that has eluded many for the past few years.

As Al Robson told me a long time ago: "If every cleaner thought like a business owner, our industry would be rock solid."

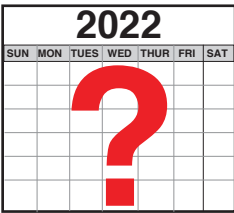
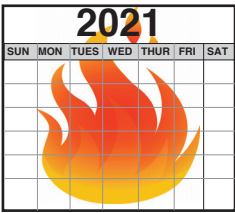
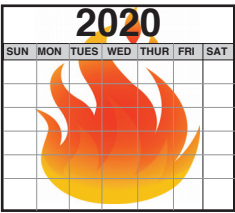
The number one reason why I fell in love with routes 20 years ago was that I could organize and orchestrate my day while providing customers an exceptional customer service they had never experienced before in drycleaning. Wash-dry-fold has thrown a wrench into this sweet spot for many, but you can see by the testimonials on the forums and other conference calls that many cleaners are succeeding at this while developing a system/routine that works with the bottom line in mind.

So, 2022 is going to throw us more curveballs, as well as a chance to utilize lessons learned from the past two years. As Al Robson told me a long time ago: "If every cleaner thought like a business owner, our industry would be rock solid."

The bottom line is check your politics at the door and focus on what lies ahead.

If the past two years didn't introduce the importance of routes to you by now, I am not sure anyone can help you from this day forward. Those may be pretty harsh words for some to hear, but I'm quoting others and not ourselves from The Route Pros.

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



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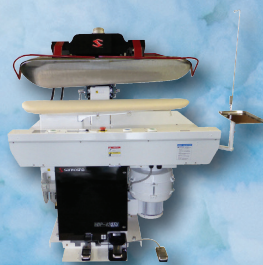
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KEEP IT LEGAL



BY FRANK KOLLMAN

When labor laws defy common sense

It has been more than 30 years since Congress passed the Americans with Disabilities Act. As originally envisioned, the ADA was to provide employment and public accommodations to individuals with disabilities affecting major life activities, such as walking, seeing and hearing. Even early on, the ADA created some situations that defied common sense.

In fact, in his book *The Death of Commonsense*, the author Philip K. Howard leads with a story about how an order of nuns in New York City wanted to remove an abandoned building to operate as a homeless shelter. Unfortunately, they did not have enough money to install elevators, which was a public accommodation requirement of the ADA for building renovations. The homeless shelter did not open, people continued to live on the streets and the building remained abandoned because the ADA required elevators in circumstances where common sense might have suggested

otherwise.

Over the years — like with many good-intentioned laws — the ADA was expanded and refined in ways that no one considered in 1990 when it was originally enacted. Without going into detail, the definition of “disability” has been expanded to include most medical conditions, whether temporary or permanent. Great pains have been taken to prevent employers from asking about disabilities prior to making a job offer, even if the disability cannot be accommodated. The ADA, along with the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act (GINA), has turned most medical information an employer has about an employee “confidential” to the point of silliness.

Recently, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) said in a “guidance” that the ADA would require an employer to treat Covid vaccination status as confidential “medical information” that the employer could disclose only at its peril.

Given vaccine mandates and demands for “transparency” of information, the EEOC guidance makes no sense whatsoever. There are some lawyers who advise that, under GINA, employers should not ask questions of employees about the health of their relatives (like a mother receiving chemotherapy) because it could run afoul of the law.

Another relatively recent development under the ADA is the requirement that employers engage in an “interactive process” with employees to determine possible accommodations to the expanded list of disabilities. In a nutshell, the interactive process requirement means that whenever any employee identifies a disability or the employer independently becomes aware of a disability, the company must sit down with the employee and discuss possible accommodations to the disability, other jobs that the employee may be qualified to fill if the disability cannot be accommodated, and any other

factors that might allow the employee to continue working for the company.

Employees must engage in this interactive process even if it would be a futile exercise. The process itself — even if it is clear that the employee must leave employment from the start — must take place, or the employer has violated the ADA. The penalty for not engaging in the interactive process is just as bad as the penalty for refusing a reasonable accommodation.

