

Start an Office Cleaning Business



The Suze & Ev Method



Written by Suze & Ev
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When walking, just walk.
When sitting, just sit.
Above all, don't wobble.
-- Yun-Men

Balance of Life and Work

Achieving balance is one of the main reasons that men and women value being self-employed. Conventional models of work (i.e., regular jobs) leave much to be desired when it comes to finding time for one's life.

We need enough time (but not too much) for our work lives, our family and friends, our physical health and the spiritual and creative parts of ourselves too. Creating time for these elements that make our lives whole leads to balance, and balance leads to fulfillment. Or at the very least, make us feel not so wobbly.

Until I discovered that I was by nature an entrepreneur, I was a wobbler who hadn't found her balance. I had lots of different jobs. I'd been educated well and had normal ambition and skill. Before I discovered that I could actually support myself by being self-employed, you could say I wobbled a lot.

If you have wobbled a bit in your conviction to find a good way to earn your living, take heart. You're not alone. Many people are searching for ways to take their financial destiny into their own hands.

As entrepreneurs by nature, our lives work when we work for ourselves. Being self-employed gives Ev and me a deep well of satisfaction. We want you to experience that kind of fulfillment, and we're dedicated to serving you as you strive for it.

Use the information we have worked for, researched and provide, to assist you in finding the balance you want and the good life you deserve.

Peace and prosperity,
Suze

People who think they know everything are very irritating to those of us who do.

-- Author unknown

In this chapter:

- Beware of taking advice from friends and family (who have never attempted self-employment)
- When you encounter negativity, remind yourself that it takes willpower and courage to start a small business. You have everything it takes.

Caution: Well-meaning friends and family may be dangerous to your small business start-up health.

Many moons ago, Evan and I decided to build a house. One of our neighbors, an architect, often popped in to critique our progress.

He would look around, then open his mouth and begin doling out advice about how we "should" be building. "See, what you *really* oughta do is...."

But here is what we discovered. He had never built a house, never even built so much as a storage shed. He had an architect degree, but lacked practical hands-on experience.

End of story.

When to open up to critics

Protect your new business from unnecessary harm, especially while it is new. The critics in your life do not need to hear details about your entrepreneurial activities. If they want to know, let them figure it out from reading your Facebook page and your business website. That's all they need to know.

What is the optimal time to talk to people who are likely to offer unsolicited advice? After you have established your first office cleaning routine. If you must talk to them about your plans before your business has started to take shape, just be prepared. Ideally, each encounter with negativity or unsolicited advice will remind you to continue learning and evolving your business.

Let experience teach you

That is the way to build genuine confidence – through gaining success by experience.

Allowing friends, albeit well-meaning ones, to tear you down is no way to start a healthy entrepreneurial lifestyle. Yet, many of us do deal with negative-thinkers.

When a critic in your life unleashes their advice and urges you to listen, learn to distinguish the actual reality (facts) from judgments (opinions) that are simply their perspective. We are each entitled to our own, as the saying goes.

Develop self-confidence

Countering negativity requires growing. We know that children develop through stages. We don't blame a second-grader for not acting like a sixth-grader.

As adults, we may reach our physical size by the time we reach our late teens. However, Harvard researchers inform us that growth and development does not stop just because we are older and bigger. We continue to develop through psychological stages as we age.

Entrepreneurs can benefit from this awareness because self-starters tend to be open to change. Therefore, we usually welcome challenges that make us grow. Growth and change require risk. Risk takes courage. Most entrepreneurs have courage by the truck-load!

Stay on top

Self-confidence and self-esteem are virtues that can be developed. Self-esteem is not achieved by listening to others say good things about us, or by accumulating Facebook friends. Such virtues are only experienced by setting worthy goals and achieving them through our own honest efforts.

The way to build real entrepreneurial confidence is to continue to develop and grow your knowledge about your business. Never stop growing. Bone up on marketing opportunities available through social networking on and offline. Get better-informed about the trends in the office cleaning industry, and stay on top.

Don't should on yourself

Learning is not only great for your business, it's sexy! It will keep you young and strong. Aim to learn something new every day. That way you will stay on top of your game. You will be too busy with the work of achieving your valuable goals to even think of entertaining the gloomy doomsayers.

Like the neighbor telling us how to build our house, people who lack the guts to build something for themselves will often jump at the chance to tell others how they *should* do it. Don't should on yourself, and don't allow others to either.

The most suspect advice comes from people who have never had a business of their own. Many people never excel at anything because they are too insecure

and frightened to take the necessary risks.

Starting an entrepreneurial venture means taking risks, which stops most people at the door. You have opened that door and made the choice to step through, because you have courage.

Close encounters

Each time you have a close encounter with negative thinking make it a habit to reaffirm your business goals. Know that you are embarking on an important mission and that your focus, courage and willpower are your required tools. Protect them and keep them sharp.

The world steps out of the way of the person who knows where s/he is going. Naturally, members of your tribe may feel threatened by your newfound energy and enthusiasm, especially if this is your first encounter with self-employment.

They may react with surprising negativity. People who react this way want to bring you back to their level, where they're used to having you near.

Persevere & trust your intuition

Remain positive. Do not waste your energy trying to explain everything about your new path to self-employment to them.

Keep focused. Do not let them derail you with their fears.

It's frightening for some folks to see their kindred spirits take off in an unfamiliar direction.

Why? Because it forces them to think about moving out of their own comfort zone.

This is a natural human reaction. Persevere and trust your own intuition. Those people will be singing your praises in the months ahead. You will be their inspiration, whether they change their tunes or not.

You have learned:

1. To pay scant attention to other people's fears.
2. To focus on your path to self-employment.

Failure is the path of least persistence.

In this chapter

- It is possible to start up with none of your own equipment.
- 2 things clients will ask.

Self-proclaimed experts

When you decide to start a commercial office cleaning business, prepare to meet at least one or two self-proclaimed experts.

Although these people have probably never cleaned offices and never been self-employed, they will cheerfully inform you what you absolutely must have in order to do your job.

They will try to convince you that you cannot proceed without a license or certificate, without being bonded, getting insured, and putting an expensive ad in the Yellow Pages.

Their questions are implicit, and could give you pause. If you are not careful, procrastination could be the result. Do you have a diploma that declares your readiness for commercial cleaning? And an office of your own where you can display it on the wall?

Does it really matter?

Land the job, start working

In this business, as soon as you land the job, you can begin working. Very few supplies are necessary to get started. Get paid as soon as you finish your first job. That's why office cleaning is a great solution for self-starters who are motivated to earn good money immediately.

You are fulfilling a role that will always be available, because you're willing to do that which others are not.

Do not listen to the questionable advice of people who have never had an office cleaning business of their own. Don't bother arguing with them, simply say thanks. Then ask if they could use an office cleaner because you know of a great one who happens to be available now.

Possible to start-up with nothing

Evan started with no supplies, no vacuum, not even his own car, and yet he succeeded very nicely. All you need to get started is motivation to earn, the ability to project self-confidence, and the courage to go out and tell potential clients that you are available.

