Start Your Own Cleaning Service

a Step-by-Step Guide

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Step 1 – Should I Start a Cleaning Business?

Have you been toying with the idea of starting your own cleaning business? If so, you're not alone. Hundreds of new residential and commercial cleaning businesses start up every day. After all, homes and commercial buildings all over the world need to be cleaned, and why shouldn't you be one of the businesses who are paid to do it?

There is such a variety of cleaning services you can offer that you don't need to limit your thinking to just cleaning homes or just cleaning office buildings. Perhaps you're interested in cleaning car dealerships or dentist offices. Or maybe you'd like to learn how to care for carpet or ceramic tile flooring. The possibilities are almost endless.

But before you jump in with both feet, you need to stop and get a good picture of just what you're getting into. All business owners need to have a thick skin, but as a cleaning business owner, it may be even more important. After all, this isn't a very high tech business, and few "janitors" get a lot of respect. In fact, they're often the unseen business, thought of only when something doesn't get cleaned or the toilet paper runs out.

The flipside however, is that you can have a very profitable cleaning business that is as small or large as you'd like. Some prefer to keep the business small, performing all the cleaning themselves, while others will hire employees to do the work, as they spend their time growing the business. Cleaning businesses are much more flexible than most other businesses, since you can run it from your home, and you can operate your business on a part-time or full-time basis. You can also offer as many or as few services as you'd like.

This eBook is designed to get you thinking about everything you need to consider when starting a new business. It's not easy and it's not for everyone. But if you get to the end and decide this is exactly what you want to do then we wholeheartedly encourage you to get started!

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Do You have what it Takes to Start Your Own Cleaning Business?

Running your own business offers many rewards and gives you the freedom of being your own boss. You can also achieve great personal satisfaction from starting with a just few cleaning clients and building a successful and thriving business. Starting a new business is demanding on your time, family and finances. So before getting too far into the process of setting up your new cleaning business, it's important to take an objective look at yourself and see if you have what it takes to become a successful entrepreneur.

Answering the following questions will help you discover your entrepreneurial strengths and weaknesses:

1. **Do you have a positive attitude about yourself and your abilities?**
You're going to run up against competition, tough to sell clients and many other obstacles. A business owner needs to be able to have a strong positive attitude and a thick skin to make it through rough times.

2. **Are you a leader?**
Your employees, customers and even suppliers will be relying on your strong leadership abilities.

3. **Do you like to make your own decisions?**
Decisions can be tough to make and at times they'll have to be made quickly.

4. **Are you a self-starter?**
Remember, as a small business owner everything is up to you - from getting clients to bookkeeping to following through to make sure the work is done properly. If you don't make things happen, it's not going to get done.

5. **Do you like people and can you get along with all kinds of people?**
Besides working with different types of clients, you are also working with suppliers, employees, bankers and other professionals. There will not only be dissatisfied clients to deal with, but also cranky suppliers and incompetent employees.

6. **How well do you plan and organize?**
A small business owner is responsible for everything -- ordering supplies, making bank deposits, sending out invoices, scheduling, etc. It takes advanced planning and good organizational skills to stay on top of all the details involved in running a cleaning business.

7. **Do you have the physical and mental stamina to take on a new business?**
Many small business owners have to work 10-12 hour days, 6-7 days a week to keep the business running.

8. **Is your family going to be able to adjust?**
As well as the time commitment involved, if you are giving up a steady income to take on a new business you may have to adjust your standard of living until your business takes off.

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9. **Do you have the basic cleaning skills and knowledge of products and equipment?** Your clients depend on you to provide the most effective products, equipment, and procedures needed to get their buildings spic-and-span.

10. **Are you willing to invest time and money to develop any skills you may be lacking?** Do you need help with accounting, marketing or managerial skills? Local community colleges often offer workshops and short courses to help business owners gain confidence in these areas.

Honestly answering these questions will help you to judge if you are ready to take on the role of small business owner. A great deal of time, effort, sweat and hard work is needed to get your cleaning business off the ground. Many small business owners work full-time jobs and start their business on a part-time basis -- starting slowly and building consistently over time. It can take several years before your cleaning business is successful enough to support you and your family. That's the bad news.

But the good news is that once you have developed a good reputation, business will be easier to get and clients will come to you instead of you going to them. Patience and hard work will pay off as you see your cleaning business grow and become profitable!

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Pros and Cons - Buying a Cleaning Franchise versus Starting From Scratch

One of the first questions that you must answer before starting your new cleaning service business is whether you want to become an independent small business owner or buy into a franchise.

Each has its own advantages and disadvantages, and the type of business you choose depends on your unique set of circumstances. Before making your choice, research cleaning franchises, and narrow down your choices. Then, talk to current and former franchise owners.

Give some thought to the following:

• **Why are you going into business?**
Is it because you want to be your own boss? If you want to have total control of your business then having a franchise is probably not something you want to pursue. A franchise will dictate many of the rules and guidelines that you have to follow. The policies set by a franchise may include: where you buy supplies, how you advertise, fees you can charge, and even hours of operation.

• **Are you looking for guidance on getting your business up and running?**
A franchiser has taken time and effort to develop a successful business template. It is a proven system that has worked in locations across the country. The franchiser can provide you with start up information, training, and name recognition. Because people are familiar with the franchise name, it may take less time to establish a customer base than an independent business.

• **Do you want to set your own rates for your services?**
A franchise may dictate what rates you set for your services and even what services you can offer. If you want to offer services outside their guidelines, a franchise might not be your best choice.

• **Are you comfortable training employees and keeping the required employee documentation?**
Since a franchise has an existing business template, they will be able to provide you with training materials for your employees. The company may dictate what training employees must have along with what employee records you must keep in your files. A franchiser will most likely give you employee job descriptions and may give guidance on employee wages.

• **Do you know where to buy your supplies at a discount?**
A franchise agreement may also dictate what supplies and equipment you will use in your business. As the franchiser buys supplies in large quantities you may be able to get the supplies and equipment you need for your business at a discounted rate. But also be aware you may be required to buy supplies and equipment only from authorized companies, which will not allow you to take advantage of discounts and promotional specials from other suppliers.

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• **Are you willing to pay a portion of your monthly revenues to someone else?**
Franchising agreements differ, but most will require you to pay startup costs as well as a percentage of your revenue to the franchiser. In addition, many franchises have ad-funds that you must contribute to in order to fund national advertising campaigns. When talking with other franchise owners, be sure to ask them if they feel they're getting their money's worth from their ad-fund contributions.

• **Do you have the marketing skills necessary to promote your business?**
Independent businesses are responsible for all of their marketing from developing business cards to phone book ads to websites. A franchise can provide templates for most marketing pieces. The home office may dictate what advertising you can and can't do.

• **Is there a specific location where you want to set up shop?**
A franchise can dictate how many of their businesses are set up in a particular area. They may even give you a specific territory where you can offer your services.

Remember, a franchise is a ready-made template that you can jump into and have support so you can get your own business up and running without having to "reinvent the wheel". However, a franchise also has rules and procedures that you must follow and that will in some ways dictate what your business can and can't do. The way you want to run your business should guide you in you determination of being an independent business or a local branch of a national franchise.

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Get Your Cleaning Business off to a Good Start by Avoiding These Common Mistakes

As you get ready to start your own cleaning business there are literally hundreds of things you have to do - from buying supplies to figuring out your accounting system to finding customers. Your first year in business is full of excitement, but can also bring about a steep learning curve. You can be a step ahead of the game by avoiding these seven common business mistakes.

Mistake 1: Thinking all you need is energy and determination to succeed.
You often hear that entrepreneurs need a "fire in the belly" to get a business off and running. It's true, you'll be much happier if you're passionate about your business, but passion alone isn't going to pay your bills. You need much more than that – you need a plan. Thoroughly research your market and write a business plan and marketing plan. It doesn't have to be a huge, overwhelming project, but it forces you to take a good, hard look at your business and what you're trying to accomplish. Consider it a road map for your business success.

Mistake 2: Under pricing your services.
Many start-up business owners believe they can undercut their competitors and "steal" customers away. Pricing your services below market value only costs you money and eats away at your profits. Eventually you'll resent the fact that you're working so hard for very little income. Carefully calculate how you need to price your janitorial services so you cover all of your costs and still make a profit. And price your services based on the value you offer your customers.

Mistake 3: Living off adrenaline.
Entrepreneurs tend to live off the rush they get from sweating out the details of how to make a business work. That's not why you are starting your cleaning business. Your overall purpose is to make money. If you need a rush to get out of bed in the morning, make your coffee stronger.

Mistake 4: Not knowing anything about marketing.
Many new business owners fail to budget or make any plans to market their services. Some business owners even confuse marketing with sales. Sales are deals you close during the day. Marketing is doing everything you can to get the word out about your cleaning business.

Mistake 5: Being your employee's best friend instead of the boss.
At the start of a business, everyone involved is working several different jobs and perhaps even working seven days a week. Many problems are fixed on the fly. Eventually things settle down and you develop a system for assigning jobs and taking care of problems. You can avoid this common mistake by making sure that you have employment policies set up before opening the doors to your cleaning business. This will avoid legal problems and low employee morale. Remember, you are the boss and you set the pace. Have a company handbook and make sure your employees follow the rules. If you don't have any rules your business will suffer.

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Mistake 6: Quickly spending your capital.
Most business owners will underestimate the amount of money they need to get their business up and running. Your janitorial business needs more than just cleaning equipment and supplies. You'll need office supplies, phone services, vehicles (or money for mileage expenses), uniforms, marketing materials (brochures, business cards, etc.), insurance, and professionals (lawyer, accountant) to get your business off on the right foot. As a cleaning business, you will most likely bill at the end of the month and on top of that, some customers may drag their feet when paying their invoice. That means that you'll be providing cleaning services well before you receive any payment so you need to have cash on hand to pay the bills. Develop a personal and business budget that can sustain your company and then add at least 50 percent to cover unforeseen expenses.

Mistake 7: Forgetting about your family.
A start up cleaning business can be very demanding. A new business owner might be working 60 hours or more a week. This can put a huge stress on your family. When you start a cleaning business, it is not only a commitment on your part, but also on your family and friends. Make sure that you find time in that hectic first year of business to show appreciation to your family and friends for the support they give you.

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Step 2 – How to Set Up Your Business Legally
Selecting the Legal Structure for Your Cleaning Business

One of the most important decisions you will make when starting your cleaning business is deciding which type of legal structure is right for your business.
The type of entity you choose will determine the amount of taxes you pay and guide you in the amount of paperwork you will have to deal with. It will also determine how much personal liability you have in the business, and can be a factor in raising money or borrowing money for your new business.

It is best to spend the time in the beginning to make sure that the entity you choose is the one most suitable for your particular circumstances. You can get advice on choosing your legal entity from the local small business administration, your accountant, and your attorney.

The different types of legal entities are:

• **Sole Proprietor**
This is the easiest type of business to form and is one of the most common for small businesses. You have complete control over your business and do not have to report to anyone. The drawback to a sole proprietorship is that the owner is personally liable for all financial obligations of the business. This means that if your business is sued you can be held personally responsible. Another drawback is that you are responsible for the entire sum of FICA taxes due. Normally the employer is responsible to match the employee's share, but when you are a sole proprietor, you must pay the entire 15%.

• **Partnership**
This type of business involves two or more people who agree to share in the profits and the losses of a business. The profits or losses are passed on to each partner and it is reported on their respective tax returns. Like a sole proprietorship, partners are responsible for the financial obligations of the business.

• **Corporation**
This is a legal entity in itself that is created to conduct business. The corporation is separate from the individuals that form the business and handle the responsibilities of the organization. Just like a person, the corporation can be taxed and it is also held legally responsible for its actions. A key benefit of a corporation is that the owner avoids the personal liability that occurs with a sole proprietorship or partnership form of business.

• **C Corporations**
These are typically large companies that are publicly held. If a C Corporation pays out dividends, then the profits are double taxed. The C Corporation must file a return on its own behalf and pays taxes on its profits before dividends are paid to its shareholders. The shareholders must then claim the dividends as income, which are taxed again.