A few weeks ago, a construction company client called to say that an older safety inspector reported that she could no longer climb stairs, an essential requirement of her job to inspect upper floors of buildings under construction. Fortunately, the client just wanted to “confirm it was OK” to fire her. I said “yes” but only after he engaged in the interactive process to see if the stair climbing disability could be accommodated, or if there was another job she was qualified to fill. I may have saved the com-

pany thousands of dollars.

Given the current Covid insanity, as well as expansion of the ADA and other employment laws, it is a good idea to treat medical information as confidentially as you can. Remember the “interactive process,” as well as the requirement not to consider disabilities in the hiring decision.

Once the hiring decision is made, it is fine to discuss disabilities in an interactive process. If the disability cannot be reasonably accommodated, keep looking. If it can, continue to process the hire. Treat whatever information you have as confidential, disclosing it only to people who need to know in connection with their jobs.

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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Cleaners prepare for opportunities in 2022

Continued from page 1
them to get back to the workforce when childcare and schools are in complete disarray. You've got an estimate of eight million women who have not been able to get back into the workforce."

Also during the pandemic, there's been a big jump in the "gig economy" sector where millions make money marketing services or selling items through the Internet. Even as the labor pool thins, new competition is popping up in the form of home laundry app services such as SudShare that have taken an Uber approach to picking up, cleaning and delivering clothes utilizing a network of gig economy workers.

State of the Industry
One early EXPO highlight was an opening day panel of experts who discussed how the industry pivoted during the pandemic and where it stands today. According to Toran Brown of SPOT Business Systems — it remains, on average, 20% down according to their software sales-tracking metrics. That is quite a climb back from when sales plummeted for many by more than 80% in 2020, but cleaners are making other advances, too.

"What is interesting about piece counts is you notice that the growth, technically in 2021 and even in 2022, is not nearly as big as the sales part," Brown continued. "So, that tells us that we still have customers

coming to us. They're bringing in fewer pieces, and we are charging more for them to try to make up for that sales volume."

Many businesses, such as Pier Cleaners of Rhode Island, spent time during the pandemic tracking key production numbers in order to measure precise labor costs and be able to price every piece profitably.



"As our costs continue to increase — because our labor costs are going up and it's so hard to find and keep our staff — it's more important than ever to know exactly what our costs are so we are pricing appropriately," noted Brian Fish of Pier. "You should get paid what you're worth and our staff is looking to get paid more. Costs for everything are up. People understand that. It's not just our industry."

A large reason for those rising costs has been ongoing supply shortages, a problem that should continue for the foreseeable future. Mike Ross of AristoCraft/Minda Supply likened the life of a distributor to playing a game of "whack-a-mole" where once one shortage problem is solved, like, say hangers, then another arises in the form of comforter bags or

plastic shoulder guards, etc.

His best advice for cleaners is to stay in close communication with their suppliers, avoid stockpiling and try to be understanding if only substitute items are available.

The final panelist, James Peuster of 21st Century Dry Cleaners, shared strategies employed by clients from all across the country, from closely monitoring their Key Performance Indicators to saying "no" to unprofitable items to developing employee retention programs.

"I think we need to be prepared and stay proactive by making sure you communicate with your staff and have strong leadership in place," he advised.

That leadership will be tested as the pandemic continues to wreak havoc in the workplace. Attorney Frank Kollman outlined several Covid-related complications, including the fact that having Covid is essentially considered a disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). So, if an employee requests a Covid accommodation, according to Kollman, "Under the ADA, you are absolutely required to engage in what they call the interactive process to discuss the possibility of an accommodation."

He also noted it was legal for employers to ask if an employee is vaccinated (or even require them to be). On the

other hand, employees can push back claiming medical or religious exemptions. Ultimately, employers should make sure all Covid information is kept confidential and separate from personnel files. When in doubt, cleaners

should visit the official government sites for OSHA, the CDC, the EEOC and the Department of Labor, among others, as they contain excellent information.

Coverage of WinterFest EXPO 2022 will continue next month.

In-person events make comeback

Continued from page 1
The cost for attendees is \$119 for association members and \$149 for non-members who register by June 29. After that date, onsite registration will be \$169 per person.

The cost includes access to the exhibit hall, as well as all live demonstrations and educational sessions presented by the six associations who help collaborate on the show: the Drycleaning and Laundry Institute, the Coin Laundry Association, the Association for Linen Management, the Textile Rental Services Association of America and the Textile Care Allied Trades Association.

