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## **Code of Conduct**

By Mike Schaffer

On a recent trip overseas, a friend of mine, who is also in the cleaning industry, mentioned how impressed he was with the cleaning workers at the hotel he stayed in. They were clean and well-dressed, would smile whenever a hotel guest walked by, and were always willing to stop



whatever they were doing and offer assistance if necessary.

It also appeared these cleaning workers were well-versed in their cleaning skills and knew as much about how to perform cleaning tasks properly as any trained cleaning worker in the United States, reported my friend. But the way they conducted themselves is what separated these hotel

workers from some of the cleaning technicians he works with in the United States. Their code of conduct was very professional, helpful, and even charming, all fostering a great deal of appreciation and respect from the hotel's guests.

Many people working in the professional cleaning industry, especially in carpet cleaning and restoration, know how valuable training and education can be. They are often brought in to clean up after emergencies, trying to salvage their customer's remaining precious possessions.

Knowledge, training, and the proper skills are the only ways this can be accomplished.

However, learning the skills of our industry is not the only training cleaning professionals need. Just like the overseas cleaning workers mentioned earlier, we also need to know how to act in front of our clients, or, more specifically, how to conduct ourselves in our interactions with our clients. When cleaning and restoration tasks are performed correctly and professionally, it builds customer loyalty and opens the door for customers to feel a connection with your company.

Additionally, your code of conduct can help differentiate your company from others. If most of your competitors have the same training as you, then it is the customer service you provide and the ways you conduct yourself that separate you from your competitors.

Further, improved customer conduct is good for employees as well. It's infectious. It may start with just a few workers but soon spreads to all, becoming a part of the firm's corporate culture. This can produce amazing results. Workers feel much more proficient and valued, and they realize they are a vital part of a company's success and future growth. Once this driving force takes over, what often happens is that company slogans and mission statements, even monetary incentives, are no longer needed for motivation. The workers take ownership of the corporate culture, expect it of each other, and demand it of new employees as well.

### **Reputations Start with Customer Conduct**

We have just discussed some of the benefits of improved customer service and customer conduct. But even more telling are the repercussions of poor customer relations.

According to John T. Self, a lecturer at the Collins School of Hospitality Management at California State Polytechnic University, cleaning professionals should consider these facts:

- It can cost up to five times more to attract a new customer than to retain an existing one.
- For every complaint that is received about service or how a worker conducted him- or herself, it is estimated that at least 26 other customers have had similar problems.
- It is estimated that 96 percent of unhappy customers never tell the business how unhappy they are—but they tell others.
- The average customer who has a problem with an organization tells 9 or 10 other people about the experience. One study found that this figure can be as high as 20 other people.
- Customers who have complained to an organization and had their complaint satisfactorily resolved tell an

average of 5 people about the problem *as well as how it was rectified.*

Interestingly, Self says that some studies indicate that people who complain to a business owner about the service they received or the ways the workers conducted themselves and then had the issue handled are more likely to call the company again. Between 54 and 70 percent of these people will do business again with the organization, and that figure goes up to an impressive 95 percent if the customer feels that the complaint was resolved quickly and satisfactorily. This indicates that customers tend to be forgiving and are willing to offer a firm a “second chance” to prove itself.

### **Ways to Improve Worker Conduct**

Just as cleaning skills can be learned, so can the ways workers interact with customers. Many of these skills are shared by all kinds of workers in most all professions, whether they work in stores, hotels, medical facilities, or restaurants. However, in a service industry such as ours, there are also some specific service-related skills that are required for conducting ourselves in a professional manner.

For instance, arriving at appointments on time or within the block of time promised is the best way to start building and developing positive customer relations. Few things are more frustrating for a customer than for service people to be late.

Some of the other skills include:

- Presenting a clean, professional appearance.  
Additionally, workers who wear company uniforms often look much more proficient and trained.
- Maintaining a professional demeanor at all times. Be cordial and friendly. Focus your discussion on the customer's needs and the work at hand. Do not let outside problems enter into your dealings with the customer.
- Providing a "safety zone" for your customers. It is often a good idea to stay at least two steps back from customers when interacting with them. This space makes them feel more comfortable.

- Being confident. Customers turn to service people for solutions. Use your training and experience to tackle cleaning-related problems, and if a situation cannot be rectified, explain the reasons why in a self-assured, professional manner.
- Being organized. When bringing carpet extractors, hoses, and other equipment into someone's home, keep them orderly. This will help improve worker productivity and present a more professional image.
- Asking for permission. If something has to be moved or an electrical plug must be disconnected, for example, politely ask the client first.
- Taking the time to make sure the job is done right. Your quality of work is imperative for business success.
- Going the extra mile. A little extra service can pay big rewards.

Communication skills are also very important. Part of an improved code of conduct is the ability to speak with your

customers clearly and without any ambiguity. According to a study by the University of Pittsburgh's Katz Business School, communication skills were cited as the single most important decisive factor for businesses when hiring employees or outside vendors. The same is likely true when selecting cleaning technicians as well.

The way cleaning workers relate to customers ultimately affects a company's financial bottom line. An enhanced code of conduct helps improve professionalism, which can provide a powerful marketing tool for the business. The technician that arrives dirty, sloppy, and disorganized will probably not be called again. But the clean, polite, and well-organized technician will find that each job leads to many more. An improved code of conduct also reflects well on the entire cleaning and restoration industry, benefiting all of us by helping improve people's image of cleaning workers.

Sidebar:

Below is the code of ethics of ASCR:

- To treat our customers and their property with care and respect.

- To provide professional service in accordance with high standards of practice that will, where possible, restore the customer's property to its predamaged or presoiled condition.
- To operate in a manner consistent with ethical principles and sound business practice.
- To be proficient in our work through ongoing participation in education and training.
- To provide our customer with accurate information concerning the scope of work required and its costs, maintaining strict impartiality in our professional opinions.
- To disclose to the customer any connection we may have to its insurer or any other interested third party.