Notice that we didn't say you need self-confidence per se; what's important here is your ability to make people believe that you have it. This is the old "fake it till you make it" routine. It really works. Of course, it also helps to have some basic cleaning knowledge.

Experience is the best teacher, so if you have not done a lot of cleaning, you're going to get experience real soon. You will start fine-tuning your skills immediately as you begin to take on jobs. We guide you through the process of getting started in the chapters called How to Get Clients and Attracting Clients.

The Number-one questions

The number one questions we hear from potential clients are not, are you bonded? Licensed? Insured? In fact in eight years, we've only been asked once whether or not we had insurance. This question came from a homeowner, not a business owner.

Companies are generally prepared for accidental damage with insurance that would cover any damage to office furniture and all other items.

The top 2 questions from new clients:

- How much do you charge?
- When can you fit us into your schedule?

We explain how to answer questions about your schedule and how to estimate your fees in the chapters on those topics. Now let's look at the issues that the self-proclaimed experts have brought up.

Insured or not?

If you accidentally break or damage anything, naturally you would be held accountable. Apologize and offer to pay for it. You can get insurance if you choose, but you may pay more on your policy than you would ever actually need.

Bonded or not?

Offer character references to your client if you wish. That will put them at ease if they are nervous about hiring a "stranger" to clean their office. Of course, you won't remain a stranger for very long. We have become friends with a few of our employers -- chit-chat leads to acknowledging common interests. We've attended a wedding and been pet-sitters for more than one client throughout the years.

You can go through the effort and expense to get bonded, but most of the time you can put your clients' minds at ease with a few good solid references from people for whom you have worked in the past.

It is wise to ask your client up front whether or not they want you to dust any expensive-looking items in their office. The Italian marble sculpture in the waiting room, the Ming Dynasty vase in the foyer, or the antique Czechoslovakian glass on the shelf in the conference room.

Don't dust before you ask. Ask first.

Licensed or not?

Some counties do require you to have a permit or business license, but don't let that stop you from starting. In most cities you don't have to wait until you have one to start your business.

See the chapter on Legal Realities about structuring your business for tax purposes. And see your local Chamber of Commerce or Small Business Association to get the necessary information on licensing, permits needed in your region.

Use the customer's equipment

You can start making money cleaning offices without owning a vacuum. In most cases, the offices where we've cleaned have their own vacuum cleaners. When they ask if we bring our own vacuum, we tell them that we have one, but theirs will work fine. This line has always worked, even when we didn't have a vacuum and were only bluffing.

You just need to get used to operating all different types and know whether or not there is a bag to change. If you do have to purchase your own, try eBay or Amazon for the best deal.

You can make a living office cleaning without buying any cleaning supplies. Most office managers already have the products and supplies you need. See the chapter on putting together your Basic Cleaning Kit for more on this topic.

Clients will ask if you bring your own cleaning supplies. You may tell them that you prefer to use theirs - they are expecting you to use theirs. That's why they went out and bought them. We prefer to bring our own products because the ones we use are biodegradable and safe, unlike most of the

popular brands people tend to keep for their office.

Car or no car?

Ev and I worked as a cleaning duo for several reasons, and one of them is that we only own one car. Years ago when he began his cleaning business alone, he had no car and took the bus to his clients' homes. So, you can even make a living cleaning offices without owning a car.

You have learned:

1. To minimize the obstacles that could prevent you from getting started.
2. Find out if you need a permit or a business license to operate your business in your region.
3. The two questions your new clients will most likely ask.

“The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step,” said a guy named Lao Tzu a few years ago. Still true. We'd like to add that it is important to be headed in the right direction when you take that step!

Handling the following legal issues upfront will keep your cleaning company out of hot water in the future.

First steps

1. Register Your Business Name

Your business name must be registered if it is something other than your full legal name. This is a way of informing the public that you will be doing business as (DBA) an assumed, or "fictitious" name.

Generally, a search is done to ensure your name is not already in use, and an application is submitted to make it official. Some states require that you publish a notice in the local newspaper. The details of registering varies from state to state, so check with your state office or county clerk for specifics.

2. License Your Business

Licensing occurs on the state and/or local level. Licensing of your business depends on the type of business you plan to start. For a cleaning business, it is unlikely that Federal licensing will be necessary, as it is only required for businesses that engage in specific, controlled activities (things such as making firearms, alcohol, tobacco, etc.).

Contact your state and city clerk offices to find out what licenses you may need for starting your commercial cleaning business. Many cities require a general business license, but some do not. In your city there may or may not be a license required for a cleaning business.

3. Report Income Tax

You are responsible for filing and paying income taxes on your business. Assuming your business is a sole proprietorship, you will pay tax on your net profits.

Report your income tax using Form 1040 at tax time, with the additional requirement of filing Schedule C or C-EZ: Profit or Loss From Business. Get IRS Publication 334 (Tax Guide for Small Business) for more information. Visit the IRS online for publications and detailed filing requirements.

4. Pay Estimated Taxes

If you expect to owe more than \$1,000 in federal taxes, you need to make estimated payments quarterly. This may seem like a burden at first, but it actually protects you from having a big payment due at tax time.

Learn more about this from IRS Publication 505: Estimated Tax Payments.

5. Pay Self-Employment Tax

You must pay self-employment tax on income over \$400 using Schedule SE. You are required to pay your fair share into Social Security and Medicare.

6. If Necessary, Get a State Sales Tax Certificate

This certificate obligates you to pay applicable sales tax on goods you sell. For example, if you sell cleaning solutions or supplies to your customers, you would need to pay a sales tax on them. If your cleaning solutions or supplies are to be sold wholesale, or if you are buying materials wholesale, please inquire about a resale certificate to avoid paying taxes twice. Contact your state treasury office for information on obtaining a sales tax certificate.

7. Obey Zoning Regulations

Check with your city and county offices about zoning regulations for your business location. You don't want to be in the position of having to shut down later because of zoning violations.

8. Get Free Advice

The SBA (Small Business Administration) is an excellent place to learn more about the nuts and bolts of legally operating a small business in your area. This office can answer many, if not all of your questions about doing business locally. Use their online locator to find your regional office.

Another important resource is the Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE). This organization provides personalized and free counseling to assist you in making the right decisions for your business. Check online or see your local community college to see if SCORE representatives offer classes or workshops in your area.

Attend to the above steps to give your business a good start. You may also choose to consult with a lawyer and accountant for additional information pertaining to the commercial cleaning business in your region. Doing so may prove valuable, both before start-up and later on, as your business grows in complexity.

If you want your dreams to come true, don't oversleep.

– Author unknown

In this chapter:

- Running a home-based business where you live
- 6 different legal business structures
- Sole proprietorship = simplest legal structure

City ordinances

Your clients do not come to your place of business, and if you run your office cleaning business by yourself, for yourself, there will not be a lot of vehicles rolling in and out of your driveway for business purposes.

However, if you hire crew members and your business noticeably expands, it may involve additional vehicles parking at your home, which may in turn impact the neighborhood.

Additionally, expansion of your business could include the need for a separate office and storage space for equipment, supplies, cleaning solutions, and chemicals. Check to see if your area is legally zoned for this.