For more information on Clean 2022, visit online at www.cleanshow.com.

One more positive sign for

the drycleaning industry has been the return to in-person classes at the Drycleaning and Laundry Institute's School of Drycleaning Technology in Laurel, MD — something set to continue throughout 2022.

DLI will host multiple installments of its signature courses on the premises, including its one-week Introduction to Drycleaning class (March 7-11, Aug. 8-12, and Oct. 17-21) and its two-week Advanced Drycleaning course (March 14-25, Aug. 15-26, and Oct. 24 to Nov. 4).

For more information, or a full list of DLI's courses, including its virtual offerings and "blended" classes that combine virtual and in-person learning, visit them online at www.dli.online.com.

Obituary

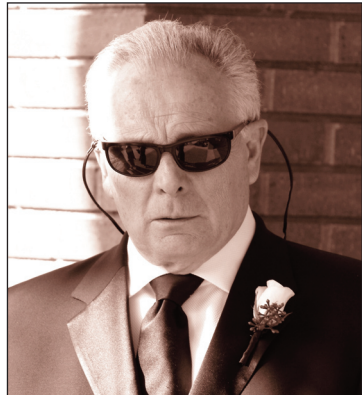
John H. Kelleher, innovator

On Dec. 27, industry lifer and leader John H. Kelleher passed away. He was the former president and owner of Kelleher Equipment Supply (now called Kelleher/Casares Equipment, LLC), a business he started in California in 1970.

Prior to that, the New Jersey native got his start in the drycleaning industry repairing laundromat washers for Cosmopolitan Equipment in Flatbush, NY, before he later went to work for Forenta pressing company, known then as Forse. He worked as a repairman and installer and eventually demonstrated pressing and finishing at trade shows before branching out into sales on the West Coast. His territory grew to include nearly the entire U.S. and all of Canada.

He received several sales awards from Forenta over the years; however, the company was hit hard during the 1970s when the advent of permanent press and the company had to let its best salesman go.

With three young children at home, Kelleher opted to strike out on his own in a struggling industry and founded Kelleher Equipment Supply in California. Soon after, he became the first to import a drycleaning machine from Italy to the U.S. — a move considered controversial at the time. However, it also proved prescient as a large



John Kelleher

number of cleaners still prefer to use ground-breaking Italian equipment today.

"My dad was an innovator and looked for and implemented solutions for a variety of industry issues throughout the years," noted daughter Kelly Kelleher Casares. "This stemmed from changes in equipment design, the willingness to learn to adapt to cleaning fluids imposed upon drycleaners by regulatory agencies, and uses of technologies outside of the box."

Even as his health declined, Kelleher enjoyed assisting others fix their equipment over the phone, he was an avid Los Angeles Lakers' fan and a dog lover, especially his late Schnoodle named Kobe.

John Kelleher is survived by his wife Diane; his four children, Deborah Gesualdo, Kelly Kelleher Casares, Kim White and John H. Kelleher, Jr.; seven grandchildren; and one great-grandson.

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SHIRT TALES



BY DON DESROSIERS

How to make good shirts look great

Over the years, it has been fun bringing together some photos of pressing defects on shirts, showing them to you, and explaining why they happen and how to prevent them in your plant.

It can be a challenge to convey shirt pressing equipment operating techniques and corrective measures via this medium.

The journey begins in my mind, slides down my arms and then travels to my finger-

You will probably pay more attention to moisture retention that you have in the past. You won't be able to defer maintenance.

tips, to this keyboard and through the barely comprehensible spider web called the internet.

Then, those instructions find temporary home on the computers of my editors and proofreaders and are somehow converted to the precisely laid, microscopic blotches of ink that you are reading now.