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• **S Corporations**
These are companies that elect a special tax status with the IRS and, therefore, do not face double taxation. The corporation is not treated as a separate entity; the profits are passed on to shareholders just as if the business was a partnership or sole proprietorship. The corporation itself does not pay taxes. However, there are strict requirements that an S Corporation must follow. Each stockholder of the S Corporation must be a US citizen and there is a limit to the number of stockholders an S Corporation can have. S Corporations can be appropriate for small business owners who want the legal protection of a corporation, but want the tax benefits of a partnership or a sole proprietorship.

• **Limited Liability Corporation**
This is a hybrid type of partnership. It allows owners to take advantage of the benefits of a corporation and a partnership form of business. Like a partnership, profits and/or losses are passed through to owners and like a corporation, owners are shielded from personal liability.

How do you know what business structure will work for your cleaning business?
There are several factors to take into consideration when determining your business structure.

• **Legal liability**
With a sole proprietorship or partnership you can be held personal responsible for the business, which means your personal assets can be taken if the business is sued.

• **Taxes**
There can be a big cost savings in choosing one type of business structure over another. C-Corporations are "double taxed". The business profits are taxed and the money that is passed on to you as the owner is taxed again.

• **Management and flexibility**
Do you want to have total control over the business? In a partnership or corporation there are agreements and bi-laws that you have to abide by.

• **Cost of formation and administration**
Sole proprietorships are the easiest type of business to set up and maintain. There are very few legal forms or tax requirements other than just general good bookkeeping. A partnership needs to have a partnership agreement drawn up ahead of time. Both corporations and limited liability corporations need to have legal documents prepared before the business begins operation.

• **Future needs**
Where do you anticipate the business being in 3 years or 5 years? If something happens to the owner, what happens to the business? Your cleaning business can be successful with hard work and dedication. Choosing the appropriate business structure can make your task as a business owner much easier if you research your options before signing up your first client. Discuss the various business entity options with a professional before making your final decision.

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Secretary of State and Commerce Web Sites

If you're starting a new cleaning business, you need to research the laws for setting up your business in your state. You'll find much of the information you need at the following state Web sites. Most of these sites will also provide information on how to register your business.

Alabama
Alaska Division of Banking, Securities and Corporations
Arizona Secretary of State
Arkansas
California
Colorado
Connecticut
Delaware
Florida
Georgia
Hawaii Division of Business Registration
Idaho
Illinois
Indiana
Iowa
Kansas
Kentucky
Louisiana
Maine
Maryland
Massachusetts
Michigan
Minnesota
Mississippi
Missouri
Montana
Nebraska
Nevada
New Hampshire
New Jersey
New Mexico
New York
North Carolina
North Dakota
Ohio
Oklahoma
Oregon
Pennsylvania
Rhode Island
South Carolina
South Dakota
Tennessee
Texas
Utah Department of Commerce
Vermont
Virginia
Washington
West Virginia
Wisconsin
Wyoming

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How to Create a Name for Your Cleaning Business

Before you open the doors of your cleaning business you not only need equipment and supplies, you need a name for your business.

The name of your company will be the first thing prospective clients see - whether that is in the phone book, on your company car, in an ad, or on a website. The name symbolizes what your cleaning business represents. So it is important to spend some time on choosing a name that not only fits your cleaning business, but also presents a positive image to customers, suppliers and employees.

The easiest way to name your business is to use your own name or initials, such as Joe Smith's Cleaning.

This provides a personal touch, is easy to remember, and if you have a proven track record in the business, it can attract customers. However, if your plan is to one day sell your business, you might want to consider something less personal.

Instead of using your name or initials, you may want to think of descriptive or suggestive wording for your business name.

When going this route begin by brainstorming key words or phrases that have something to do with the business: clean, cleaning, squeaky clean, house cleaning, commercial cleaning, janitorial services, etc. Write down as many words as you can think of and use a thesaurus to create more wording possibilities.

You can also use words that describe the benefits your clients will get from using your service: spotless, spic-n-span, dust free, immaculate, etc.

Take the words from your two lists and start combining them into various business names: Sparkling Waters Cleaning Company, A1 Janitorial Services, APlus Cleaning, Spic-n-Span Cleaning. As most businesses also use a tag line or motto, look through your list to see if any of your potential names suggest possibilities. For example, "Sparkling Waters Cleaning - Your floors will look like sparkling waters".

Try out different names and combinations and then judge the names by the following:

- Is it easy to pronounce?
- Is it concise?
- Is it easy to remember?
- Is it distinct?
- Does it convey the message you want your customers to see?
- Is it pleasant to hear and repeat over and over again?
- Is it something you can stand behind?

Before you can begin using your business name, check to see if the name is already trademarked.

Do an Internet search at the USPTO (U.S. Patent and Trademark Office) at www.uspto.gov. Then check with your local secretary of state to see if anyone else in your state has already registered that name. Once you have decided if the name is available and can represent your business, run it by family and friends to get their reaction.

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The business name is the flag that can wave down potential customers. Once you have decided on a name it will most likely be with you throughout the life of the business. Putting the time into researching a suitable name for your cleaning business is one way to get your business off and running in the right direction.

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How to Find a Good Accountant for Your Cleaning Business

Finding a good accountant who you feel comfortable working with is important to your cleaning business.

It's his responsibility to stay on top of all the ever-changing tax laws, plus he can give you financial advice that will help guide you in the growth of your business.

Perhaps you're a sole-proprietor who is thinking of incorporating your business. Your accountant will be able to advise you about how this move would affect your taxes and business growth. Or maybe you have questions on whether you should buy or lease a new truck for your business. Once again, your accountant will be able to help.

So how do you go about finding an accountant who is a good fit for you and your cleaning business? Here are a few tips:

• **Ask other business owners for references.**
Find out who their accountants are and how happy they are with the services their accountant provides.

• **If you can't get any references, go to the yellow pages and search the listings for several firms to contact.**
Call their offices and ask for the names of accountants who are familiar with cleaning businesses. Call four or five of the accountants on your list and ask them to tell you about their experience with working with clients in your industry and about their fees. From that information, narrow down your list to two or three accountants to interview in person.

• **Prepare a list of questions to ask at the interviews, including:**
o Do you have experience working with cleaning companies? (As a cleaning business you have unique expenses, including cleaning supplies and equipment, so it's helpful to find an accountant who understands your business.)
o How long have you been an accountant?
o What certifications do you hold?
o What continuing education or workshops do you attend?
o What is the hourly billing rate and what are the charges for extra services such as completing tax returns or helping with payroll?
o Who will I be working with and will I always be working with the same person?
o How accessible will my contact person be? Can he be reached by phone and e-mail? If I have to leave a message, how soon will he return my call? Will I be charged for every phone call?
o What other services do you provide and at what fees?
o If my cleaning business is audited, what are your responsibilities?
o What type of insurance do you have? (They should carry liability and errors and omission insurance.)
o Look for an accountant who is forward thinking. Ask what problems he might foresee and what he would do to correct those problems.
o Also remember to ask for references and then be sure to call those references.

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• **Meet with several prospective accountants and ask your questions.**
An accountant should be willing to meet with you for a brief "get to know you meeting" at no charge. A face-to-face meeting will help you to assess if you are comfortable with him or her and if you can establish a long-term relationship. As you are asking the accountant your questions, watch their body language. Do they seem interested in you and your business? Have they communicated with you in a language that you understand and not used accounting language jargon?

Service is important.
If the accountant doesn't seem interested in you and your business or takes calls during the meeting, it might be best to move on to the next candidate who will devote his full attention to you and your business.

After interviewing several candidates sit down and decide which one you are comfortable with and that you are confident has the knowledge and abilities to keep your business finances on track. Once you have decided on who you want to work with request a written estimate of costs that spells out what your responsibilities are and what your accountant's responsibilities cover. Knowing what you will be doing and what your accountant will be doing can eliminate confusion and save you time and money.

Remember, your accountant should be more than just someone who prepares your tax return. He or she should be able to help you in making important financial decisions that guides your business and makes your business profitable. Spending time and effort in finding the right accountant when starting your business can help to assure your cleaning business is successful in the long run.

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Protect Your Cleaning Business with the Proper Insurance

Too many companies don't think about their insurance policies and what they cover until after something happens -- and unless you have prepared ahead of time, that something might not be covered in your policy. The following are just a few of the things that can occur: lost keys, chemical spills, employee theft, damaged equipment and broken items. The proper insurance coverage can play an important part in keeping your risks to a minimum.

The basic business insurance normally includes general liability insurance, commercial auto coverage, workers' compensation and equipment breakdown. These may be all combined into a package policy, but you need to check with your agent to make sure you have coverage in these four areas.

Besides the coverage listed above, the janitorial service industry has risks unique to it and you should make sure that you are covered for the following:

• **Lost key coverage.** This should pay to replace lost keys, adjust locks, or purchase and install new locks.

• **Coverage for property in your care.** This may include rental property, such as carpet cleaning or floor care machines.

• **Theft of customer property coverage.** This should cover losses incurred for theft and losses that occur from negligence, such as an employee who forgets to lock a building and allows a thief to steal your customer's valuables.

• **Limited pollution coverage.** As a cleaning company your employees will most likely be working with an assortment of chemicals. You need to have coverage for accidental job site pollution that may arise from chemical spills.

• **Business income coverage.** If your biggest customer went out of business and your main source of income dried up, could you stay afloat until you had a chance to sign on new clients?

• **Office equipment coverage.** Check your policy to make sure you have enough coverage for your computers and office equipment. If you have a home-based business you might be able to get a rider attached to your homeowner's insurance policy.

How do you choose an insurance carrier? To make sure that you get the proper insurance and the right types of coverage you should look for an agent that has experience working with businesses that provide janitorial services. Remember, the more your insurance agent knows about your business, the more confident you can be that he or she will provide a comprehensive program that meets your needs.

Look for a company that is financially strong and stable. It is also important to know that the company has a solid history of paying claims in a timely manner. Once you have an agent that understands your company's needs you should consider buying all of your business insurance policies through one company. This saves on paperwork and you are more likely to make sure that all of your various coverages work together.

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Once you have your policies in place don't forgot about your insurance.

Keep your agent informed of any changes in your business, i.e., new business location, new vehicles, etc. Also, make an inventory of all of your property; keep one copy at the business and one copy of the inventory off-site. Provide a good safety training program to your employees to reduce the likelihood of accidents and injuries.

Any one incident that happens could cause serious problems for your business and without the proper insurance coverage, could put you out of business. Taking time before something happens is vital to make sure that your business will survive if a catastrophe happens. Getting suitable insurance for your cleaning company can be a complex and confusing task. But having the proper insurance coverage for your company is something you can't afford to be without.

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Avoid Frequent Tax Mistakes by Keeping Good Records

It is important for small business owners to keep good records. Complicated tax laws cause many small business owners to make mistakes in bookkeeping and record-keeping. However, business owners can avoid making some of the common mistakes with a little forethought.

Following are some of the common mistakes small business owners make and how you can avoid making the same mistakes:

1. **Not saving receipts for expenses under $75.00.** There are some expenses the IRS does not require receipts for - meal and entertainment expenses if the cost is under $75.00. However, you still need a record of what you spent, where, who you were with, the business relationship, and the purpose of the expense. When you look at the requirements it is in your best interest to keep the receipt with written information about whom you went there with and why. Make sure the receipt is also date and time-stamped.

2. **Treating an equipment expense as a supply.** Equipment is considered a capital expense and it has to be depreciated. Supplies are items that are used up in a short period of time. Check with your accountant on tax laws for equipment purchases as they change frequently.

3. **Forgetting to track reimbursable expenses.** As a small business owner you will no doubt have to pay for some expenses out of your own pocket or with a personal credit card. Don't make the mistake of losing track of those expenses and having the company fail to reimburse you.

4. **Miscalculating automobile deductions.** There are different ways to calculate deductions for the use of a car or truck. Find one that suits you and stick with it. You can either take a standard mileage deduction or a deduction for expenses, but you cannot mix and match.

5. **Giving more than you can receive.** You can offer gifts to clients and business associates. Just check with your tax professional to make sure that you are not going overboard here. There is a limit on the amount of deduction you can take for these items.