Adjust your plan in order to be in compliance with local laws. Do your research and find out what ordinances apply to your business in your area.

Liability Insurance & Bonding

Liability insurance is for your protection. If you damage any goods, such as floors or furniture, in the offices you clean, this insurance will protect you. Get it from an insurance agent who sells regular homeowners or car insurance.

Certain businesses, especially those whose cleaning staff handle valuable items, such as art or jewelry, require their cleaning service to be bonded. A bonding company investigates your background to assure that you are “good” enough. It will then insure you for a large amount of money to be available to the client in the event that you break or ruin their belongings. Bonding will be required of you if you contract with big businesses, banks, and jewelry stores.

Sole proprietorship

Sole proprietorship is the simplest legal structure if you are in business on your own. If you own your cleaning business and take jobs on a contract basis, you are automatically considered a sole proprietor.

No special forms are required for you to start working. Just declare your business to be a sole proprietorship when you complete the general registration requirements that apply to all new businesses.

As the sole proprietor, you are personally responsible for paying both income taxes and business debts.

Specific legal and tax structure instructions are beyond the scope of this book. Please refer to the Action Plans for specific instructions.

The 6 different business structures:

1. Sole Proprietorship
2. General Partnership
3. Limited Partnership
4. Limited Liability Partnership
5. Corporation
6. Limited Liability Company

Legal Entities

When you start your cleaning business you will need to select the business or legal form under which to operate. Determining the form most suitable for your business and your situation is complex. We recommend that you consult a lawyer and a tax advisor before doing any kind of business, including acquiring equipment, hiring employees, leasing office space, borrowing money or acquiring a license.

There are six basic business forms in the US. The list below attempts to describe their differences.

Study this (yawn...) useful information a few minutes before meeting with your lawyer or tax advisor. It may help you better understand the jargon and help you ask the kinds of questions you need answers for.

Note: This general information is not intended to be legal or tax advice or to be used in substitution for consulting qualified legal and tax advisors.

1. **Sole Proprietorship.** A single owner of an unincorporated business operates the business as an extension of herself. Clients pay the owner directly to his or her name. For tax purposes, profits and losses are included on the tax return of the owner. Liabilities of the business also flow

through to the owner. If the company damages the property of a customer, or the company runs up debts it cannot repay, successful claims against the company may be levied against the bank account of the owner.

2. **General Partnership.** Two or more persons own the business jointly. Profits and losses of the business are shared in accordance with their partnership agreement. Each partner is exposed to the public for all liabilities of the business, regardless of the agreement between them. That is, a creditor may collect the full amount of a debt of the partnership from the partner that is the easiest to collect from. Profits and losses of the partnership are reflected on the tax returns of the partners. Their ownership percentages are determined in the partnership agreement, and each pays taxes accordingly. The partnership itself is not subject to any income or franchise tax. The authority to control the business is determined by the partnership agreement. Each partner has one vote.
3. **Limited Partnership.** This partnership has at least one general partner and one limited partner. The general partner is legally responsible for all liabilities of the partnership. The limited partner does not have personal liability and cannot participate in managing the business. S/he is sometimes referred to as a “silent partner.” Profits and losses are distributed and included in the tax returns of all partners in accordance with the percentages which they determine in their partnership agreement. Profits and losses may be distributed in percentages that differ from the ownership percentages. The way the partners may vote is determined by the agreement. A limited partnership does not have to pay state franchise tax.
4. **Limited Liability Partnership.** The LLP is taxed and controlled like a general partnership, except that the partners are not liable for the liabilities of the partnership or for any damage done by other partners. A partner is still liable for his or her own negligence.
5. **Corporation.** A corporation is owned by stockholders and is managed by a director or board of directors that is elected by the stockholders. Officers, appointed by the directors, run the day-to-day company business. The stockholders, directors and officers of the company are protected from the liabilities of the company, including liabilities for their own negligence in conducting the business. In a standard type of corporation, a.k.a. a “C Corporation”, the profits and losses of the corporation are not included in the tax returns of the owners.

The corporation exists as a separate entity which files its own tax return and pays its own taxes. Corporate federal income tax rates are not set in graduated tax brackets, and corporations are also subject to franchise taxes in many states. The stockholders may choose to elect "S Corporation" status by filing with the IRS. In that case the corporation is taxed like a partnership. The business profits and losses of S Corporations flow through to the federal tax returns of the owners in alignment with their stock ownership. They are still protected from the liabilities of the company.

6. **Limited Liability Company, or "LLC."** The LLC is a hybrid of a corporation and a partnership. The ownership percentages, profit and loss distributions, and voting powers of each member are determined by the agreement. At the formation of the company an election is made as to how the company will be taxed - either as a partnership with profits and losses flowing through to the owners' tax returns, or as a corporation. The owners and any officers and directors are protected from the liabilities of the company, including for their own negligence in operating the business. An LLC is usually subject to franchise tax.

Doing Business As, or "DBA"

A fictitious business name, assumed name, or DBA, and referred to as "trading as" in the UK, allows you to do business legally under a particular name at reasonable cost, without having to create an entirely new business entity. You can accept payments, advertise, and otherwise present yourself under that name. In fact, if you present your business under a name other than your proper legal name without proper notification, it may be considered fraud. Fortunately, filing for an assumed name is so easy and inexpensive, there's really not much excuse for not filing one.

Why file an assumed name? What does it let you do?

It allows you as a sole proprietor to use a business name rather than your personal name. In some places you can use either your full name or part of your name plus a description of your product or service without filing an assumed name, for example, Cathy's Custom Clean or C. Smith. The exact rules vary from country to country and within the US, so again, check with your local business regulatory authority regarding your region. If there's any implication that there are more people involved (C and J's Custom Clean), or if you're just using your first name (Kathy's Custom Clean, etc.), you must file a DBA.

An assumed name also allows you to use a typical business name without creating a formal legal entity. You can open a business checking account and apply for a business phone listing under your assumed name. For sole

proprietors, this is the least expensive way to legally do business and use a business name other than your own.

It allows a single legal entity (corporation, LLC, etc.) to operate multiple businesses without creating a new legal entity for each business. Since filing and maintaining a corporation is expensive, filing an assumed name keeps your costs down while still allowing you to expand your business.

How do you go about getting an assumed name?

In most states in the US, you would register at the county level. Each county has its different forms and fees for registering an assumed name. You must first make sure the name is not already in use, then submit a simple form, along with the correct filing fee.

Some states also require that you publish a notice in your local newspaper and submit an affidavit to show that you have fulfilled their requirements. Call your own county clerk's office for information about the local procedures and fees in your area.

Laws vary significantly from country to country. In the UK, there is no governmental filing process for the use of assumed names, but DBAs are heavily regulated by the Business Names Act of 1985. Again, you'll have to check with your local regulatory board.

Proper use of a fictitious business name is a powerful branding tool. Create a snappy business name. Use it at every opportunity.