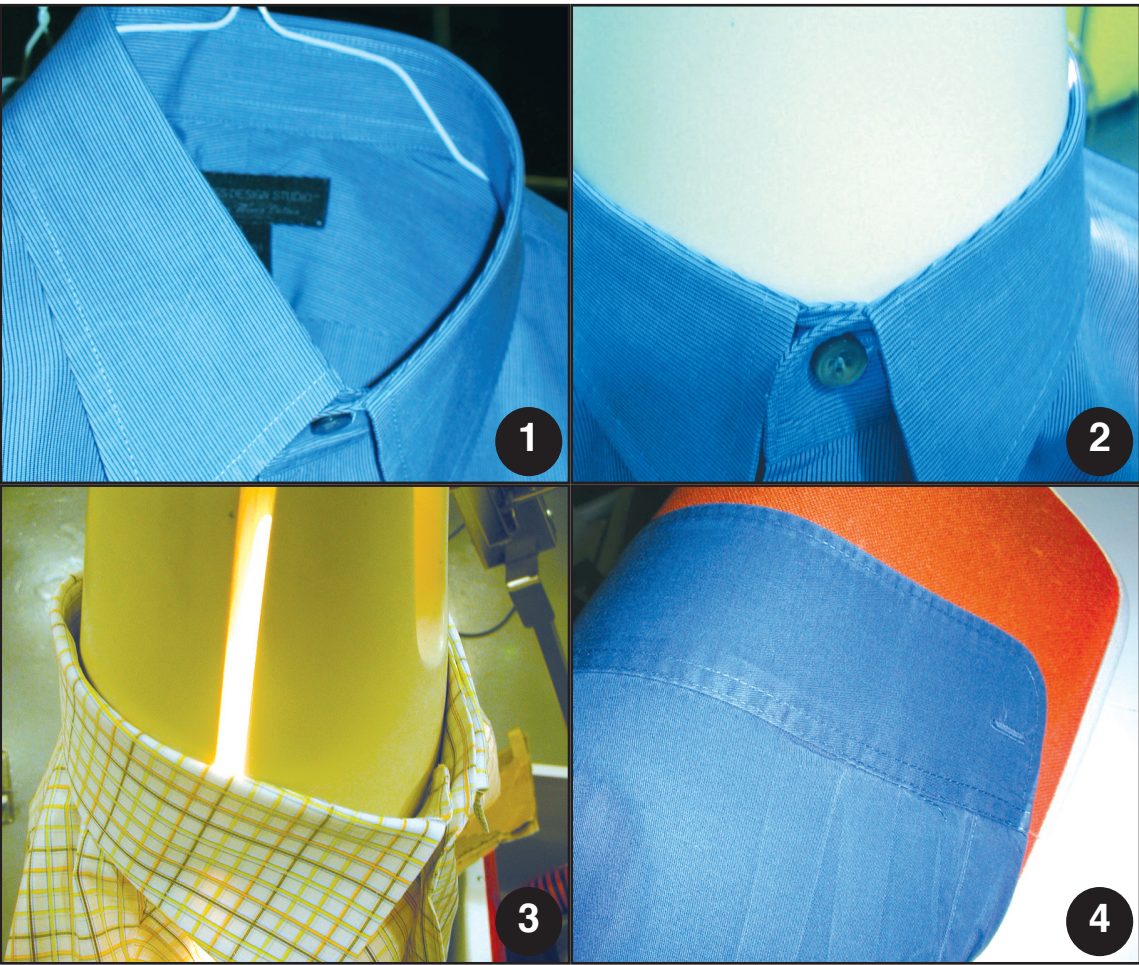
I pray that my instructions are ultimately as helpful as I hope them to be.

For this month, I thought that a twist on that theme was in order. I have photographed a good number of pressing defects over the years, but I have also shot some great looking shirts.

I have caught many pressers in the act of doing something right. So, I thought that I'd show you some of these great shirts and examine why they look so good.

Take a look at the shirt in Photo 1 (top left). This shirt looks great!

Notice how round and perfect the collar is! This requires at least two things: a completely dry collar and the



proper use of a collar cone. To get a dry collar, you need some key components.

For that matter, you need a similar recipe to dry any part

of the shirt.

I learned a long time ago that in order to get a truly great looking shirt, it needs to be 100% dry.

This is not the same thing as "pretty dry" or "just about dry."

It isn't easy to accomplish this, but if you want a great looking shirt, it is going to start with this. You will find yourself replacing pads and covers more often than you used to, but that is a very small price to pay.

You will probably pay more attention to moisture retention than you have in the past.

You won't be able to defer maintenance on your washing machine or pressing equipment.

Before this shirt was hanging, it spent at least 30 seconds on the heated collar cone as you can see in Photo 2.

Notice that the collar is in direct, uniform contact with the cone.

Also notice that the front of the collar doesn't droop. This is no accident. This is the byproduct of a meticulous presser.