Keeping receipts and good records does not have to be a difficult task. Talk with your accountant or tax professional to see what records you should be saving and make sure to pay attention to the common mistakes listed above. A good record keeping system is the only way you will know if your business is making a profit.

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Step 3 – Business Planning

As you think about starting a cleaning business, have you thought about how much money it will take to get started? By taking the right steps at the beginning, you can start your cleaning business with very low up-front costs, and, unlike many small businesses, you can actually clear a profit in your first year of operation!

What are the advantages of starting a cleaning business as opposed to owning and operating another type of business?

• A successful cleaning business can easily be started by one person who does everything from billing to marketing to the actual cleaning. You can start the business part-time and keep a full-time job until the business grows and can support your lifestyle.
• You'll provide the cleaning services at the client's building or home, so more than likely clients will never go to your "place of business". Therefore, you can easily run a commercial cleaning business out of your home. A spare room or garage can hold your supplies and equipment, and you can use a spare bedroom or small corner of any room to do your paperwork. Working out of your home saves the cost of leasing or owning a building and you can write off part of your home mortgage and utilities as business expenses.
• You can start a cleaning business with only a small investment in supplies and equipment. As your business grows and you offer more services such as carpet cleaning or stripping floors, you can buy or lease equipment.
• When just starting out you will probably do most, if not all, of the work by yourself. If you need employees you can work with a temporary employment agency and avoid the challenging tasks of payroll and paying employment taxes, social security, unemployment, and worker's compensation.
• A cleaning business can start out as a sole proprietorship, which is the easiest and cheapest way to set up a business entity. As the business grows you can consider changing the structure to a corporation or limited liability corporation, which may require an attorney and an investment of several hundred dollars.

What steps are needed to not only start a cleaning business, but to make sure that it is a successful cleaning business?

1. Begin by writing a business plan. This does not have to be a long document, but a three-to five page document that you prepare to help you focus and decide the basic parameters of your cleaning business. Include the following in your business plan: business name, location, geographic area you will serve, competition, business structure, marketing plan, accounting procedures and a cash flow spreadsheet. Remember, a business plan is to help get you focused - it is not a hard and fast document that outlines the day-to-day operations of how you will run your cleaning business.

2. After deciding on a business name and business structure, it is important to decide on a particular "niche" for your cleaning business. Do you want to clean small office buildings, large office buildings, medical clinics, banks, new construction or government buildings? It is much easier to start with one particular niche and focus your marketing efforts on a select group, rather than spreading yourself too thin.

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3. When just starting out your cleaning business you can easily operate on a shoestring marketing budget. Avoid the expensive and often ineffective newspaper and radio ads. Market your cleaning services through networking (especially through your local chamber), cold calling (in-person and by telephone), talking to property managers, and watching for new buildings going up in your area.

4. Once you decide to start a cleaning business, develop a relationship with a janitorial supplies distributor. Although it may seem like buying supplies through a distributor is more expensive than buying through a "big box retail store", there are many advantages in working with a distributor. A distributor can teach you how to use supplies and equipment properly, which will save your cleaning business time and money.

A distributor has knowledge of new products and can let you know when a cheaper product works just as well as a more expensive item. Through a distributor you will be able to buy concentrated and more effective cleaning chemicals. Knowing what chemicals to use and how to use them can directly affect your bottom line. This is advice you cannot get from a big box store!

Besides giving advice and training, a janitorial supplies distributor may have leads and referrals that can lead to profitable cleaning accounts.

5. Another important person to find right at the start of your cleaning business is an accountant. A good accountant does much more than your taxes at the end of the year. He or she will provide financial advice and guidance throughout the year and help you make important financial decisions such as when to buy or lease a piece of equipment or whether you should rent office space. This will help to save you money.

Hard work, dedication and attention to detail will keep your cleaning business going. Taking the time to make plans for your cleaning business will help to ensure that your cleaning business is successful!

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Finance Your Cleaning Business by Bootstrapping

New cleaning businesses tend to have few financial resources. Before you sign your first client you need capital for supplies, equipment, basic start-up expenses, and perhaps even payroll. Where do start-up companies get the financing they need to set up shop? Some businesses use savings, some borrow from friends or relatives, and some get a bank loan. But many small start-ups rely on a technique called bootstrapping.

Bootstrapping means pinching pennies, cutting corners, and learning to do more with less. Using bootstrapping techniques also means carefully watching where your cash is coming from and where it is going to. Does this technique work for growing your business? You bet! Ernest & Julio Gallo, Domino's Pizza, Hallmark Cards and Black & Decker are examples of businesses that started with $1000 or less and used the art of bootstrapping to grow and become successful.

In bootstrapping you not only focus on how revenues come into the business, but where you are going to spend the money that comes in and if there are other ways to obtain those resources.

The following are techniques that have helped businesses grow and expand.

1. **Focus on the right customers.** Some customers like to hold onto invoices as long as possible. Finding customers who pay immediately helps keep cash flowing into your cleaning business. Maintaining a good customer relationship will also help to get your customers paying as soon as they get their invoice.

2. **Be frugal, but not cheap!** Distinguish between costs that are necessary and ones you can avoid. Do you need to rent space for your cleaning business or can you begin by running the business out of your home or garage? Can you get by with used equipment? Do you need a cell phone with streaming video or just a basic model to make sure you do not miss any calls? On the same token, don't be shortsighted (and cheap) with suppliers.

Develop a good relationship with your suppliers and they will be happy to let you know when there are specials and if a lower priced item works as well as a more expensive one.

3. **Create a high profile for your cleaning business.** By taking on larger cleaning accounts your business projects an image of competency and that it has the skills and resources to handle the job.

4. **Keep your salary as low as possible.** The less cash that goes out of your business, the better. Cut back on your personal expenses while the business grows. Avoid buying that new car and that holiday cruise until your cleaning business has a good cash flow.

5. **Get your customers talking about you.** Word of mouth is the best advertising around and it doesn't cost you anything. Ask your customers for referrals and tell them to mention your name if they know of anyone who is looking for cleaning services.

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6. **Keep good records and track every dollar.** It is difficult to know if there are expenses that you can cut if you don't know where your money is going or where your money is coming from. Keep more income by not giving preferential treatment or discounts to special customers.

7. **There is power in becoming a partner.** Find another business owner to share equipment, office space or even employees.

8. **Trade for services.** Are there individuals or businesses who would be willing to have you clean their offices for part or all of their payment? Large businesses and corporations may not have the flexibility to "swap" services, but your lawyer, graphic designer, accountant or other consultant may be happy to exchange services.

9. **If you need employees, hire part-time or temporary help.** Rather than having a full-time bookkeeper or marketing person think of hiring a virtual assistant that you can pay for just a few hours a month. Another benefit to a virtual assistant is that she will have her own equipment and be responsible for her own employment taxes.

10. **If you are buying or leasing space and equipment** agree to only short-term leases. This helps you control costs and keep your cash flow flexible.

11. **How much inventory do you need to have on hand?** Don't tie up money in supplies and equipment that will just be sitting on a shelf.

12. **If necessary, work nights and weekends while your business is growing.** Many entrepreneurs will keep their full-time job and a part-time job until their own business is financially stable.

Using bootstrapping techniques mean that you are looking at more than just where your money is coming from. Earning a dollar in revenue may lead to only 20 cents in profit. But if you save a dollar in cost savings, that goes 100 percent to your bottom line. Being frugal at the start of your business can pay big dividends in the long run. Bootstrapping can be your best friend when it comes to the cash flow of your cleaning the business!

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7 Advantages to Leasing Equipment for Your Cleaning Business

All small businesses need equipment and your cleaning business is no exception. But you don't necessarily have to buy the equipment to run your cleaning business successfully. Depending on your circumstances, leasing may be a better choice than buying every piece of equipment you need for your cleaning business.

What is a lease? A lease is an agreement in which you have the use of a piece of equipment, but you do not own it. The user (the lessee) makes payments to the owner of the equipment (the lessor). Leasing has become a common business practice. The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) reports that equipment leasing has risen about 20 percent over the past two years. And, according to the Equipment Leasing Association, 8 out of 10 U.S. businesses lease all or part of their equipment.

There are several advantages to leasing equipment:

1. **Leasing is flexible.** As your business grows your needs may change. Leasing allows you to add or upgrade equipment. Lease terms vary from 12 months to 60 months. You may even be able to upgrade your equipment during the original lease period.

2. **Capital conservation.** In today's financial environment, you can lease equipment with little or even no money down. If you have to borrow money to buy a piece of equipment you may have to put money down that you could have used in other areas of your business, such as marketing or wages.

Leases generally require little or no down payment so it is likely you may be able to get more equipment or higher quality equipment than you could by buying.

3. **Fixed predictable payments.** When structuring the payments of a lease, look for fixed, monthly payments. This will protect you against rising interest rates and help you to project your cash flow outlays.

4. **Leasing is cost-effective.** Equipment in itself is costly and can also incur unexpected breakdown or repair costs. Most leased equipment is maintained and repaired by the owner of the equipment.

5. **Tax advantages.** Operating leases are generally 100 percent tax deductible as a business expense and are paid out of pre-tax earnings instead of after-tax profits.

6. **Not having to deal with obsolete equipment.** In today's business society, manufacturers constantly upgrade equipment and add new features. By leasing you can always be using the most up-to-date equipment. You also are relieved of the problem of getting rid of an outdated piece of equipment.

7. **Convenience.** Applying for a lease is generally easier than applying for a loan. Loans generally require large amounts of paperwork and copies of financial reports or tax returns. A lease agreement typically involves a brief application form and may not require supporting financial documents.

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Before leasing, go through the following list of questions from the Equipment Leasing Association:

Before Leasing:
1. How am I planning to use this equipment?
2. Does the leasing representative understand my business and how this transaction helps me to do business?

During
3. What is the total lease payment and are there any other costs that I could incur before the lease ends?
4. What happens if I want to change this lease or end the lease early?
5. How am I responsible if the equipment is damaged or destroyed?
6. What are my obligations for the equipment (such as insurance, taxes and maintenance) during the lease?
7. Can I upgrade the equipment or add equipment under this lease?

After
8. What are my options at the end of the lease?
9. What are the procedures I must follow if I choose to return the equipment?
10. Are there any extra costs at the end of the lease?

When leasing equipment it is important to understand the terms of the lease. Getting answers to the above questions will help you get all the information you need about your lease and avoid surprises or hidden costs after you sign the lease.

With leasing you do not own the equipment, but your cleaning business has the advantage of using the latest equipment and staying on top of technological advances. With the many benefits of leasing, it may be a better choice for your company than the outright purchase of an expensive machine.

If you would like to compare the costs of buying as opposed to leasing, use the "Buy or Lease Calculator" found here:

http://www.finance.cch.com/sohoApplets/BizBuyvsLease.asp

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Why Your Cleaning Company Should Buy From Janitorial Distributors

There is no getting around it - your cleaning business needs high quality cleaning supplies and equipment so you and your employees can effectively do the job of taking care of your clients' buildings. There are several places you can buy the chemicals you need to clean. Over 50% of the respondents to a recent survey answered that they buy their supplies from a big box retailer. But there is a better solution to buying cleaning supplies and equipment than purchasing Lysol, 409, or window cleaner from a large retail store. A janitorial supplies distributor can supply your cleaning company with professional products and much more.

At first glance the cleaning products bought through a janitorial distributor may seem to be higher in cost than the products bought from a big box retailer. However, the professional quality products you get from a distributor are higher quality products that clean better and more efficiently.

Distributors have products available in concentrated form, which means a small amount goes a long way. You'll actually be spending less than you would if you bought from a retailer. The price may initially seem higher, but once you see how far concentrates stretch just by adding water, you will see that buying cleaning products in a concentrated form is a bargain. Distributors may also offer **quantity discounts for high volume purchases**.

In addition to **higher quality products** and the ability to offer volume discounts, there are many other reasons that your cleaning business will benefit from doing business with a janitorial supplies distributor:

Distributors keep records of the items that you buy. They also keep track of warranty information. Distributors can also provide you with MSDS sheets and OSHA's right to know information on the cleaning products that you buy from them. As you know, you're required to have MSDS sheets on all cleaning chemicals you use and have them available for your employees. Most retailers won't be able to offer MSDS sheets.