LLC

The Limited Liability Company, or LLC, has recently become the most popular legal structure for small businesses who want to incorporate. Exact requirements vary slightly from state to state, but setting up an LLC is a fairly painfree process that can usually be done in an hour or less, depending on the complexity of your business.

Here's How:

1. Obtain a copy of your state's LLC Articles of Organization form from your state's Secretary of State office. Find out if the state in which you are incorporating requires you to post newspaper notification. Also find out any specific rules regarding business names.
2. Choose a name for your business that complies with your state's rules for LLC business names. The main part of the business name is generally very

flexible, but each state has a list of prohibited words. Your legal name must end with an LLC designator, such as "Limited Liability Company", "LLC", or whatever. The name can not be the same as another LLC on file in the state in which you are filing.

3. Fill out the LLC Articles of Organization form. Usually a fairly simple process. The only things you need to notify the state about regarding your LLC are items such as name, its business purpose, principal office address, the "registered agent" i.e., you, for receiving any legal documents, and the names of the initial members. You do NOT have to specify at this point the ownership distribution or management structure, just the names of the LLC's members.
4. Currently, If you live in Arizona or New York, you are required to publish a notice in your local newspaper of your intention to form an LLC. This should be done prior to filing your Articles of Organization. Check with your Secretary of State to be certain.
5. Submit your Articles of Organization form to your Secretary of State along with the filing fee. Fees range, depending on the state. Be aware that some states may have a separate corporate tax from from the filing fee, but that it must be paid when you file. California has a \$70 filing fee, but also an extravagant \$800 annual tax.

An LLC Operating Agreement that spells out the written agreement of the terms is not required for legal purposes, and it can be created after the legal filings are completed. If you are the sole owner of the LLC, you probably don't need one at this point. However, if anyone else is involved, it is wise to make a written agreement of the terms.

Describe, in detail, the financial and management rights and responsibilities of your LLC members. Spell out who contributes what, when and how business profits will be distributed, and under what terms members can leave the LLC. Without putting it in writing you risk straining your business and personal relationships down the road.

3 Tips for Formulating an LLC:

- 1 Even though the Operating Agreement isn't legally required, work out the details of the Operating Agreement before you file the LLC Articles of Organization. This is a good opportunity for someone who really doesn't want to be a part of it to opt out, and you may need to bring someone else in. Work out the kinks in advance.

2 You can hire an attorney, but this process is easy enough to do yourself.

3 You don't necessarily have to incorporate in your own state. There are some tax and organizational advantages to registering in certain states. Delaware, Nevada and Wyoming are considered the most hassle-free (and least expensive) for out-of-state corporate registration. Do some web research and investigate.

Business Start-up Checklist

Decide which of the six legal entities you want for your cleaning business. Then:

Create a business plan. In your plan, outline the goals of the business, explain the operating procedures, describe the competition and include a marketing plan. If you want to seek funding, a thorough business plan will be required for the application process.

Select an accountant and attorney. Troll around. You may want to search for professionals who have worked with other small business owners and are familiar with the special business demands small business owners face.

Obtain the federal tax identification number, also known as the employer identification number or EIN for your cleaning business from the IRS. The EIN is the social security number for your business. It's required for corporations and LLCs that will be paying out to employees. The IRS uses this number to identify your business for all tax matters.

Obtain the state tax identification number for your business - if applicable. Some states in the U.S. require businesses to also have a state tax identification number. Contact your state's taxation department to find out this applies to your business.

Open a business bank account. LLCs and corporations are well-advised to keep the finances of the business separate from those of the owners. To open a business bank account, most banks require information on the company, such as its formation date, type of business, and names and addresses of its owners.

Contact the bank to inquire what their specific business bank account requirements are, prior to trying to open an account. Then you will be prepared to bring all the necessary items.

Apply for business loans, if you need to seek funding through banks or Small Business Administration (SBA) loan programs.

Obtain the necessary business licenses and/or permits. Licenses may be required for your city, your municipality, your county and/or your state, so find out what the deal is. It is best to contact both your Secretary of State to check on business license requirements for your cleaning business and for the cleaning industry, and also to contact your local government agency in charge of licensing. Learn what their requirements are, and find out how to obtain whatever licenses may be necessary.

Obtain business insurance. Consider getting insurance for your business. Find out if it's required in your area. Discuss your cleaning business with an insurance agent, to ensure that you obtain the appropriate type and amount of insurance.

Investigate other insurance and government requirements. Small businesses face a number government and insurance requirements, particularly if you have employees. So be wise and investigate your business's obligations for the following:

- Unemployment insurance
- Workers' compensation
- OSHA requirements
- Federal tax
- State and local tax
- Self-employment tax
- Payroll tax requirements (FICA, federal unemployment tax, and state unemployment tax)
- Sales and use tax

Check zoning requirements. This is particularly important if you are starting a home-based cleaning business, which you are. You'll want to ensure that you meet your city's zoning requirements for your area.

Lease office space if you need it. Along with leasing an office and possibly a storeroom, you'll need the appropriate equipment to get your business up and running.

Set up your business accounting. You may have your accountant handle the

accounting, or you may want to handle it yourself with QuickBooks or other software. Either way, you'll want to ensure that you are prepared to properly account for all business disbursements which include payments received, invoices, accounts receivable, accounts payable, and more.

Establish a line of credit for your cleaning business. Establishing a line of credit will reduce the number of times you'll be required to prepay for the products you purchase. It also helps establish a favorable credit history, which is helpful as your cleaning business begins establishing vendor and supplier relationships. Obtaining a D&B D.U.N.S. number for your business is also smart. D&B (used to be Dun & Bradstreet) is the popular resource used to check the creditworthiness of any business.

Develop your marketing tools and materials. Get creative! Have fun here. Your website, social media sites, flyers and business cards will help your business develop an identity and will help you attain success.

Develop a marketing plan for your office cleaning service.

Please read the Action Plans for further information on developing your marketing approach.

C of C and SBA

Make an appointment with a business counselor at your local Small Business Administration or your Chamber of Commerce, because you may also have to have a business license or permit and comply with local laws in order to make your business legitimate.

In most cases you do not have to wait to begin working and getting paid by your clients. However, it is important to check the ordinances governing your town, as specific legal and tax structure instructions are beyond the scope of this guide.

You have learned:

About the local legal requirements in regard to starting your office cleaning business.

Don't let the practical legalities block you from getting started.

Legal structures

For every minute spent in organizing, an hour is earned.
– Benjamin Franklin

In this chapter

- Schedule clients and keep track
- Checklists! Daily, weekly, monthly, annually
- Being well organized helps minimize stress and free your time

Notebook or smartphone – it's your choice

Whether or not you are a planning fanatic, electronic devices and technology are making it easier than ever to cultivate good habits of organization.

If you prefer a notebook or daytimer for scheduling, bring it with you on the jobs to note changes and help keep receipts and paychecks organized.

For those who like a paperless office, scheduled events may be tracked on a smartphone or tablet using programs such as SmartTime Pro with Outlook or Google Calendar.

Note any changes in clients' and/or crew members' schedules. Keep your date book or smartphone with you, so when clients have questions about scheduling, you can answer them on the spot.