Now, compare Photo 2 (top right) with Photo 3 (bottom left). The shirt in Photo 3 will not look as good as the one in Photo 2.

However, all that needed to be done with the shirt in Photo 3 was to lower the shirt so that it contacted the collar cone. It's not that difficult!

The attention to detail is

everything. After all, the pressing machine does a tremendous majority of the work. The presser's job is to contribute the details.

I wish that my drycleaner pressed the pleats on the sleeves of my shirts. It's so easy to tell when the presser was careful and when the presser was careless.

When you look at the press job in Photo 4 (lower right), it is clear that an extra second of time was spent and it is easy to see that this shirt will look great!

The details — the extra attention — is really how you can make your good shirts great.

"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 laundries 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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WRENCH WORKS



By BRUCE GROSSMAN

Evaporating the cleaning solvent

Last month, I explained the basic processes of the most common type of distillation system found in drycleaning machinery. In this issue, I'll be describing in more detail the components associated with the distillation process.

There are many variations in the distillation systems used in drycleaning; therefore, all of the items that will be discussed, and those shown in the illustrations, may not be present on your machinery.

The steam heating section of the still contains the following components which correlate to the numbers shown in the circles on the accompanying illustration (right). The numbers assigned to the paragraphs indicate the numbers attached to the components shown in the illustration:

1. Steam Pressure Regulator — Controls the pressure of the steam in the still heating system. Steam temperature directly correlates to steam pressure so what you are doing when you are adjusting the steam pressure is varying the temperature of the still heat. The correct steam pressure setting is usually between 40-60 lbs/sq. in.

This will vary depending on the machine manufacturer and the solvent being used so be sure to follow the suggested manufacturer's setting.

Common problems encountered with this device are:

A. Regulator set too high or not regulating. If the pressure in the still is excessively high, it's possible to overheat the solvent and cause it to boil too violently. This forces the raw still content up the still riser pipe into the still condenser, contaminating the condensed solvent (condensate) in the condenser, the condensate flow path throughout the machine and in the water separator.

Should the regulator provide no or insufficient steam pressure, solvent will not evaporate at the expected rate, resulting in no, or very slow, distillation.

This contamination will usually contain drycleaning detergent, which, when mixed with the water present in the condensate, prevents the proper separation of water and solvent in the water separator. A milky white mixture of solvent or water can usually be observed when this condition is present.

B. Regulator too low or stuck shut. Should the regula-

tor provide no, or insufficient steam pressure, solvent will not evaporate at the expected rate. This results in very slow or no distillation at all. Overfilling of the still will result if, during the drycleaning machine cycle, solvent is automatically pumped to the still.

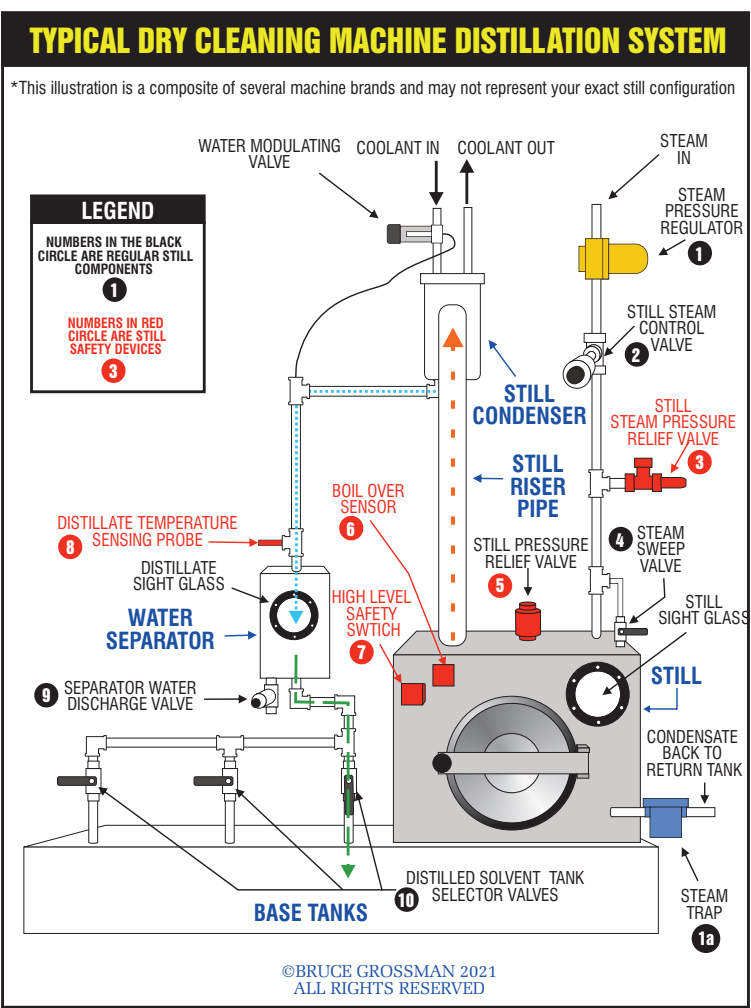
2. Steam Control Valve — This valve starts and stops the flow of steam to the still. Its operation is usually selectable from a button on the control panel and is also controlled by safety devices which I will be explaining later in the article.