Janitorial supply distributors have in-depth product knowledge. Looking for a product to give your restrooms a "fresh smell"? Forget about buying Pinesol from a retailer. Pinesol has a strong smell that people may find offensive. A distributor will be able to recommend a suitable air freshener for your particular situation. A good distributor can recommend products and will know if a lower priced product is just as effective as a higher priced item.

Don't know how to use a cleaning product or piece of equipment? **Your distributor will be able to train you and your employees on how to use new products and equipment properly.** Your distributor will also be able to share information on how to use products that can help your staff become more efficient. Rather than saving just a few pennies by buying a product from a retailer, you can save a substantial amount in labor savings with the product information you can get from a distributor.

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Equipment breakdown? **Some distributors may even offer repair service for your cleaning equipment** saving you the time and headaches of sending your equipment back to the manufacturer for repairs.

Do you need a specialized cleaning product for a building or job? Your distributor will have suggestions for the product you need and if he does not have it on hand will know where to order it from.

Pricing alone should not dictate where you buy the supplies for your cleaning business. The value you get by buying cleaning supplies from an experienced distributor is priceless. Rather than saving a dollar or two on cleaning products by buying through a big box store, you can save hundreds of dollars on staff time by working with your distributor. And those savings will lead directly to more profit in your pocket!

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Janitorial Supplies Checklist for Starting Your Cleaning Business

Use the following checklist when buying your cleaning supplies and equipment from your local janitorial supplier.

Trashing

___ **44 Gallon Brute/Dolly:** Use to collect trash and to store extra trash can liners and dusters.

Restrooms

___ **Caddy:** Holds spray bottles, stainless steel cleaner, bowl cleaner, bowl brush, grout brush, cleaning cloths, and white hand pad. Tip: buy a caddy that fits on your Brute/Dolly.

___ **Spray Bottles** with appropriate labels for disinfectant cleaner and glass cleaner.

___ **Stainless Steel Cleaner:** Use to polish brushed stainless steel items such as sinks, dispensers, and grab bars.

___ **Bowl Cleaner:** Can use 0% to 26%, depending on the surface being cleaned and the soil load.

___ **Gloves:** To be worn when cleaning restrooms and emptying trash.

___ **Safety Glasses:** To be worn when mixing or applying chemical.

___ **Bowl Brush:** Use for scrubbing toilets and urinals.

___ **Grout Brush:** Use for detailing around faucets, hardware on toilets, and grout lines.

___ **White Hand Pad:** Use to loosen and remove soil after applying chemical.

___ **Cleaning Cloths:** Microfiber cloths are best. Use color-coded cloths.

• Yellow – counters, sinks, partitions, dispensers

• Red – toilets and urinals

• Blue – glass and mirrors

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Dusting

___ **Furniture Polish:** Use on wood furniture and woodwork.

___ **Murphy's Oil:** Use on woodwork.

___ **Microfiber Cloths:** Use green microfiber cloth for dusting all surfaces.

___ **21" Static Duster:** Use on flat items, tight areas, and hard to reach areas.

___ **8' Extension Duster:** Use to dust high areas without having to use a ladder.

Vacuuming

___ **Back Pack Vacuum:** Use to vacuum carpet, hard floors, corners and edges. This type of vacuum is the most efficient and can replace upright vacuums.

___ **Upright Vacuum:** Use to vacuum carpet and mats.

Brooms

___ **House Broom:** For inside use.

___ **House Broom:** For outside use.

___ **Push Broom:** (Optional) 18" – 36". Use to sweep larger floors.

___ **Dust Mop Frame and Head:** (Optional) Can use 18" to 60" depending on the size of the floor.

___ **Dust Pan**

Mopping

___ **Mop Bucket/Wringer:** Buy a wringer with downward pressure and one that is for 16 oz to 32 oz mops, as it can be used on any size floor.

___ **Mop Handle and Mop Head:** Buy appropriate mop handles and mop heads for the job.

___ **Microfiber Flat Mop:** (Optional) 18" flat mop works well on small to medium size floors.

___ **Microfiber Mop Pads:** (Optional) For use with 18" microfiber flat mop.

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Step 4 – Sales and Marketing

It doesn't matter what a fantastic service your cleaning business provides if no one knows that you exist. If you are clever and motivated there are numerous ways to promote your business that don't have to cost a bundle. This Chapter offers tips on successful sales and marketing techniques.

43 Niches for Your Cleaning Business

If you're thinking about starting a cleaning business, then before you even begin to think about marketing, you need to think about who you should market your business ***to***. You'll find it much easier and less stressful to get started in the cleaning business by deciding on a niche so you can market exclusively to that group of individuals or businesses. This is a short list of the types of businesses or individuals that hire cleaning companies.

Once you've decided on your niche, the next section on branding will help you to differentiate yourself from the competition.

Residential Homes
Convenience Stores
Condominium and Town Homes
Restaurants
Office Buildings
Taverns
Banks
Movie Theaters
Grade Schools
Day Care Centers
High Schools
Apartment Buildings
Colleges and Universities
Move-in/Move Out
Special Education Centers
Construction Cleanup
Federal Government
Manufacturing Facilities
State Government
Distribution Centers
Local Government
Hotels/Motels
Military
Convention Centers
Hospitals
Civic Centers
Clinics
Sports Facilities
Medical Offices
Casinos
Dental Offices
Park Facilities
Nursing Homes
Visitor Centers
Labs
Amusement Parks
Grocery Stores
Golf Courses
Large Retailers
Car Dealerships
Small Retailers
Automotive Centers
Retirement Communities

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Why You Need to Brand Your Cleaning Company

As you get your cleaning company up and running, it's important to develop a brand image. Your brand shows your personality and values to your clients, vendors, distributors, potential clients, and professional organizations you belong to. Despite what many small business owners think, developing a strong brand image is not for just for the big corporations, like McDonalds' Golden Arches, Nike's Swish, or Capital One's "What's in your wallet?" A strong brand image portrays your company as credible; it motivates your customers and develops customer loyalty.

Another way to look at branding is to imagine going to a restaurant that changes its decor and menu every week. The customers of this restaurant would have no idea what's on the menu and no clue about the atmosphere they are walking into. With no consistency, customers would soon seek out an alternative solution. They want to know the type of food being served and if it has a quiet atmosphere or one filled with loud music or television sets playing seasonal sports programs.

Public perception is an important part of any business, large or small. A consistent identity means developing a brand image for your cleaning company that shows you are dependable and consistent in the services that you provide. What does your cleaning business stand for? Fast service? Dependability? Healthy buildings? Or just doing the job right the first time? Incorporate this into your brand and then reflect that image in your logos, slogans and company promotional materials.

A brand is much more than just the look and emotional feel of a logo. It is what your cleaning business stands for and what you want your customers to think of when they think about your business. It should distinguish your business as unique and help you stand out from your competition. Look at your mission statement and develop your brand image from the key elements that are the strengths of your cleaning company. Keep your brand simple and consistent, "we deliver for you", "we try harder", "just do it", and "eat fresh" are just a few examples of successful slogans that go with brand images.

Once developed, keep your brand consistent and reflected in all of your marketing materials. Include your logo and slogan on all of your promotional materials, as well as company letterhead, faxes, statements, invoices, vehicle lettering and even voicemail. A strong, consistent message will help your cleaning customers and potential customers understand what your company has to offer.

Today's consumers are hit hard every day with advertisements on radio, TV, the Internet, direct mail and print media. It's important for your cleaning business to have an image that shows you understand the needs of your customers. Consumers don't trust products and services that frequently change their brand image, so they'll look elsewhere to buy the products and services they need.

Once you develop a strong brand you will not have to work as long or hard to get new accounts. Customers will know what you stand for even before you present a proposal to them. Taking the time at the start of your cleaning business to develop a brand - who you are and what you have to offer your customers - will pay off in the long run with increased profits for your cleaning company!

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How to Write a Press Release to Promote Your Cleaning Business

A press release is a great way to create publicity for your new cleaning business. Send out press releases to announce your new business, or to announce a newsworthy event about you, your employees, or your business to the media. Keep in mind that a press release is not an advertisement and you should never use it to sell something. But press releases are an effective way to get your company's name out in front of potential clients.

A press release should cover one topic, be as specific as possible, and be no longer than a few paragraphs. The types of events you may want to write a press release about include:

• announce your new business
• training or workshops you or your employees have attended
• awards your business or your employees have won
• new products or services your cleaning business is offering
• classes you are teaching
• free information you have available at your business or on your website
• publications you have been quoted in
• new business hours or new business location

There are basic elements that should be in every press release:
1. Contact Information
2. Headline
3. Lead Paragraph
4. Text (main body of information)
5. Ending paragraph containing information about your cleaning business

How do you write the press release? Be professional by putting your press release on company letterhead. On the left side type "For Immediate Release" then on the opposite side put your contact information. Your contact information should include your name, phone number, web site URL, and e-mail address. Skip down a couple of lines after the contact information and type your headline. Go down a couple of lines after the headline and start your press release. Your first paragraph should be attention grabbing and contain the most relevant information about your message - the who, what, when, where and how.

The following paragraphs can expand on the message. Be aware that newspapers may edit your submission. It is important to get all relevant information as high up as possible in the press release. For a successful press release follow these tips:

• Keep your press release to a maximum of one page or 400 words.
• Always write your press release in third person.
• Check to be sure everything is accurate, double check anything with numbers as it is easy to transpose numbers and not catch the mistake the first time.
• Double-space your release.
• Use quotes and bullets for interesting points and to make the press release easier to read.
• Mark the end of your release with -30- or ###. These are printer's marks and make it look like you know what you are doing.

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Once you've written your release and proofed it, you are ready to send it to the media. Check with your local newspaper(s) to see if there is a specific reporter in charge of the business section and send the press release directly to that person. If you are aware that a local radio station runs business related press releases, send it to them too. Find out the preferred method of delivery. Some prefer that you fax your press release and some prefer that you email it. If they prefer email delivery, find out if they allow attachments. Some companies do not allow attachments within email so in this case; type the press release directly into the body of the email.

Press releases should be an essential part of your marketing campaign. The local media are always looking for short stories to print about area businesses and events. Don't miss out on this free form of publicity! With a little time and effort you can be turning out press releases that can generate interest in your cleaning business. The more interest you have in your business, the more clients you can sign up, and the more dollars in your pocket.

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Networking Tips for Cleaning Companies - Part One

Many people cringe at the thought of having to "network" to gain business for their cleaning company. But networking is one of the best ways to meet people and build relationships, and as you know, building relationships is the cornerstone of building a successful cleaning business.

If you feel uncomfortable with the thought of networking, then change the way you think about it. Most of us think that networking is an activity, an event to attend, or a "thing to do", in order to market our business. Rather than think of it that way, look at networking as an attitude, or a skill to be developed. It's something that can become a part of us every day, and can be shared with everyone we meet.

So how do you change your attitude about networking? Start replacing the negative self-talk with positive self talk. For example:
• "I can start networking easily by calling all the family, friends, and colleagues I already know and tell them I'm looking for referrals for my cleaning business."
• "I am confident that the people I meet will offer to spread the word about my cleaning business because people like to assist others who ask for their help."
• "When I approach people and ask their advice, they'll be happy to offer it because they love to share their knowledge and experience."

Now that you're ready to start networking, you'll want to do it effectively. In order to do that you need to be able to carry on a conversation with the people you meet. Ok, I can tell you're cringing again... Not to worry. The key to keeping a conversation going is to ask lots of questions. Following are questions you can ask when you first meet someone at a networking event. Keep asking questions and the conversation will flow naturally.
• "How did you get involved with (name of group)?"
• "Tell me about your business." (Ok, well that's not a question, but it's the typical ice-breaker)
• "How long have you been in business?" - or - "How long have you been doing...?"
• "How did you get your start in this business?"
• "What do you enjoy most about what you do?"
• "What challenges do you face in your business?"
• "What have you found to be the most effective way to promote your business?"
• "What advice do you have for someone just starting out?"
• "Who is a good referral for you?" (Let them know you're interested in helping them with their business).
• "This is my first time attending this group." You could follow up this statement with, "Can you suggest two or three other people here that I might meet?"
If you want people to be interested in your business, then you need to show an interest in their business. People like to talk about themselves, so don't monopolize the conversation by only talking about your cleaning business. A good way to get them talking is to ask questions like:
• Can you expand on that?
• Can you explain that to me?
• Can you give me an example?
• That's very interesting...tell me more!