Keep an updated list of clients and their contact information in a spreadsheet on the computer. If you have hired crew members, schedule a routine to help you keep all employee contact and other information updated.

Toss, recycle or shred

You may choose to continue filing hard copies of necessary paperwork in an office filing cabinet. However, there is no longer a need a need to pile up or file receipts, business cards, employee data, time-sheets, and more. Management organizing systems can keep your office paper free. Scan important papers and store them securely online.

Online or software organization methods not only cut down paperwork, they can be extremely helpful at tax time, as accounting and itemization can be completed as-you-go. Check out websites and products such as NeatReceipts, Intelliscanner, ScanDigital and CardScan.

Service With a File

During the set-up phase, plan on spending a good deal of your time in administration mode. You are the marketing, PR, janitorial crew, administrator, one-man-band here, and it's a lot of work to get your business rolling. Things will go easier for you later if you take the time now to organize your home office.

Do most everything on the computer, but keep hard actual copies of some things. Keep filing cabinets in which to stash these copies. Use notebook binders on bookshelves instead, if you wish. What matters is staying organized. It doesn't take a lot of time to file things in the right spot. You will save time later and cut down on frustration levels if you begin good habits of organization now.

Files may include:

- Hard copy list of clients names, company names/addresses, phone numbers and any personal notes.
- Hard copy of schedule -- the most recent.
- Photocopied maps of the neighborhoods where you work.
- Hard copies of advertising fliers and a list of names and numbers of your flyer distributors.
- A file for business receipts.
- A list of earnings, expenditures and expenses.
- Employee's contact information and tax ID numbers
- A tax file.
- A file for monthly and annual written business goals.

New jobs require extra attention

Detailed scheduling information for each day is necessary to keep on hand, especially in the set-up phase, or the first three months. This is because new jobs require more information than routine ones. Directions, addresses, names and phone extension numbers of office managers, as well as any special cleaning or building security instructions.

Checklists

Make a daily checklist and assign yourself a time to tend it. A lot of office cleaning work begins in the evening as the standard workday ends, around 6 o'clock. Jobs will end late in the evening. You may want crew members to perform daily routine chores at the conclusion of each job, or first thing the following day.

Every day:

Wash and dry rags and sponges. Check levels of cleaning products. Refill or

replace as needed. Toss out any trash from jobs that may be stashed in company vehicles.

Admin work: Do daily accounting. Check schedule. Make any necessary callbacks, schedule estimates; double-check to make certain you know where and when you or your crew members are expected the next day.

Every week:

Do overall supplies check for anything you may have overlooked on your daily checks. Make sure equipment is clean and in working order for crews. Make any repairs necessary.

Admin work: Deposit paychecks, do weekly accounting. Meet with flyer distributors, if needed pay them for last week's work.

Every month:

Set a monthly earnings goal. Decide how frequently you want to flyer, and map out the area. Set aside the expected amount needed for printing and distribution. Consider meeting with other entrepreneurs for socializing and professional networking.

Quarterly (every three months):

Set aside money for taxes. Pay taxes if your business legal structure requires paying quarterly.

Every year:

Pay taxes if required to pay annually. Set personal and professional goals for the new year of business.

Renew equipment warranties as necessary. Have annual checks done on vehicles and large cleaning equipment.

Write down your new goals and look over your old ones to see how far you've come.

You have learned:

1. Schedule clients like a pro with your computer & smartphone.
2. Use management programs to help organize and keep down the paper load.
3. A routine system of checklists help to orient and organize daily, weekly, and monthly.

Even if you are on the right track, you will get run over if you just sit there.

– Will Rogers

In this chapter:

- Make lists of potential customers.
- Create marketing material.
- Hand out that material to people on your lists.

Enough with the planning

Politician Jerry Brown once said, “the reason everybody likes planning is that nobody has to do anything.” Planning is the easy part. If you want to seriously invest in your business you must let everyone know about it.

Where are your clients going to come from, you ask? Well, who works in an office?

Practically every business, institution, non-profit, local shop, restaurant, church and school you can think of has an office. Large or small, that every office must be cleaned on a routine basis.

Make a list

Go to your email program and pull up your contact list. Make a list of everyone you know who works at an office in your target region. Call them and let them know about your new business. Do not email them unless you know them or have already introduced yourself. Otherwise, your email will just end up in the spam file.

Create a business card and a simple flyer, then get acquainted with your target neighborhoods. Go online and pull up Google maps. Study your own city. If you don't want to go online, look at the map inside your local yellow pages phone book. Print out a copy of the map to use as a guide.

Hand out flyers

Now for the people you don't know. Get outside, walk down the street and hand out your marketing materials directly to people in the offices where you want to work.

Define your target areas with a yellow highlighter pen and mark them off as you cover each street. Make your marketing job easier by making sure you cover all

the businesses in your target area.

Choose one street to begin walking, and stride confidently into the business buildings in a busy downtown area. Hit the big streets first, then branch out to small businesses on the side streets. Look for insurance agencies, chiropractor offices, other small businesses and organizations with a storefront.

What will you say to these potential clients?

You do not have to say much. Greet them with a smile and hand them your business card. Introduce yourself with confidence and good cheer. Make a stellar impression, and chances are good that the next time they're looking for an office cleaner they will think of you.

It pays to put some time and ingenuity into creating marketing materials to catch their eye. Magnetic business cards are affordable and also a good idea. Make them funny, colorful, or attractive and someone will display them on the company fridge. Guess who will get a call when a professional cleaning service is needed?

Follow through professionally

All you need to succeed in this business is a professional attitude and the ability to follow through on your word with quality work.

Yellow page ads are still popular with conventional companies, and many entrepreneurs believe that in order to be considered professional placing an ad in the trusty dusty yellow pages is a must. The exorbitant expense may prohibit you from doing so in the beginning, but when your company expands you may choose to advertise that way.

If you do, give yourself an advantage and ensure that your company listing is placed in either the front or the last place in the section. These are the most easily-accessed by readers. Some companies put a triple-A in the beginning of their name, or an XYZ. Do whatever works.

Website working for the long-term

Your business website is going to be the main hub of your online presence. Other online portals such as Facebook and Twitter will direct customers to visit your website. That is part of the long-term marketing plan.

But in the short-term, which is the start-up phase, no one knows about your website. You need to go directly to the businesses who will hire you. Speak to real people, hand them your flyer. They can then check out your website after

they know it is there.

For now, you must get out there and actively discover your new clients. Clients who can hire you right now – and pay you now!

Lighten it up

Hands down, your best bet for marketing as you start your business is the shoe leather technique. Walk the streets, hand out your business cards, and tell everyone you meet about your brilliant new office cleaning service. Have fun with it.

Do as one cleaner we know does, and offer a zen approach with your marketing material. Promise your clients that after you've cleaned their office they will “see everything more clearly.”

The business world can be so deadly stiff and boring, you're bound to make a lasting impression when you dare to show a bit of personality and make them smile.

You have learned:

Marketing material represent your unique skills and personality, and finding potential clients is simple.