Common problems encountered with this device are:

A. Valve not opening. Most of the time, this is a pneumatic (air system) problem. Either the air pressure to open the valve is too low, which is likely an incoming air pressure regulator problem, or the air is blowing by the valve's piston which used to open the valve. A symptom of this valve not opening would be no, or very slow, distillation.

B. Valve not shutting. Usually a steam control valve sticking open is caused by a buildup of scale on the shaft connecting the valve disk to the piston, causing friction which exceeds the force exerted by the spring which shuts the valve.

Symptoms of this problem during normal distillation would be a continuously heated still which may result in higher utility costs. During



a failure of some other component in the distillation system, this valve sticking open may result in a still boil-over.

3. Steam Pressure Relief Valve — This valve is used to relieve steam pressure in the still heating system if it exceeds safe design limits.

It's important to understand that this is the pressure in the steam jacket which surrounds the lower portion of the still, not to be confused with the area of the still which contains

solvent.

Common problems with this device are:

A. Valve not opening. If the steam pressure should exceed the limits of the still steam jacket, there could be steam leaks or a rupture of some component. I have found no way of realistically testing this valve and have never seen one fail, so this paragraph may be an academic exercise.

B. Valve leaking. If this valve leaks, the escaping steam would be obvious and likely require the replacement of the valve.

That's it for now. I'll be carrying on from here in the next issue.

Bruce Grossman is the chief of R&D for EZtimers Manufacturing. EZtimers is the manufacturer of the new EZ DOSE boiler compound manager and return tank level control which replaces that troublesome ball float valve in the condensate return tank 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. For more information visit online at www.eztimers.com. Please address any questions or comments to bruce@eztimers.com or call (702) 376-6693.



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THE SPOTTING BOARD



BY DAN EISEN

Correcting fluorescent dye problems

White fabrics produced in manufacture will usually have a gray or yellowish tint. To offset the discolored look, fabrics are bleached in manufacture to create a white fabric.

Fluorescent dyes or optical brightness are then added to the fabric to increase the whiteness of the fabric. Fluorescent dyes increase the brightness by converting invisible ultraviolet light to visible light. Although fluorescent dyes are often added to colored fabrics, the problems that drycleaners encounter are usually confined to white fabrics.

Fabrics Causing Fluorescent Dye Breakdown

A fluorescent dye breakdown can occur from many factors. These include sunlight, drycleaning solvents, staining substances and chemicals used for stain removal. Strong bleaches and strong chemicals will also break down the fluorescent dye on most fabrics.

Detecting Fluorescent Dyes

When observed under black light, a fluorescent dye will glow. When the fluorescent dye is removed, the area will not show any degree of fluorescence. Many drycleaners are

using the portable Spectralight, which I invented to be used to examine fabrics for staining, and for fluorescent dye.

Correction Procedures

It is important when correcting a fluorescent dye breakdown that the fabric is taken into consideration. Different fabrics require different procedures for restoration. Correction of fluorescent dye problems is accomplished by wetcleaning and bleaching, but not in drycleaning.

Remove Staining Substances

You cannot correct a fluorescent dye if staining substances

or residue is still left in the fabric. If you have a tannin or protein stain, the staining substance must be removed first. If the fabric is gray with redeposition of soil, the fabric cannot be made lighter unless the redeposition of soil is corrected. Fluorescent dyes cannot camouflage staining.