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Now that you have an idea how to change your attitude about networking and how to keep the conversations moving, the next step in effective networking is to lay some ground rules for attending networking events so you can plan ahead for what you want to accomplish. In Part Two, I'll show you how to do that, plus teach you how to grow and nurture your network -- how to keep your network fresh!

Networking Tips for Cleaning Companies - Part Two

Networking is a great way to market your cleaning business, and in order to do it effectively, you need to plan ahead so you know what you want to accomplish at each event. You also need to grow and nurture your network to keep it fresh!

Networking isn't about seeing who can collect the most business cards. How many times have you attended an event, and then let the pile of cards sit on your desk? Have you ever gone back through the cards and wondered what the person looked like who gave you their card? Wouldn't it feel awkward to call that person when you don't even remember meeting them or what they look like? Chances are, the cards will end up in the trash.

In order to network more effectively, it helps to have a plan of attack BEFORE the event. Here are some ways to plan ahead:

• **Set a goal.** Perhaps the goal is to connect and have a conversation with 3 people before the event is over. Once you've reached your goal, if you're not feeling comfortable, give yourself permission to leave. However, if you're enjoying yourself, by all means stay and continue to meet more people.
• **Be prepared.** Have your business cards ready, know your "elevator speech," and be prepared with your conversation questions, noted in Part One.
• **Be proactive.** Instead of waiting for people to approach you, take the initiative and walk up to someone who looks like they could use someone to talk to and introduce yourself. Ask them about their business. They'll be relieved someone is taking an interest in their business and will eventually ask about yours.
• **Listen, listen, listen!** Ask questions about the person you've just met, and let them talk. The more you let people talk about themselves, the more you learn. Eventually they'll realize that they've been doing all the talking and ask about your business.
• **Give referrals.** Don't go to the event with the goal of just finding new prospects for your business. People give referrals to people who are generous and offer referrals to them.
• **Remember to write comments on the back of the cards you receive.** Perhaps someone mentioned they might have a referral for you but need to look up the contact person's information at the office. Or maybe you talked about continuing the conversation over coffee. Jot down these notes - this will help you when it comes time to follow up.
• **Plan to follow up.** When you get home, don't simply set aside the cards and forget about them. Make a point to follow up with the people you've met within a week. The best way to follow up is with a phone call. Once you're in the habit of planning for the events you'll attend, you need to come up with a way to keep your network growing. It's not enough to attend the event and perhaps do one follow up call. Your network needs to remain "fresh".

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Here are some tips for growing your network and keeping it fresh:

• **Start a contact database** so you have a place to document the people you meet. Enter information into the database soon after meeting someone or attending an event. Make notes in the database about every contact you have with this person, along with the date. This will be helpful to you if you need to refer back to a conversation or if it's been a while since you've connected with this person.

• **Go through your database regularly** and contact at least 2 people you haven't spoken to in 60 or 90 days. This way they won't forget you.

• **Always be prepared by having your business cards with you** – when going shopping, to the hair salon, even at your child's school events. You never know when you might meet someone who could provide you with a referral.

• **Spend at least 2 days a month** attending networking events.

• **Invite someone in your network** to attend an event with you, rather than always going alone. Don't stick together at the event though. Each of you should make new connections and then you can talk and compare notes later.

• **If you read an article** in a magazine, newspaper or on the Internet, clip it or print it out and send it to a person in your network that you think might be interested.

• **Don't let your database get bogged down with old information and contacts.** Once a year, go through the database and delete any people you haven't connected with during the year.

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Finding Sales Leads for Your Cleaning Business

When starting out in your cleaning business, your first clients may be friends, relatives or clients that you had while working for another cleaning service. To grow your business you need to expand your circle and gain new customers. Where do you look for potential clients? The following are practical ideas to find qualified leads.

• **Join a networking or volunteer organization.**

Your community may have a Chamber of Commerce, Sertoma, Rotary or other networking organization. Joining and participating is one way to get businesses in the community to know about you and the services you provide.

• **Become an authority.**

Conduct a survey or poll that offers marketing information and then publicize the results through press releases and websites. Another way to become an expert is to teach classes in a local community education program. Both ways will build recognition and hopefully demand for your services.

• **Find a partner.**

Work with businesses that compliment your cleaning service. Think of pairing up with a carpet cleaning service, air duct service or a business that cleans blinds. When your partner cannot supply a service they can refer the client to you and vice versa.

• **Create an industry profile.**

Put together an informative speech or write an article about green cleaning, taking care of carpets or another area you're experienced in. Then put together a few promotional pieces to mail out to the local media.

• **Buy banner ads in electronic media.**

Look for a website that targets your potential customers, such as your local chamber. This can deliver your information right to the businesses that need your services.

• **Read your local newspaper.**

Your local paper will keep you informed about new businesses, expansions and remodels. These can all be prospective clients.

• **Have a booth at a Business Expo.**

Most communities have some type of commerce and industry trade shows. Setting up a booth and having a sign up for door prizes is one way for people in the community to learn about the services you provide.

• **Check your records.**

Have you lost clients? Were there potential customers who contacted you that you did not sign up for cleaning services? Circumstances may have changed and they might now need your services.

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• **Buy leads.** You can buy prospect lists and mailing lists from various sources including local chambers, trade groups, professional organizations and mailing list services. Some lists can be very specific and break down the leads to specific groups, while others (such as from a chamber) may include all the group members.

Growing your cleaning business and getting more clients will take some time, creativity and perseverance. Devoting time into developing contacts and using the above ideas as guidelines you can grow your cleaning business and put your profits into the bank!

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Cold Calling Success for Cleaning Companies

Most people recoil in fear at the thought of cold calling in order to make sales for their business. But if you spend your time sitting in your office waiting for people to come to you, you're going to have a long wait. If done properly, cold calling can be an effective sales technique for your cleaning business.

The following tips won't eliminate your fear of cold calling, but they can help to make it a more positive, successful experience for you.

1. **Remember the purpose of a cold call.** Many people think that the purpose of a cold call is to get the sale - wrong. The purpose of the call is to get an appointment so you can get a chance to make the sale.

2. **Do your research.** Don't just pick up the phone and start dialing. You need to do a little research first. Who is your target market? Start making a list of the companies who fit into your niche and then start doing preliminary research on each company before calling. For example, find out if they have a web site and read it thoroughly. Find out who the decision-makers are. See if they're a member of the Chamber of Commerce to get additional information that way.

3. **Be nice to the gatekeeper.** It's very likely that when making cold calls you're going to be connected to the gatekeeper (assistant to the decision maker, receptionist, etc.). Be friendly, learn their name and use it, and maybe say something like, "I wonder if you could help me?" You want to get them on your side, willing to give you the information you need. Ask if they can help you get the name of the person you need to talk to or when would be the best time to contact that person.

4. **Call early in the morning.** This is typically the best time to reach the decision maker. It's also a time when most people are more pleasant and have more energy.

5. **Prepare your script.** Don't just "wing it". This will keep you from making common mistakes like opening up with, "How are you today?" This will give them a chance to end the call before it's even started.

You should start the conversation with a greeting and an introductory statement, which can transition into more dialogue. For example, "Good morning, Mr. Smith. This is Tom Jones of ABC Cleaning Company. I recently read in the business section of the local paper that you're moving your business to a larger location. We specialize in commercial cleaning services in buildings of this size and can help you to reduce your monthly maintenance costs by using proven cleaning systems that also use environmentally friendly products. I'd like to ask you a few questions in order to determine the amount of savings we can potentially provide your company."

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6. **Prepare for the rest of the call.** It's difficult at this point to completely script the call, but you should have a list of the benefits of your services and the reasons that the prospect should buy from you over the competition.

Don't simply make a list of features, like being bonded and insured. While that's an important consideration after you've made the sale, the prospect only cares about what's in it for them at this point in the call.

Make a list of possible objections that they're likely to make like, "We already have a cleaning service that we're happy with," and then craft statements to overcome the objections.

7. **Ask for an appointment at a specific time.** Don't simply end the call by saying something like, "Can we meet next week to discuss this?" Instead say, "Would next Tuesday at 10 a.m. be a good time to meet?"

8. **Be persistent.** They say that most people need 7 to 10 "touches" before they're ready to make a purchase, so don't give up after only one or two calls!

Try sending a Thank You card after the call thanking them for taking the time to talk to you. Most people appreciate this simple, thoughtful gesture.

9. **Practice makes perfect.** The only way to get better at cold calling is to practice. You may never really enjoy it, but you can definitely get better at it the more you practice. Remember, your customers are out there, you just need to let them know about you!

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Closing the Sale

How do you know a prospect is ready to buy? Listen for signals during the presentation. A great indicator is when they start asking for more information. The following are common buying signals:

• Prospect asks specific questions about your services.
• Prospect asks you to repeat or clarify something you talked about.
• Prospect asks about features or different cleaning options.
• Prospect asks for references or a list of satisfied customers.
• Prospect brings up problems with current cleaning contractor.
• Prospect asks questions about you and your business.

When you start hearing buying signals, it's time to test the waters by asking a question to see if you're reading the signals correctly. Craft your closing question in a way that responds to the prospect's main concerns, and try to eliminate the possibility of the prospect answering "no" to your question. For example, "If you decide to go ahead and make a change in the cleaning service, would you want to stay with the same 3 days per week service, or would you want to go to 5 days per week?" If the prospect answers positively or confirms your suspicions that they'd like to move forward with the sale, then it's time to close the sale.

Here are some sample closing questions:
"When we start cleaning a building, we do an initial deep cleaning to get things up to standard. Would you like us to start next week, or the week after?"

"We track, order, and deliver all our customer's restroom supplies for them so they don't have to waste time on managing this time-consuming task. Who currently handles the restroom supplies?"

"If the cleaning proposal we give you is within your budget, when would you like to make the change?"

If they hesitate on price at this point, try something like, "I can certainly understand your concern with the budget, Tom. That's one of the reasons I contacted you. The money you'll save in supply costs, slip/fall accidents, and time spent managing cleaning complaints will be well worth the investment in partnering with us as your cleaning contractor."

After you've asked a closing question, it's time to stop talking. Remember, this is more about listening to your customer's needs than it is about talking about your business. Sometimes people are tempted to just keep selling, even though the prospect has indicated they're ready to buy. Pause and give them a chance to speak.

One of the best things you can do for your prospective customer is to keep in mind that there is a difference between just asking for the sale and helping people make decisions that are good for their company. In the end, it's not about you. . .it's about them!

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Step 5 – Bidding and Estimating

You've done the marketing and research, and even managed to get a meeting with the decision-maker. Now you have the opportunity to bid on a new cleaning account. This Chapter will help you to prepare yourself for a building walk-through and putting together a winning bid proposal.

Questions You Need to Ask When Bidding on Cleaning a Building

When bidding on cleaning a building, walking through the building with the prospective client is an important part of the process. This offers you not only a chance to do a detailed site inspection, but to ask questions and get to know your prospective client and start building a relationship with that person.

Here are some important questions to ask while doing the walk-through:
• **Why are you putting the contract out for bid?** Perhaps they're required to put the cleaning out to bid once per year. Or maybe they're not happy with the current contractor. Or it could be that they need to cut costs and are looking for someone that will offer a lower price.

If the latter is the case, then this should be a big red flag for you. Prospective clients that are just looking for the lowest bidder don't usually make for the best customers for your cleaning business.

• **If they're having a problem with the current contractor, then ask specifically what their concerns are.** Having this information will help you to let them know how you'll be able to solve their problems. When talking about the current contractor, don't talk badly about them. If the prospective client you're talking with hired the current contractor, then they'll feel as if you're criticizing their poor judgment!

• **What is your budget?** Many cleaning contractors don't feel comfortable asking this question but it is a valid one that many people are willing to share, and it will be helpful to you when deciding on a price.

• **Do you have a list of cleaning specifications?** If they do, ask for a copy. If they don't, find out exactly what they're looking for and provide a list with your bid proposal.