Success comes in cans. Failure comes in can't.
– postmodern proverb

In this chapter

- Build your business quickly
- Flyering 101
- The secret you won't believe

Build Your Business Quickly

Expect to get a 2% or 3% response rate on your flyers within a couple of days of distribution. Whenever you flyer a hundred businesses, you will get two or three queries from potential clients within just a few days.

One hundred businesses sounds like a lot, but it isn't. Depending on the variables, you should be able to introduce yourself and distribute business flyers to a hundred businesses within a few hours.

Of that 2 or 3%, you will almost always get a regular client. Some clients don't stick. But most do. You don't need to please everyone. Keep honing your schedule until you have all the business you want to have.

Here's the equation:

Flyers = phone calls = estimates = clients = \$\$ in the bank.

Here's the way the equation works:

- a - One hundred flyers
- b - which usually result in 2 - 4 calls from potential clients,
- c - which result in 1 - 3 estimates,
- d - which result in 1 - 2 jobs.

Excellent ROI

On an average this means you've spent an hour and a half or about \$12 to \$15 (if you pay someone to flier for you; more about that in a minute), and you've landed one or two jobs, which results in an average of \$105 each time you clean.

Remember, you may end up keeping some of these clients for months or even years to come. That's one heck of a good return on your initial investment.

Here is an example of the difference between ads in the paper and flyering directly. Evan and I put an ad in a local weekly paper for six weeks at a special

rate of \$108. That ad generated three phone calls and one client, who incidentally was our lowest paying client.

During those six weeks we also took to the streets and posted one thousand flyers, which took approximately fifteen hours. Those flyers began to generate calls within three days. Over that six week period we received sixteen calls, which resulted in twelve ongoing clients and several one-time jobs.

Flyering 101

Locate, on a map, the businesses you want to hire your cleaning service. Make it lucrative territory. Aim high.

Drive around and scout out locations you would like to concentrate on getting jobs. You will be working as soon as you hand out three hundred flyers to the owners or office managers of those businesses.

Hire a flyer distributor

At some point you will be working and unable to spend time flyering. Do not stop flyering! You still need to drum up attention and point people to your website. So when this time comes, hire a flyer distributor.

Fees paid to flyer distributors (approximately \$8 per hour for 3-5 hours a week), have been well worth it. They kept us working and bidding on new jobs during the first few months as our business got off the ground.

Your distributor is your professional representative. In other words, it may as well be you introducing yourself to local business owners. Advise this person on dress code and behavior for best results.

When to Flyer

Introduce yourself to business owners and make sure they have your website address and contact information. Dress business casual.

Make appointments where necessary, otherwise just drop in during workday hours, Monday through Friday, 9 am to about 4 pm.

Checklist for flyering

- 1 - Scout your target regions.
- 2 - Mark your target businesses on a map. (We photocopy an actual map so we can mark it up. Make several copies and you can hand these out to your distributors.)

3 - Set a time limit for handing out flyers, say 1-2 hours.

4 - Bring your map and enough flyers to cover the neighborhood. Bring a bottle of water and your sunscreen -- remember, this is urban hiking.

The road to success is always under construction.

Charge more as business grows

Starting up, you may not earn your ideal fees. Take on these beginner jobs. Build your experience, confidence, and bank account. Get the cash flow and the practice your start-up company needs.

Don't worry if the first jobs are not paying your ideal fees, because you will quickly build up your business and be making \$20 to \$50 per hour or better.

The more you charge, the more you make, and the better the businesses where you work will be. Take our word for it. Charge more, earn more.

People assign value to a service, product, or experience. If you charge a nominal fee, your client will assume that you are less than professional and that you are offering less than professional service. Instead, charge a healthy sum and deliver quality service.

Businesses of quality want quality service

Good business managers know the importance of having a tidy and clean environment. It impacts their business directly. They want quality service and they can afford it. They believe "you get what you pay for." They believe that if a service doesn't cost a substantial amount, either the service is not worthwhile or the company delivering the service is inexperienced.

Unless you charge a sum that declares: I am worth my weight in gold, they won't bother with you. They can afford the best, and they want assurance that they made the right decision in hiring your service at a substantial cost.

Art-science

Setting fees is more of an art than a science. Try to strike a balance between what you need to earn to stay in business, and their perception of what you are worth.

In service fields, people want quality. There are plenty of people out there trying

to find the cheapest cleaning service available, and there are plenty of cheap cleaning services. But that's not you. That's the reason you're reading the Suze & Ev Methods.

Once you have built confidence and experience you will begin to target a new market. This is when you'll phase in one higher-paying job at a time, and phase out one lesser-paying job at a time. It's the equivalent to giving yourself a raise. How do you do it? Just keep flyering better businesses, more in alignment with where you want to be.

Make it your goal to have all your jobs pay you well within six months. It's really up to you to decide how quickly you want to build up your business to this point.

You have learned:

1. Flyering directly is the least expensive, most effective way to advertise your office cleaning service.
2. Insights and instructions on the fine art of flyering, and what to teach your flier distributor, if you should choose to hire someone to help.
3. How to earn more money by setting your fees high. Remember, people believe they get what they pay for. You are worth your weight in gold!

In this chapter

- Create marketing materials that express your unique mission
- Study what works and what doesn't.
- DIY, or engage a marketing or design student to do it for trade.

Turn minutes into \$\$\$

Your flyer goes before you into the business communities where you will soon have clients. It takes only minutes to create, and costs virtually pennies, but it will bring you thousands of dollars of income in a short period of time.

Handmade or professional

Whichever style you choose, let your flyer represent your cleaning service's personality. People are leery of commercially branded come-ons anyway, and hip to slick ad copy. I am always intrigued to see a genuine spark of creativity, aren't you?

For a sharper, more professional look check into ordering doorhangers online. Designed to hang right over the doorknob.

Next time you pass a notification board at the bookstore or any other public place where fliers are posted, linger for awhile. Take a few minutes to glance over them. Observe the ones that catch your eye. Analyze what works and what doesn't work.

Key ingredients:

- Message
- Overall design
- Blank space
- Color

Ask yourself if the message is instantly clear. When designing your flier, keep in mind that people will toss it out without a second thought unless they can instantly discern your message. Learn from the bad ones. Appropriate ideas from the good ones.

Delegate to the Nearest Design Student

You can skip the design stage and delegate, if you wish. Check out your local

college or university for graphic design students who may be interested in expanding their portfolio of samples. This is a great way to provide experience for them and a low-cost flyer for your cleaning service.

You'll need:

1. A photo of yourself, plus partner and crew or other cohorts
2. These key points of information:
 - Your name
 - Your phone number
 - Brief description of your service
 - Offer for a free estimate

If you have a partner or crew, include everyone in your photo. Be candid, smile naturally. The point is to let customers see that your company is made of real people.

Faces – not logos

Use the same photos on your business website, Facebook and other social networking media. Advertising has, at its heart, repeated exposure. The more your customers see your friendly faces, the more you will be perceived as familiar and trustworthy. Faces are much more effective in establishing a human connection than a company logo. Use both if possible, the photos and your logo.

Golden rule of design: KISS (Keep It Simple, Stupid)!