Correcting Fluorescent Dyes on Silks and Wools

The fluorescent dyes on silks and wools are effected by alkalis found in protein formulas and ammonia. It is important to avoid using these chemicals for stain removal. To correct a fluorescent dye breakdown, alka-

line-based bleaches such as sodium perborate and sodium percarbonate should be avoided. The best bleaches to

You cannot correct a fluorescent dye if staining substances or residue is still left in the fabric.

use for correction are acid-based agents. This includes sodium bisulphate and sodium hydrosulphate.

1. Soak garment in a plastic pail with one to two ounces of bleach per gallon of water.

2. Add a few ounces of mild detergent for better penetration when soaking.

3. Soak garment for approximately 10 to 15 minutes.

4. Rinse garment thoroughly and add a little detergent to the rinse water. A small amount of detergent in the rinse water will aid in increasing the brightness of the fabric.

Correcting Fluorescent Dyes on Cottons, Rayons and Linens

These fabrics require an alkaline-based bleach. These bleaches include sodium perborate and sodium percarbonate.

1. Soak garment in a plastic pail with warm water adding one to two ounces of bleach per gallon.

2. Add a mild detergent to the bleach bath.

3. Soak garment overnight and rinse thoroughly.

4. Use a mild acid to neutralize the bleaching action.

5. Rinse again and add a mild detergent to increase the brightness.

Bluing

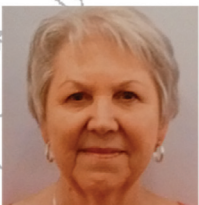
Bluing can be an important asset for whitening a white fabric. The brightest white fabrics have a slight blue hue. When manufacturers bleach fabrics, they add fluorescent dyes and a slight blue color.

Bluing has the ability to mask a yellow tint and gives the fabric an additional whiteness. A popular bluing agent that is very effective can be found in most supermarkets. It's called Mrs. Stuarts Liquid Bluing.

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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BUILDING VALUE



BY KERMIT ENGH

Nine warning signs that you are a hub

How well does your company run when you do not show up? The answer has a significant impact on the value of your business. Suppose your company could survive your absence for a while. In that case, you will score well on something called “Hub and Spoke,” the next driver to increase your company’s value. Visualize a big airport like Chicago’s O’Hare or London’s Heathrow. They function as a centralized routing location for the airlines that rely on them. The system works efficiently enough until a snowstorm shuts down a hub and the entire transportation system grinds to a halt. I assume I am not the only one who has been stuck in an airport due to weather, computer issues, personnel shortage, or any other issue you can imagine. Now, imagine you are the hub, and you run your business with critical issues coming through you. It is efficient right up until the point you are no longer there, which is why anyone valuing your business will levy a steep discount. Acquirers generally avoid such businesses be-

cause they understand the dangers of buying a company too dependent on the owner.

Nine Warning Signs of Hub and Spoke Ownership

If you drew a picture that represented your role in your business, what would it look like? Are you at the top of a traditional Christmas-tree-like organizational chart, or are you stuck in the middle like a hub in a bicycle wheel? The moment the hub is overwhelmed, the entire system fails. Here’s nine warning signs you are a Hub and Spoke owner and suggestions how to pull yourself out of the middle:

1. You sign all the checks. Most business owners sign the checks, but what happens if you are away and an important supplier needs to be paid? Consider giving an employee signing authority for checks up to an amount you are comfortable with, and then change the mailing address on your bank statements to your home (not the office) so you can review all signed checks and make sure the privilege is not abused.

2. Your mobile phone bill is over \$200 a month. If your employees are consistently

out of their depth, it will show up in your mobile phone bill because staff will be calling you to coach them through problems. I was guilty of this until I started asking the same question every time: *If I was there, what would you do?* This provides a great teaching/coaching moment to verify their thinking process. In time, they will soon stop asking and start making decisions on their own. This is liberating. You may be hiring too many junior employees. Sometimes people with experience will be more self-sufficient and only slightly more expensive. Also, consider getting a virtual assistant (VA) that can function as defense in protecting your time. You can find one at www.iva.org or www.upwork.com.

