



Take That to the Bank!

by Rick Meehan

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Those of you who have been reading my articles for a while know that I harp on acquiring more knowledge to increase profits in our contract cleaning companies. Although it has a wonderful sound – p...r...o...f...i...t...s – many of you simply do not understand what I’m driving at.

Let’s face it, the cleaning industry as a whole has a reputation for employing educationally challenged personnel. Many owners barely made it through high school, much less college. Few janitors and maids reached beyond high school. None of this really matters in the world of cleaning, especially if you understand that this industry is as much a trade as bricklaying or carpentry. A good cleaning person learns tricks of the trade from someone with more experience. It may not take a lot of studying to sling a mop or scrub with a brush, but a true professional can make a facility look so good that it sings without a diploma.

Unfortunately, to run a cleaning business it takes far more than manual labor done properly. Although no one can really get enough schooling, knowledge is not simply about books. Knowledge is about information and wisdom. You can take that to the bank!

Of course, what any good business owner wants is take more money to the bank. If some of that money gets to stay there instead of being spent on the costs of doing business, that’s really great. This excess is called profit.

Since the contract cleaning trade is a hands-on field, anything that makes it more rewarding is a good thing. Obviously, moneymaking is what the trade is all about. So how do you turn a higher profit? Are you afraid I’m getting ready to say “crack the books?” Well, actually I am – you can take that to the bank too.

To soften the blow, let me tell a personal story. My son, age 21, joined the U.S. Army this past May. His reasoning, “I don’t like college and I don’t want to waste any more of your money, Daddy.”

Well, I appreciate saving some money, for sure. However, I know enough about the U.S. Army from friends and family that have served to know that training never stops. Some of that training is done in the classroom. My son picked a field that requires tremendous volumes of book-learning, testing, field training, and more testing. All this is to keep him as safe as possible, and I am truly thankful for that. His last phone call was, “I’m learning a lot, especially since I have spent eight hours a day for the last five weeks in the classroom.” If I can’t lead a horse to water and

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make him drink, the U.S. Army surely can... and you can take that to the bank!

Now, I can't force-feed knowledge and wisdom into you, but I surely can lead you to the trough. Resources for the cleaning industry are boundless these days.

When I first started in the trade, virtually nothing was available except a couple of magazines and maybe a book or two at the public library. Since the advent of the World Wide Web, every form of media has hopped on board to educate the cleaning industry. People like me are flooding the system daily with tips and tricks, how-to manuals, videos, books, e-zines (like this one), websites – you name it. The trade is inundated with a smorgasbord of information.

Big words for an unlearned occupation. However, like my son, I implore you to educate yourself in whatever fashion works best for you. Along with your education level, your profits will rise, and you can take that to the bank.

Here is a list of my top ten favorite resources to help increase my product knowledge:

- 1. Trade magazines**, both printed and on the web: www.ecleanmag.com, this very e-zine; www.cleanlink.com, run by Trade Press, publisher of Sanitary Maintenance; www.maintenancesalesnews.com, by Rankin Publishing, publisher of Maintenance Sales News.
- 2. Your local public library** in the “building maintenance” section.
- 3. YouTube (www.youtube.com)** where you can search for videos on virtually every cleaning machine and procedure.
- 4. Manufacturers' websites** list resource materials on their products – how to, specification sheets, material safety data, sales flyers, seminars, training sessions.

5. *Secrets of Closing the Sale*, by Zig Ziglar, world famous sales trainer and motivational speaker, now deceased. His sales methods are timeless, however.

6. Cleaning associations offer resources and training events. The largest of these is the International Sanitary Supply Association, or ISSA (www.issa.com).

7. Your local janitorial supply house is the place to get one-on-one instruction, mostly for free.

8. Janitorial and cleaning staff working in the trenches every day. Some of them are masters willing to train apprentices. Learn from them.

9. Government agencies like OSHA, EPA, DOT, and USDA contain the rules and regulations governing occupational, environmental, transportation, and food safety. Cleaning procedures and materials handling



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ignore them get put out of business.

10. Use the Federal Register, www.federalregister.gov, to study up on changes in the laws governing business operations.

No one ever said it would be easy to run a cleaning business. In addition to the resources above, it is wise to have local investment advisors, bankers, lawyers, accountants, insurance agents, and even other cleaning company professionals in your repertoire of consultants. I have been told by many cleaning pros who started off as apprentices and worked their way into becoming masters that they never had a clue about the level of expertise it takes to run a cleaning business until they tried it for themselves. The story is one about the School of Hard Knocks, so you can take that to the bank.

Now that we've about reached the fall of the year, many of us are evaluating where our profits stand so far. Are we better off than last year to date? How are we going to improve our profits in the years to come?

One of my favorite old television shows was a police drama called *Baretta*, which aired from 1975 to 1978. The main character, a New Jersey plainclothes detective named Tony Baretta, held the answer to staying in business: "surviving in a tough world." He was pragmatic; hence, his favorite phrase, "You can take that to the bank!" He meant what he said and backed it up using whatever ethical force necessary to bring a successful outcome to the situation. It was the force of willpower, just the same as the power needed to buckle down to study.

Studying is the path to knowledge; Wisdom comes from experience on the streets. So, starting right now, this fall, hit the Information Highway to discover what it will take to increase your profits and stay in business. Otherwise, like so many undereducated cleaning contractors, this fall may be your last – and you can take that to the bank!

eClean Magazine