Three Easy Flyers:

- Cut & Paste Method. Fast and effective.
- Software Method. Your design software program will guide you.
- Copier Method. Write it out and take it to the print store. What could be easier?

In addition to your flyer, create a magnetic business card. The long-life quality of these magnets helps secure long-term business.

Tickle a funnybone

Don't settle for blending in with the masses. Marketing is your time to shine. Take this golden opportunity to create a spectacle in a teacup.

We all love to laugh and it's fairly easy to tickle a funny bone here and there. Put a humorous quote on your flyer and your magnetic business card.

Search online or in a book of quotes for one that you like. For future reference, I keep a hard file of copies of jokes that reach me via email. Heaven knows there's no shortage of comedians just waiting to share their wit and perspective.

According to statistics, people are 500 times more likely to feel friendly toward you if you make them laugh than if you quote statistics.

You have learned:

1. When creating marketing tools such as your flyer and business card, let your company's persona shine and watch your profits climb.
2. You can make a flyer easily with a little bit of your own ingenuity. Alternatively, ask a design student to create one for your business.

I have been up against tough competition all my life.
I wouldn't know how to get along without it.
– Walt Disney

In this chapter

- Investigate the competition in your town
- Discover how your service compares

How does your company stand up to the competition?

This exercise is in friendly, cleaning-business espionage. Call similar services to yours and request an estimate for office cleaning.

This exercise is about role-playing. If you choose to play along, you will learn some very important things that are otherwise virtually impossible to learn. The exercise is useful in many ways, especially if you are not certain how much to charge. Going through the trouble of getting three different estimates will give you a good idea of where to set your fees.

Talking to the competition will show how your company compares in terms of behavior. We make judgments and compare ourselves and our business to other similar ones anyway. Going through this exercise gives you firsthand experience on which to base your judgments.

Get 3 different estimates

Your assignment is go online or pick up the local newspaper, and scan the ads for other local office cleaning services. You will be calling to have them come out and give you a free estimate.

If you do not have an office or you would rather they not come to your office, ask a friend or family member if you may use theirs.

The object of this exercise is to learn as much as you can about how the competition in your area does business. How do your rates compare? How does your service compare?

Role-play the part of a customer.

Ask pertinent questions such as:

- Exactly what does your service include?
- How much do you charge?
- How do you calculate an estimate?
- Do you have references?

- How long have you been doing office cleaning?
- How long do you expect a cleaning to take?
- Are you the people who will be doing the cleaning, or do you represent a cleaning service?

3 different estimates

Obtain three different estimates to give you a feel for the local going rate. Observe what you like about them. Take notes. Notice what bothers you about them. Decide how you would do it better.

Play along. Answer their questions naturally. But hey, this is spy work, right? So don't raise any red flags. Do not be too nosy. Do not ask inappropriate questions about their business. For example, do not inquire about their annual income. Do not ask them how they get their clients.

Stick to questions about your specific office. When it is time for them to leave, tell them you will call if you decide to go with them. Do not sign any contracts.

Sit down and take some notes for future reference. Did anything surprise you, and if so, why? What did you learn about your own business by talking to the competition? Make notes about fees and other specifics.

You have learned:

1. To investigate other office cleaning services in order to learn how your service and your fees compare with theirs.
2. To empathize with your clients by playing the role of one.

The best labor-saving device is doing it tomorrow
– postmodern proverbs

In this chapter

- Sample telephone scripts to use as a guide
- The 5 steps of the estimate process
- Instructions on estimating the fee

Bidding on Jobs

Placing a bid for a cleaning job, also referred to as giving an estimate, involves the following steps:

- Meet the potential client at their office
- Survey the office(s) or rooms to be cleaned
- Take a few notes and tell them what your fee would be
- Arrange a time on your schedule

Beat the competition!

Let your prospect know that the estimate process will take about 15 minutes more or less, depending on the size of the building.

Your potential client is likely to compare two or three office cleaning services to get a feel for who they want to hire. So during the bid, keep in mind that you are probably up against the competition. Be the best.

Not as Scary as it Sounds

Like most things, once you've gone through the process a few times and put in a few bids you will exude much more confidence. And guess what? The minute you start acting as if you know what you're doing, the more jobs you will walk away with, and the better paying they will be.

People can sense confidence a mile away. It tells them you are trustworthy and you know what you're doing. Combine this with two or three outstanding references and soon you will have all the office cleaning jobs you want.

Post letters of recommendation

If you have a profile on LinkedIn, ask your professional associates to recommend your new service, and post it on your profile. Also ask for letters of reference outside the scope of LinkedIn.

If your reference is also one of your recently acquired clients, that's even better. Asking for a reference gives you just one more reason to communicate with

them. Regular communication is important in creating long-term professional relationships. It helps build job security.

By the Hour, or By the Job?

We recommend that you ask whether they have had an office cleaner in the past, and if so, how much did they pay? However, do not let that figure intimidate you into lowering your fee, if you were going to ask for a higher amount. Keep your money goals in mind and you will reach them.

Some clients do not care how much per hour they are paying as long as it fits their budget. They agree to pay by the job. Others are concerned with how much money they are paying by the hour.

At any one of your customers' offices, know that over time you will complete the service more quickly, the job becomes more routine, and the customer grows to depend on you. Formulate a satisfying and comfortable business relationship in which both parties feels secure.

Shoot for a price that covers the job

Before you know it, the job will take an hour-and-a-half, and you will earn what appears to be \$70 or \$80 per hour. But in the beginning when the job took longer and was less routine, you walked out the door with the same dollar amount for the job, but your hourly rate was lower because it took you longer to finish.

The bottom line: When giving an estimate, shoot for a figure that covers the whole job.

Telephone script

Here's a simple telephone script that you may use as a guide until you get comfortable with your own words:

Script 1

You: "Hello, Sabrina speaking."

Client: "Is this Sabrina's Custom Clean?"

You: "Yes it is. How may I help you?"

Client: "Well, I received your flier, and I'd like you to come and give us an estimate for a cleaning."

You: "We'll be glad to come take a look at your office and give you an estimate."

"Client: "Great."

You: "How's Tuesday? We could be there at 4:00 pm."

Client: "Sounds great. We're the chiropractor's office on the corner of Broadway and Water Streets."

You: "Okay, I know right where you are. Let me get your name and phone number here too."

Client: "I'm Jackie, and our number is 555-1234."

You: "Okay, Jackie. Thanks for calling! We look forward to meeting with you Tuesday."

OK. Script 1 is an example of how easy it can be. Those sorts of calls happen all the time. We are not trying to lull you into a false sense of security here. However, we also want you to be prepared to deal with other kinds of callers.

Script 2

Here's an example of how to handle the call when the conversation's not so cut and dry:

You: "Hello, this is Roberta."

Client: "This the cleaning person?"

You: "That's right, how can I help you?"

Client: "How much do you charge per hour?"

You: "Well, that's kind of hard to say. We have to come and take a look at your office, then give you an estimate based on what we see."