3. Your revenue is flat compared to last year’s. Flat revenue from one year to the next can be a sign you are a hub. Like forcing water through a hose, you have only so much capacity. No matter how efficient you are, every business dependent on its owner reaches capacity at some point. Consider narrowing your product and ser-

vice line by eliminating technically complex offers that require your involvement, and instead focus on selling fewer things to more people. Or, delegate revenue opportunities to those you trust and see how they do. We assigned a lead CSR to be responsible for our New Mover program. Sherry does everything from identifying the prospect, creating the mailer, and tracking the results. If I had to do this, it would not get done as often.

4. Your vacations suck. If you spend your vacations dispatching orders from your cell phone, it’s time to cut the tether. Start by taking one day off and see how your company does without you. Build systems for failure points. Work up to a point where you can take a few weeks off without affecting your business. The ultimate goal would be three months without going to the office and having restricted contact.

5. You spend more time negotiating than a union boss. If you constantly have to get involved in approving discount requests from your customers, you are a hub. Consider giving front-line, customer-facing employees your approval to negotiate. We have an MFM member who hired a CSR Manager to manage all customer interactions. You may also want to tie salespeople’s bonuses to gross margin for sales they generate so you are rewarding their contribution to profit, not just chasing skinny margin deals.

6. You close up every night. If you are the only one who knows the closing routine in your business (count the cash, lock the doors, set the alarm), then you are very much a hub, more closely defined as a *hostage*. Write an employee manual of basic procedures (closing routine, e-mail footer to use, voice mail protocol) for your business and give it to new employees on their first day.

7. You know all your customers by first name. It is good to have the pulse of your market but knowing every single customer by first name can be a sign you’re relying too heavily on your personal relationships being the glue that holds your business together. Consider replacing yourself as a rainmaker by hiring a sales team, and — as inefficient as it seems — have a trusted employee shadow you when you meet customers so over time they get used to dealing with someone else.

8. You get the tickets. Suppliers wooing you with free tickets to sports events can be a sign they see you as the key decision-maker in your business. If you are the key contact, you will find yourself in the hub of your business when it comes time to negotiate terms. Consider appointing one of your trusted employees as the key contact for a major supplier and give that employee spending authority up to a limit you are comfortable with.

9. You get cc’d on more than five e-mails a day. Employees, customers and suppliers constantly cc’ing you on e-mails can be a sign that they are looking for your tacit approval, or that you have not made clear when you want to be involved in their work. Ask your employees to stop using the cc line in an e-mail; have them add you to the “to” line if you really must be made aware of something — and only if they need a specific action from you.

Getting Your Company to Run Without You

Start by breaking down your job into tasks. Then prepare instructions for your team so they can follow your standard operating procedures when you are not there.

Assess your team’s knowledge by taking a couple of vacation days to see where your processes have holes. Plug the gaps with more details, and then take a more extended vacation. Keep lengthening your time away from work and tweaking things upon your return so that by the time you are done, your company can manage your extended absence.

If you are curious how well your company is performing in the Value Drivers we have been discussing, go online to <https://mfmbusinesscoaching.com> to get your free Value Builders Score.

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 positions as managing partner of MfM and as a Certified Value Builders Coach allow 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. To find out more about how Kermit can help you maximize the value of your business, contact him at kengh@mfmi.com at mfmbusinesscoaching.com.

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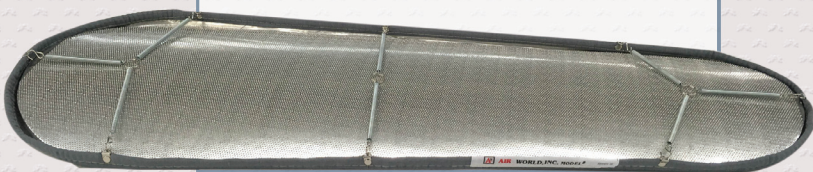
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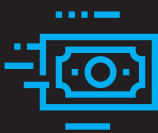
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Life goes on
For the Bodin family, starting a cleaning business in Yonkers, NY, was an opportunity for a clean slate. Before that, 12-year-old Paul Bodin and his father, David, had been forced to flee their native country during the Russian Revolution during which the family business in Kiev was confiscated. An old article from the Herald.
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, computer chips, steel and other metals, lumber, packaging materials, zippers and
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
Light always follows darkness
by Peter Blake
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
Don's wishlist to St. Nick: 2021 edition
by Don Deroulers
BH! 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
A Tribute to James Peuster
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

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OTS Anniversary 10%	101	\$1,563.45
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