• **Here are some additional questions to ask:**
- What is the frequency of cleaning (once a week, five times a week)?
- What is your timetable? When are you looking to make a change?
- Do you have the amount of cleanable square feet?
- Do you have the amount of carpeted square feet and hard floor surface square feet? (You will need this information if bidding on floor care)
- Do you have recycling paper that needs to be handled by the cleaning company?
- Do you have an alarm system?
- Are there specific hours that the cleaning company is allowed to be in the building?

Take the guesswork out of the bidding process and get the information you need to make an accurate and competitive bid.

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Bidding and Estimating: Winning the Bid Doesn't Mean You must be the Lowest Bidder

Winning the bid for a cleaning contract doesn't necessarily mean that you have to be the lowest bidder.

The entire bidding and estimating process has an enormous impact on the success of your bid, and should be considered an overall effort, and not just an aim to beat the price of any competing business. The trick is to communicate well with the facility operator in order to create a set of standard expectations and definitions for the job itself. That way, the bid you make will cater precisely to what your prospective client wants and expects, and will justify your bidding price.

Normally the services required will depend on the client, but can include sweeping, dusting, vacuuming, buffing, waxing, emptying trash and recycling, restroom cleaning and restocking, and window cleaning.

When bidding on janitorial contracts, it is best to have a specifications list that you go over with the prospective client.

This ensures you and the client both know exactly what is expected, and allows you to bid accordingly. Make sure you check both inside and outside of the building, and include any seasonal or special tasks such as outside windows or sidewalks that require attention. On your tour, be aware of the level of cleanliness already present, and try and gage the expectations of the client accordingly.

Your checklist should contain the following items as a basic foundation, and should have additional points, depending on the specifics of the particular job, as well as any specialties you may offer to provide:

• Total cleanable square footage, including the types of floor surfaces and the measurements per type of floor surface. Floor care services such as carpet cleaning and stripping and waxing is usually bid separately. It is common for a floor care bid to be submitted on a square footage price as an add-on service.

• Tasks and frequency of these tasks.

• Similar to the floors, windows can be bid on in a per-unit basis and can be considered an add-on service.

• Restroom supplies and trash can liners should be identified. An additional bid can be made for their management (and a small profit as well).

• Overhead expenses, fixed expenses, variable expenses, labor, and materials should all be considered in your bid price.

• Production cleaning rates - for example how long it takes to vacuum a space based on square footage, how long a restroom fixture takes to clean (toilets, urinals, sinks), and how many trash cans can be emptied in an hour.

• Initial cleaning cost - you may need to charge separately for the first-time cleaning if the building needs to be brought up to the correct level of appearance by giving a thorough detailed cleaning.

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When you leave the site, don't forget to ask your prospective customer any questions you may have about details and expectations.

It's also important to find out your client's priorities between price and quality.

Remember that the presentation of your bid is as important as its contents.

Put some effort into creating a standard bidding packet, which includes information about your company, a specifications list, references, testimonials, contract, and other information is greatly appreciated and very impressive to potential clients.

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What is Work Loading and What Does it Have to do With Bidding?

You have only so many hours in a day to get your buildings cleaned. Did you know there is a way you can have cleaner buildings and higher employee morale?

By implementing a work loading system you can streamline your cleaning operation and save money in the process.

Work loading will also help you when bidding on new accounts because your time estimates will be more accurate.

So what is work loading?

It is a system in which you analyze the amount of time it takes to complete tasks so you can schedule properly and get an accurate estimate of how much your staff can clean in a set period of time.

Work loading looks at more than just the minutes it takes to empty trash, vacuum, sweep or clean restrooms. To get an accurate idea of the area your staff can clean you also need to include "non-cleaning" tasks such as picking up equipment, restocking supplies and, if necessary, the drive time between buildings.

Through this tool you can manage your staff and know what can or cannot realistically be done with the tools and resources that you have on hand. This helps with planning and scheduling, and can help when you are bidding on cleaning jobs.

How does the actual process work?

Look at an example of restroom cleaning.

According to the ISSA (International Sanitary Supply Association), each toilet, urinal or sink in a restroom takes three minutes to clean. If you have a medium size restroom with one urinal, two toilets and two sinks - multiply six times three to come up with a time of 15 minutes to clean that restroom.

Adding on time for sweeping, mopping and re-stocking supplies, you have another ten minutes of time needed to clean that restroom.

Adding all of your cleaning times together for a building will give you an accurate estimate of how long it will take your staff to clean that location.

Looking at your workload and your employees, you can then decide if it is feasible to purchase high efficiency equipment, such as backpack vacuums or auto scrubbers that will shorten cleaning times.

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Through work loading you can compare the cost of increasing your staff to the investment in a new piece of equipment.

Work loading is a simple process that you can easily test in your buildings. It is important to have a detailed task list that covers all duties your cleaning crews do at a specific location so you can get an accurate estimate of the amount of time it will take to clean a building.

This will not only help in the bidding process, but in your overall operations as well.

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Understanding Cleaning Production Rates

When bidding a cleaning account, labor is always the biggest expense. In order to determine your labor expense for a cleaning account you'll need to figure out how many hours it will take to get the job done.

In order to determine the number of hours it will take, you'll need to break the job down into production rates by task. Using a cleaning rates production chart will be helpful in figuring this out. A cleaning production rate is not foolproof, but it will give you an average time per task under normal circumstances.

No situation is ever really "normal", so it's helpful to understand different circumstances that could affect a "normal" cleaning production rate.

• **Square Footage.** Perhaps the account you're bidding on has 2500 square feet of vinyl flooring that needs to be mopped. The standard production rate for mopping is 5000 square feet per hour, so that 2500 square feet of floor should take 1/2 hour to mop. However, you need to ask yourself some questions. Is the vinyl flooring all in one large area? Or is it broken up into two floors, with 4 restrooms, a break room, a copy room, a computer room, and a utility room? Do you think it will still take 1/2 hour when the floors are scattered throughout the building? This may not be a "normal circumstance" so you need to take that into consideration.

• **Task Frequency.** How often are tasks being performed -- once a day, once a week, once a month? Keep in mind that by lowering the frequency of a task, you're not necessarily reducing time and expense for the customer. Emptying trash 2 days a week versus 5 days a week doesn't really save much time and will affect your production rate. If your bid calls for emptying trash in a busy office twice a week, you may find overflowing trash cans, which will slow your workers down.

• **Number of Occupants.** If you're bidding on a small office building with a few employees and very little public traffic, your production rates will probably soar. However if that same sized building has lots of employees crammed into numerous cubicles, and they get a lot of public traffic, then production rates will go down due to more people occupying the building.

• **Equipment.** If you give your employees the wrong equipment, or give them equipment that has frequent breakdowns, then your production rates will be affected. If your building has wide hallways and open areas, they'll get more accomplished with a wide area vacuum, or a backpack vacuum versus a 12" upright vacuum.

• **Area of the Country.** Buildings located in climates that have snowfall or lots of rain will have more maintenance required due to snow, salt, sand and dirt getting tracked into the building. Climates with high humidity can also affect production rates for hard floor care and carpet cleaning, as drying times are much slower.

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• **Customer Standards.** One of the most intangible variables in regards to cleaning production rates has to do with customer standards. Is your prospective customer primarily interested in price? Then perhaps the "normal" production rates will be accurate. However, if your customer is dissatisfied with the current cleaning contractor because the quality of service is not there, then your production rates could be affected because you'll want to make sure your employees are spending enough time on each task.

Keeping these circumstances in mind when walking through a building and bidding on a new cleaning account will help you "massage" the numbers the way they should be for this particular bid.

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What to Include in Your Cleaning Bid Packet

When bidding on janitorial services in a commercial setting, it is necessary to put together a "Bid Packet" to present to your prospective client. Many small businesses seeking cleaning services do not know what to expect when receiving a bid, or their experience has been receiving a single page bid, which is not very impressive. When you present a nicely packaged proposal, you've just increased your chances of winning the bid, regardless of price. This is because you've given the impression that your bid packet is neat and professional, so your performance on the job must be too.

What should you include in your bid packet?

1. **Cover page.**

This page should include your logo and contact information. The heading should read something like, "Cleaning Proposal for XYZ Corporation".

2. **Table of Contents.**

There are many pages in your packet, so having an index of the contents is helpful to the prospect.

3. **Information about your business.**

Be creative here. Tell about your company, but in a way that shows how you are the perfect company to solve your prospects cleaning problems. You might also include what makes your cleaning company unique, and what specialty services your company provides.

4. **Cover letter for bid proposal.**

This will include a brief introductory paragraph and list the key points included in the bid including days and times of service and prices. If you are to provide restroom and other supplies, include that list here too. And be sure to thank them for the opportunity to bid on cleaning their building.

5. **Specifications list.**

If the prospect provided you with a list of specifications, rewrite them in your bid packet. If they did not provide you with a list of specifications, then provide your own standard list. Oftentimes, the prospect doesn't know what needs to be done and the frequency of each task, so using your list is the better choice.

6. **Contract.**

Make the contract page a simple, one or two page document. The longer it is and the more legal jargon you use, the less likely they will be to sign the contract -- especially in a smaller-sized account. Be sure to restate the pricing on this page, and include the payment terms, date service begins, length of the contract (if applicable), termination procedures, and a place for both parties to sign the document

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7. **References.**

Include a list of references the prospect can call. Include company name, contact person name, address, and phone number.

Put the Bid Packet into some type of presentation binder, found at an office supply store. One choice might be to use a clear cover, so your cover sheet is what they see when you present them with the bid. When submitting your proposal, be sure to present it in person if possible. Set up an appointment to drop it off. Put it into a manila envelope, addressed to your contact person in case they're not there to accept it in person.

You'll be pleasantly surprised at the positive comments you'll receive when presenting a professionally designed Bid Packet. And you'll be even happier when the contract is awarded to your cleaning company!

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Step 6 – Customer Service
How to be a True Professional in Your Cleaning Business

With the large number of cleaning businesses out there, how do you get your company to stand out? Being a professional in all aspects of your cleaning business will go a long way towards showing your customers and potential customers that you are serious about doing the best job that you can do. Do you have the background, knowledge and experience to become a professional? You bet! Doing the best job that you can do and having a professional attitude is what it takes to show your clients you go that extra step.

There are several factors that come to mind when you think of being a professional in the cleaning business: appearance, dependability, continuing education, pride in your work, treating customers and employees with respect and honesty, and abiding by general etiquette rules.

Appearance: As a cleaning contractor you most likely won't be wearing a suit and tie, but your appearance is still important and it can leave a lasting impression on people. While cleaning an account your clothes will no doubt become soiled; however, when meeting with clients you should always have a neat and clean appearance. Work shirts with your company name and logo also give you one more way to market your company. Besides your personal appearance, your equipment and company vehicle should be clean. After all, if your clients see that your equipment isn't clean, what faith will they have in your cleaning abilities?

Dependability: Your cleaning clients depend on you to provide timely services so their buildings are clean for their employees, customers and visitors. Your employees should show up on time and do the work as required. Whether it is just you or your cleaning staff, your clients are depending on you to not only clean, but to do so without breaking items or ruining carpet, flooring or furniture. If something does happen, you need to be a "professional" and let your customer know you will take care of the damages.

Continuing Education: There are constant improvements in chemicals, equipment and cleaning procedures. It is important to realize you can never "know everything", but be willing to spend a little time every week reading and learning what is new in the industry.

Pride in Your Work: No doubt some jobs will be easier than others, but putting 100% into every job, large and small, can set you apart from the other cleaning companies in your area. There is also nothing more satisfying to any professional than seeing a job well done.

Treating Customers and Employees with Respect: Cleaning customers can be easy to work for or extremely difficult and demanding. It is always easier to smile and say hello to a friendly face, but it is just as important to be friendly to those demanding customers.

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Although you may have started your cleaning company as a one-person business, once you have employees on board, treat them as individuals and valued members of your team. Ask for their opinions and be open to their ideas. Make sure that your employees know what you expect of them and that they too are expected to act as professionals.

Honesty: Be honest with your clients about the services you provide and what those services cost. Stick by the guidelines set out in the agreements that you have with your clients. And don't be afraid to let a cleaning customer know there are services that you do not provide if you do not have the staff, equipment or knowledge to do a job properly.

Also abide by the following general etiquette guidelines:
• Leave your personal problems at home and your work problems at work - even if you work out of your home make sure there is a separation between the two.
• Avoid the use of foul language.
• Don't eat, smoke or drink on the job.
• Stay out of desk drawers and file cabinets and don't read loose papers that are left on desks and tables.
• Don't take any items from customers even if it something that they threw in the trash.
• Don't use a customer's phones unless you have permission to do so and then only in an emergency or if it is required for you (or your employees) to clock in and clock out.

Your cleaning company can stand out from the crowd by incorporating the above guidelines into its everyday routines and practices. A true professional is someone who takes pride in their work and is always willing to go that extra mile. Putting that little extra in to what you're doing will show your customers that you are the best one for the job!

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Are Your Cleaning Customers Motivated by Quality or Price?

You don't have to be running your own business for very long to find out that customers are different when it comes to what they expect out of a cleaning service. There are those customers who want the best, no matter what the cost. On the other end of the spectrum are price conscious customers who are more concerned with how their cleaning expenses fit into their overall budget than anything else. Marketing to these two distinctly different groups can indeed be a challenge.

What are the differences between the "budget conscious" and the "quality minded" customers? There are always individuals who will make their final decision based on price. However, that doesn't necessarily mean that these are not good customers for your cleaning business. With the budget minded there are special issues to consider:

1. For the budget minded, regular carpet maintenance will not be high on their list of priorities.
2. They will probably only become concerned about the "soiled" look of their carpet and ask for cleaning before a special event or occasion.
3. When they finally decide the carpets need cleaning, they will want the "biggest bang for the buck".
4. The budget minded are also not likely to ask for special services, such as carpet spotting, floor stripping and waxing, and window washing.
5. Overall, these customers are willing to have fewer cleaning services provided and deal with some inconvenience in exchange for a lower price.

Quality minded customers have a different view because they value high standards, professionalism and great service.

1. The quality minded customer believes in the value of building maintenance and the results that are achieved with a contractor who provides quality service.
2. They are willing to pay to avoid inconvenience.
3. Poor service is a big irritation to the quality minded customer.
4. They will want carpets cleaned on a regular schedule and not allowed to become so soiled that they are an embarrassment to employees, customers and visitors.

Marketing to these two distinct groups means tailoring your materials to match what they are looking for in a cleaning service. The budget minded customer has let things go for so long that they will be in a rush to find someone to do the job. They may not take time to get referrals and will search traditional advertising sources such as phone books, newspaper ads, and direct marketing materials. In addition, they are always looking for specials or discounts.

The budget minded customer's first question is likely to be "How much do you charge?" As they tend to wait until the situation is critical, they may also be looking for fast service. Penny-pinching customers are also likely to ask for outrageous guarantees and try to get you to lower your price. The "budget conscious" are also more likely to complain about the smallest details even though they want everything done quickly and cheaply.

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Quality customers will be using a professional cleaning service regularly. If they become unhappy with their current cleaning service they will ask for referrals from friends and colleagues. They are not motivated by specials or discounts. If your cleaning company does not offer the specific services they are looking for, they may quickly remove your cleaning service from consideration.

Customers who are looking for quality will want a company that has a high degree of professionalism and takes pride in its work. They don't want any surprises when it comes to getting their building cleaned. This customer is looking for an expert and is relying on your judgment, knowledge and skills to handle their cleaning needs. They trust that you are recommending and providing what they need and not promoting services that are not needed. The quality minded customer wants a long-term relationship and wants to avoid going through that long search process of finding a cleaner that suits their needs.

It often takes a referral from a happy customer to get you in the door of someone looking for quality. When you do "get in the door" make sure that you have quality printed marketing materials. Know your business and be proud to "toot" your own horn.

As you are marketing your cleaning business keep in mind these two distinct customer types. Remember, the budget conscious customer is looking for specials and package deals. Effective marketing tools for "economy" customers will involve using direct mail, newspaper ads and door hangers. The customer who is seeking quality will most likely ignore these marketing strategies and be searching for a reliable and knowledgeable cleaner that has a solid reputation in the community. Remembering that there are two types of clients can help you market your cleaning business more effectively.

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Top 5 Cleaning Complaints and How to Solve Them

Have you ever picked up the phone to find an angry customer on the other end? Perhaps a trash can didn't get emptied the night before, or the dusting isn't up to par. Customer complaints are inevitable for a cleaning company, but there are a number of things that you can do to minimize the frequency. Here are some of the common complaints received by commercial cleaning companies and tips on how to solve the problem.

1. **Supplies Empty**. If roll towels are being used, you can replace smaller rolls of 350' with rolls of 800' with stub roll access. Most 350' roll dispensers will handle 800' rolls without replacing the current dispenser. The same can be true for center-pull towels. If using a smaller roll, replace with a larger roll. If you have to replace dispensers, do so. It's a small price to pay in order to keep the customer happy.

If replacing dispensers is not an option, ensure your employees are properly trained on how to stock dispensers. When stocking hand towel dispensers (multi-fold, single-fold, c-fold towels), train employees to fill the dispensers two-thirds full. Filling dispensers to the brim puts a lot of weight on the bottom towels, causing them to tear apart when pulling them out. If the dispenser tends to run out your can either put in a second dispenser or leave a stack on the counter.

If you run out of toilet paper you can leave an extra roll on the back of the toilet or change the dispenser to a twin roll or jumbo roll dispensers.

2. **Dirty Restrooms.** Restroom training programs that lay out each step for cleaning a restroom is essential. With so many steps, it can be easy for a new employee to forget an important procedure that is likely to cause a complaint. One way to make it easier for employees is to give them color-coded microfiber cloths. For instance, blue cloths for cleaning mirrors and polished stainless steel, red cloths for toilets and urinals, and yellow cloths for countertops, sinks, dispensers, partitions, and walls.

One common restroom complaint has nothing to do cleaning procedures, but should be taken care of by the janitorial staff. Oftentimes odors come from the floor drain because it has dried out. Simply pouring water down the drain on a weekly basis can eliminate the odors.

3. **Inadequate dusting is a very common complaint.** If workers rush through their work to get the job done, dusting tends to be the task that gets neglected first because it's much less noticeable than not emptying a trash can, for instance.

The most effective tool to use for dusting is a microfiber cloth. Microfiber cloths pick up the dust rather than moving it around or making it airborne, like feather dusters, which means the dust won't re-settle onto surfaces. Use a green microfiber cloth for dusting. Be sure to point out commonly missed areas to employees - build-up around calculators, stacking baskets, pictures, sides of desks, and chair legs. Make sure supervisors pay special attention to these areas when walking through the building.

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4. **Trash Not Emptied.** When training new employees, point out hidden trash cans. There should always be a specific path to follow so a trash can is not inadvertently missed. Typically employees should go counter-clockwise around the room, zig-zagging back and forth down aisles and through the hallways. A good way to double check the work is to check the cans while vacuuming to ensure they've been emptied.

5. **Lack of Vacuuming.** Train employees to move through the office counterclockwise to ensure all areas are vacuumed. Mats should be vacuumed, and then rolled up so the area underneath can be vacuumed.

Cleaning personnel should be using the correct vacuum for the job. For instance, if a wide track vacuum cleaner is being used to vacuum tight areas like underneath desks, then it's likely that bits of paper and paper clips are going to be missed. The right vacuum should be used for the space that's being vacuumed. For large, open areas use wide track vacuums. Back pack vacuums are great for regular office vacuuming and detail work.

Consistent training of all employees using detailed training programs is of key importance in order to avoid customer complaints. When employees use the same procedures every day, they are much less likely to make mistakes. It is also important to do follow-up training. This will ensure that all employees are using the right cleaning system for the location and are reminded of the proper step-by-step procedures to use.

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When Should You Fire a Cleaning Customer?

Years ago the phrase was coined, "The customer is always right." But this is not always a true statement, and keeping extremely demanding or troublesome customers may be biting into your profits. When you first started your cleaning business you were no doubt eager to get any paying customer you could get to sign on. But do you have customers whose phone calls you don't want to answer? Or are there cleaning clients on your list that are low profit, yet demanding and take up a lot of your time? Trimming these customers off your list will allow you to spend more time on building up relationships with higher profit margin accounts.

Just running a business is tough and stressful. If you have cleaning customers who are never happy, are always complaining, expect you or your employees to do something illegal or unethical, or are just more trouble than they are worth; then it may be time to tell these clients to look for a new cleaning service.

It often tends to be smaller accounts that absorb most your time. Keep in mind however, you probably don't want to fire a customer that accounts for 25% or more of your sales or profits unless you have a good lead to fill that vacant spot.

So how do you go about "firing" a customer? First take a look at the contract you originally signed with your client. Did you include a termination statement in your agreement? Your contract should include a clause that either party can terminate with a 30-day written notice. You do not need to tell your client that they are "not worth it", but give them a written notice that because of circumstances you will no longer be able to clean their building. The termination statement should also include the wording that you (the contractor) can terminate at any time for nonpayment of services. So if you need to fire a customer for nonpayment of services, you have it stated in your agreement.

If you do not have a contract or your contract doesn't have a termination statement, give your client a 30-day written notice that you can no longer provide them with cleaning services. Again, don't feel compelled to tell the client that they are more trouble than the profit that they bring to your cleaning company. After all, you want to leave on good terms if possible.

It might seem counterproductive to fire a paying customer. But there are always going to be certain customers that will never be happy. If you have a customer that is constantly giving you headaches, calling nonstop, or burning up time that you could be spending in more productive ways, then it is time to consider firing that customer. Getting rid of the "deadbeats" and building up a customer base of loyal, appreciative cleaning customers will not only make you happier, but make your cleaning business more profitable.

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Step 7- Employees

You may have started your cleaning company part-time and thought that as the business grew you could quit your "day job" and put more time into the business.

But as your cleaning business grows you may find you can no longer manage all the tasks you need to handle, no matter how much time you devote to it. If you do not have time to market your business or to keep in contact with your clients regularly, it may be time to think of adding an employee. Hiring help not only allows you to keep your cleaning business growing, but also allows you to take some much needed and hard earned time off.

How to Hire Your First Cleaning Employee

Start your hiring process by making a list of the tasks needed in your cleaning business and then decide on those you want (or need) someone else to do. Your first employee should be more than just someone who takes the extra work off your shoulders. This individual should be able to help with the overall growth of your cleaning business by helping not only with cleaning responsibilities, but by making sure they provide great customer service.

As you start the hiring process, decide on the job title and prepare a comprehensive job description. This will help you to focus on the responsibilities you want your employees to have, and then when you hire your first employee, he or she will know what his or her duties are.

As well as a job description, you will need a way to evaluate job performance. You should give a written evaluation regularly. During the first year of employment you may want to do evaluations at 3 months, 6 months, and then at the end of the year. After the first year, job performance evaluations are usually given annually on the employee's employment anniversary date. Also be prepared to offer constructive feedback as needed. If an employee is doing a task wrong, you need to take steps to immediately correct the situation.

Hiring the right individual can take time. Set realistic goals for when you want that first person on board. It may take longer than a week or two to advertise, interview and get the right person on board. As you interview potential candidates, look for individuals who have an eager and willing attitude. You will be able to train most of the specific skills an individual will need. If you find someone who has the right attitude don't overlook them if they have never run a buffer, carpet steamer or backpack vacuum.

You may be eager to get someone on board once you have a job description prepared. But before you advertise for help, make sure you have the following addressed:

Is your employee covered by your insurance? Check with your insurance agent to make sure your policy covers employees. As an employer, you'll also need to provide workers compensation insurance. Your agent should be able to help you get the right insurance.

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Do you have an employee manual and is it up-to-date? Your employee manual will cover the orientation, evaluations, time off procedures, equipment policies, and the overall working responsibilities that your employees will have. It may also include safety information - or the safety manual may be a separate document. All of your policies should be in writing before your employee's first day of work.

Your cleaning employees will most likely be working in buildings after hours, so you will need to conduct background checks. Your clients may not require background checks of cleaning employees. However it is an added selling point for your services to let any potential clients know that all of your employees go through a background check before they start working for your cleaning company.

Have a training program in place. This can be a detailed manual or guidelines for one-on-one training. The training program should include how to perform all tasks that you expect your new hire to complete. In addition, as your cleaning employees will be working with chemicals and equipment, they need to have specific training to address safety issues to comply with OSHA standards.

If you are a one-person operation you may not have obtained a federal employment identification number. This number is required once you hire employees. To get the necessary form to obtain a federal ID number, go to the IRS website at www.irs.gov.

Register with your state's employment department. All states have a system set up for unemployment compensation. Employers are required to pay into this fund through unemployment compensation taxes.

Set up a payroll system for withholding taxes and making payroll tax payments to the IRS. Check with your accountant to make sure you file the necessary paperwork. There are specific labor notices the government requires you to post at the worksite. The Department of Labor's website at www.dol.gov has a listing of the federal posters you need to post. Check with your state's department of labor to see if they have added requirements.

Hiring your first employee is big step towards the growth of your cleaning business. Making sure you have all of your i's dotted and t's crossed before you bring someone on board will help with the transition of moving your cleaning business from a one person shop to the next level. Your cleaning business can grow exponentially with the right employees and it all starts by getting that first employee on board!

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Are Your Cleaning Company Workers Employees or Subcontractors?

Rather than putting an employee on the payroll, some companies elect to use independent contractors. But if you improperly classify a worker as an independent contractor when the IRS views them as an employee you could be liable for back taxes, penalties and interest!

Putting employees on the payroll means that you are responsible for withholding income taxes, social security taxes, Medicare, and unemployment taxes. A business can get around all of this by hiring "independent contractors" instead of putting employees on the payroll. The independent contractor is then responsible to pay his or her own taxes and insurance. But the IRS has strict guidelines that determine if they are truly an independent contractor or if they are actually an employee.

Who is an independent contractor? If you, as the employer, only have the right to decide the result of the work being done, and not how that result is achieved, then the individual is most likely an independent contractor. However, if you as the employer control not only the end result, but also how that result is achieved and when the work is to be performed, then the individual is your employee and not an independent contractor.

Following are factors you should consider when determining if you should classify an individual as an employee or an independent contractor.

1. Does the worker need to follow your methods for getting the job done? An independent contractor can generally decide for himself (or herself) how to complete an assigned task.
2. Do you provide training for the worker? If you have to train an individual for a job, then that person will probably be considered an employee.
3. Is the employee's services an integral part of the business? This will probably bump a worker into employee status.
4. Do you require the individual perform all the services personally? Independent contractors may have their own employees or their own subcontractors that perform part of the work.
5. Do you set the worker's schedule and hours? An independent contractor will set his or her own hours. A contractor may have to work within a certain time frame because of agreements with vendors, but specific hours are generally not set.
6. Do you provide the supplies and equipment used on the job? An independent contractor is responsible for the providing their own supplies and equipment used on the job.
7. Do you pay expenses, mileage, etc.? An independent contractor is usually liable for their own expenses, even though they might bill you and seek reimbursement for items needed during their working relationship with you.
8. Does the worker have other clients? If an individual is working with multiple clients, that is a sign that they are an independent contractor.
9. Do you have the right to fire the individual at any time? Or does the individual have the right to quit at any time? Independent contractors are usually bound by a contract and can only be let go if there is a failure to meet the contract's requirements.

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10. Does the worker have his or her own office? Having their own office space is a good sign the individual is an independent contractor and not an employee. The office can be a home office, but they should have a phone line dedicated to their business.

If you believe that your worker has satisfied the independent contractor status, strengthen your stance by doing the following:

1. Put your agreement with the contractor in writing. Make sure that you include a description of the project, the time duration, the amount to be paid and a clause that recognizes that the individual is an independent contractor.
2. Get a completed W-9 form from the individual and then be prepared to complete a 1099 at the end of the year.
3. Pay only when the independent contractor submits invoices to you.
4. If the particular project changes in any way, goes over budget or takes longer than expected, etc., address these issues in writing.
5. Have the independent contractor provide you with documented proof of insurance.
6. If at all possible, do not pay the independent contractor on an hourly basis. Instead, break down the amounts to be paid in terms of deliverables you receive throughout the life of the project.

Following these guidelines is not a guarantee the IRS will consider the worker as an independent contractor. If you are in doubt about the status of an individual, you can submit Form SS-8 to the IRS and ask for a determination of the worker's status.

You can run into an endless nightmare of fines, penalties and taxes if you improperly classify your workers as independent contractors when they are in reality employees of your cleaning company. It may seem easier to just call your workers "independent contractors" than have them on your payroll. But if you can't convince the IRS that these are not your employees, your cleaning company may have a tax burden big enough to drive you out of business!

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How to Decide What to Pay Your Cleaning Employees

If it's time to hire employees for your cleaning business, you must decide on how much you are going to pay before you start interviewing and offering jobs to your new cleaning staff. As a business owner you may have times that you work more hours and make less per hour than your paid staff. However, you are investing your time and efforts not just into current cleaning accounts, but also into the growth of the company. You cannot expect your employees to act like an owner when it comes to payment for their services.

Pay packages have few rules and hourly wages go up and down depending on the geographic area you live in and the potential employee's experience. Wages also depend on the current condition of the job market (are there more jobs than employees or vice versa). Typically, entry-level wages in the cleaning industry have been towards the low-end of the pay scale. A recent survey in CM/Cleaning & Maintenance Management Magazine showed that wages for cleaning workers range from $7.80 per hour to $9.51 per hour, with the overall average starting wage being $8.63 per hour. This can, of course, be higher or lower depending on specific circumstances and in what part of the country you run your cleaning business.

How do you figure out what a job is worth? First off, remember that you are investing in your employees today to have a more profitable cleaning business in the future. With any luck you will hire employees who are willing to learn and grow with your business. Before setting your pay scale consider the following:

1. **If you already have employees, what are your current pay practices?** You don't want to be hiring new employees and paying them the same or more than your current employees who are already trained. Look at your payroll records for the past year or two and see how much of your overall expenses you are paying out in salaries.

2. **Make sure you have job descriptions.** Just a title such as "janitor" is not acceptable. You need an accurate job description that specifically lists the key responsibilities and duties of that position.

3. **Find out what your competition is paying.** This may require a little digging on your part. You can check with your local job service or workforce center to see if they have a salary survey for the area. If no survey is available, check out classified ads, the local chamber or other professional organizations in your area. An online resource for salary estimates is www.salary.com.

4. **Set the salary ranges for your various positions.** You may have a Level 1 Maintenance position, Level 2 Maintenance position, Lead Person, and Supervisor. After you have an idea of the salaries that your competitors are paying, set a suitable salary range for each position.

5. **Decide on any bonuses, perks or training expenses you will pay.** With a small cleaning business you may not be able to provide health insurance, but consider other incentives that you can give to get and keep employees. You can provide bonuses or paid days off for reaching performance goals or not missing any days within a certain time frame. You could also give discounts on products, or pay for attending training seminars and workshops.

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However you decide to set the wages, remember to think ahead. You don't want your employee to hit the salary cap in six months or a year. You need to have enough steps in each pay scale to allow flexibility for an employee's performance. A motivated employee who is doing a great job may advance two steps, while an employee who is just "getting by" may be pushed up just one step on the pay scale.

When you are ready to get that new employee on board, make sure they have a copy of the job description and pay policy in writing. This can be a short, 2-3 page document, or part of a comprehensive employee manual. Having everything in writing will help you to avoid confusion or disagreements later.

It's not an easy task figuring out how much to pay your cleaning employees so you not only make a profit, but so you can recruit and hire dependable and qualified employees. The cleaning business typically has a higher turnover and you may find yourself needing to hire new employees regularly. Doing your homework beforehand and having a set of written job descriptions and salary ranges will make it easier when you offer a candidate a job with your cleaning business.

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Tips for Training Your Cleaning Staff

Proper training of your cleaning staff not only leads to cleaner buildings, but it also means fewer accidents, faster cleaning times, and a more professional cleaning staff. When hiring new employees, you may find candidates with extensive backgrounds in cleaning; however, it is more likely your new – hires will know little about proper cleaning techniques. Proper training is essential to get your employees off on the right foot and to make sure they are getting the work done properly, safely, and efficiently. Keeping the following tips in mind will help to make sure your employees learn to do their job safely and efficiently.

• **Cleaning workers are the fifth most injured workers in the country**, so training your employees properly will keep them on the job and help keep your insurance rates down.

• **Keep the training focused on the employees and their needs.** Training sessions are often in a room with the instructor at the front and the employees seated at tables - this makes it easier for the instructor. Instead, arrange chairs in circles so people can interact with one another. If training just one or two employees, use eye contact, ask questions, and get them involved - don't just give a lecture.

• **Don't just demonstrate products.** Many cleaning crews only receive training when a new product or piece of equipment is introduced. Make sure to train your employees from start to finish.

• **Measure the effectiveness of your training.** It's hard to know if your training time was well spent if you do not have some sort of measurement tool. This can be faster cleaning times, lower accident rates, or reduced use of cleaning products and supplies.

• **Make sure that your training is effective.** Do more than have your employees watch a training video and read through a handout. Demonstrate products and techniques and encourage your employees to ask questions if they don't understand something.

Use the following technique: Tell - Show - Do - Review.
- Tell (about each step)
- Show (how to perform each step)
- Do (each step)
- Review (each step)

• **Training can be boring.** Don't just give employees training manuals or product literature and expect them to read it and then have improved their job performance. Find ways to make training interesting. Demonstrate new products and supplies instead of having employees read about them. Give practical examples of how to be more efficient. Use your knowledge and experience and pass that along to your employees.

• **Remember, you can learn from your employees.** If they have picked up a technique that saves times, money, or makes the job easier, ask them to share that with the rest of your cleaning staff.

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• **Change is not always easy.** Training involves changing behaviors and attitudes. The training may involve a new product or piece of equipment or it may be to break bad habits. Either way, employees may be resistant to change. Don't be surprised when your employees are hesitant to change.

Rather, be prepared for this resistance and overcome it with information and statistics about why the change is needed. The proper training of your cleaning crew is essential - not just to get the job done correctly and efficiently, but also to keep your cleaning crews safe and on the job.

Keep your employees interested during training sessions by making the training hands-on and informative. A properly trained staff will lead to buildings that shine and higher profits in your checkbook!

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How to Retain Janitorial Workers

Due to the nature of the cleaning business it can be hard to keep good employees. Your good employees may be lured away by competitors, leave for a "regular" 8 to 5 job, or leave to take a job in another field that pays more. Good employees and employees that can be promoted to supervisory positions can be difficult to find and retain. The following are some tips that can help you keep those good employees on board.

• **Develop talent.** Pay attention to your employees and look for ones that have leadership qualities and show that they are creative when it comes to solving problems. These are the employees you want to train to be supervisors. Give them added responsibilities and when the time is right promote them into positions that supervise others.

• **Communicate frequently with your employees.** Never take your employees for granted. Ask for their ideas or suggestions for improving the way tasks are performed in your company. Talk to your employees and show an interest in their lives - ask about their families and hobbies - it shows that you care about them not just as an employee, but as a person.

• **Show your appreciation.** Thank your employees for their hard work and let them know you appreciate their dedication. Everyone likes a pat on the back once in awhile.

• **Learn to delegate.** You can test key staff by giving them more authority and responsibilities. This will also help you to identify which members of your staff have the qualities of a good supervisor.

• **Provide direction as well as feedback.** Make sure that each employee knows what you expect of him or her. Let your employees know how you'll evaluate their performance. When you evaluate your employees provide feedback that will help them to improve their job performance.

• **Offer training and educational opportunities.** Find training sessions and seminars for your employees, or create your own. Look for training not only on cleaning, but in management and business areas as well.

• **Offer competitive wages.** As your business grows, you want to be sure that you have dependable and well trained employees to handle the workload. Develop a plan early on for compensating your employees and decide how you will move the most motivated employees up on your pay scale.

Keeping good employees is a challenge in any business, but can be even more difficult in the cleaning field. You can increase your chances of keeping your employees by remembering the above tips. Make your employees feel like they are an integral and important part of your cleaning business and they will be more likely to stay and help your business grow.

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The Next Step

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