Client: "But we're just looking for a ballpark figure. Our office is about 2,000 square feet, we have a men's and a ladies' room, and we'd just want you to do the small kitchen and the latrines, and the waiting room, and also

dust the conference room table and vacuum and dust everything."

You: (Non-committal sounding) "Sounds like about a five hour job. Your office may be around the \$125. - \$150. range."

Client: "Your fees begin at \$25. an hour?"

You: "Well, I don't usually charge by the hour. I charge by the job. Like I said, I'd really have to come and have a look at the office myself in order to give you a fair estimate."

Client: "No thanks. I'm just checking around. Goodbye."

You: "Thanks for your call!"

This is one way handle these calls. Again, keep everything in perspective. If this person appears obsessed with the hourly amount, that is a red flag. We are not suggesting that you not attempt to get this particular job. Only that in our experience, clients that start out like this can cause trouble later.

Be choosy

You do not have to take every job. However, we know when you're just starting out, you are tempted to grab all the new jobs you can stuff into your schedule.

At the estimate appointment

Walk through the office with your client, come up with your estimate, and tell the client.

For example, you might say, "I can clean your office for \$110 every other week," (or every week, whichever is preferred). The client will either agree to it, or tell you they will get back to you.

It is not unprofessional or unethical to ask if they have a dollar amount in mind before you give them a figure. Office managers work within the constraints of a budget. Sometimes, the figure they offer is higher than the one you were about to give, so you could luck out.

Prepare ahead of time

If necessary, familiarize yourself with the area their office is located by studying your map. You probably know the area already because you flyer'd the offices there in the first place.

Allow yourself enough time to find the place and park. Be on time, or be 5 minutes early.

In many cases this is one of the only times you will actually meet with your clients face-to-face, since generally you and your crew will be cleaning after they have gone for the day. It is therefore very important to make a good first impression by being punctual and appropriately dressed.

Dress codes

Dress "business casual" for estimate appointments. Appearance should be pleasant and well-groomed. Think non-offensive and blending-in. This is not the best time to show off your tattooed sleeves!

Cleaning attire

When dressing for cleaning jobs wear clean and comfortable clothing you can move in easily. Bear in mind that printed fabric will help hide stains from cleaning solutions. Always try to look your best, given the nature of your job.

Looks are superficial, but they don't know you yet

Be aware that you are being judged and "sized-up" by your clients, especially when they are new clients. They don't know anything about you, other than what you tell them and how you behave. If you are sloppy, use questionable language around them, or otherwise make them feel uncomfortable to be around, you wouldn't get the jobs. Or keep them.

On one hand, appearance is simply a superficial issue. On the other hand, your livelihood depends on your appearance and your behavior. So look at it from your customers' point of view. Until they get to know you better, they're trusting you and your crew, virtual strangers, with the keys to their office. Treat that privilege with respect.

What to bring to the appointment

On the estimate appointment, bring your scheduling device, smartphone or date book, plus the names and contact info for at least two or three professional references.

Print out a number of names and phone numbers of your references. Make several copies of the list to give to new customers when needed. Ideally, your list of references will include other clients from offices in the building or in the neighborhood or district.

Until you get those clients (and rest assured, you will have them soon), use two or three other people who you know will gloat lovingly about your integrity and diligence.

References

You can expect around half of your potential customers to ask you for references. Some people don't ask. If they do ask, have your list of references handy. Unless they specifically ask, do not bother mentioning it.

You are working in a field where your clients, unfortunately, have dealt with their share of flakes. They want you to be different, to be on time, to be well-groomed, to be courteous and attentive to their needs. It is your job to show them that you are not the stereotypical flake they made the mistake of hiring last year.

5 Steps of the Estimate Process

Step 1

Walk through the office with your client. Inquire if they have used the services of an office cleaner before, and if they have, were they happy with that service? Find out why they were happy or unhappy with it and discreetly ask how much they paid. Keep in mind that if they were unhappy they're probably aware they are going to have to pay more for a better service.

Step 2

Listen to their comments and take notes. Roughly note how long it may take you to clean each room.

Step 3

Note clutter on desktops, the office kitchen, restrooms, etc. Noticing clutter and dealing with it is so important we've devoted a whole chapter to it. Generally it isn't a huge problem in offices, but every situation is different, and believe me it pays to be on the alert. Clutter = time, so it will affect your work and thus your fee.

Step 4

Floors – Notice the type of floor-covering and how it should be cleaned. Become familiar with the various methods to clean hardwood, carpet, tile, linoleum, and area rugs.

Step 5

Take a few moments to calculate your findings. Tell your client the figure you have come up with. Let them know that because this figure is simply an

estimate, it can be adjusted if necessary. For example, you may take on the job and then discover that it will take more time (or less) than you initially calculated. When the customer agrees, schedule your first cleaning.

First-time cleanings

Consider charging a one-time extra fee for first time cleanings. then give your client a break on subsequent cleanings. First time cleanings generally do take longer, especially when the office has not been thoroughly cleaned for a while. For this reason, a lot of cleaning services routinely charge a higher rate for the initial cleaning.

Tip: One way to land a lot of good jobs when you're starting out is to make a point of telling them that you are going to waive the first timers' extra charge. This is a foolproof method for getting regular jobs immediately.

40 minutes instead of an hour

Your abilities and experience will determine how fast you go. We do most of our cleaning jobs as a duo and a lot of them average approximately 2 and ½ hours. A solo office cleaner would estimate spending five hours on these jobs. Small offices -- two or three rooms and a restroom -- are convenient because they can be cleaned quickly.

Often, Ev and I estimated that cleaning a small office would take one hour, but it ended up taking more like 40 minutes. That is because we worked slower at first, then sped up the routine as the job and the office became familiar. Leave some room in your schedule for this sort of adjustment.

Arriving at the estimate appointment

When you arrive for the estimate, introduce yourself, then go through the 5 steps of the estimate process as outlined above.

These are the critical moments during which the office manager is deciding whether or not to hire you.

Non-verbal communication

Most communication is non-verbal. People either resonate with you or they don't. It's pretty straightforward. Be clear in your intentions. You want them to hire you to clean their office at regular intervals for a good fee.

If you are clear about what you want, and your intention is to give them excellent service while making a decent income, your words and behavior will communicate this intention and you will be hired.

In most cases, people are likely to use their intuition about you, but of course it doesn't hurt to have a pleasant appearance and strong references also.

You have learned:

1. Sample telephone scripts
2. What to bring when going out on bids
3. People make judgements on appearance, use of language, and behavior
4. The 5 steps of the estimate process

People with clear, written goals accomplish far more in a shorter period of time than people without them could ever imagine.

– Brian Tracy

Act of faith

Writing down your goals is like drawing a map that leads to your future. It doesn't matter if you don't know exactly how you'll reach these goals at this very moment. The act of writing down something you want to achieve is an act of faith.

How it works

Write it and feel it passionately and your unconscious will immediately begin the work of turning it into a reality.

Setting a conscious goal stirs your subconscious into creating awareness of the opportunities that can get you there. So find a pad and pen or get in front of your computer. The following exercises are designed to improve your odds of success and lead naturally into a course of action.

Ready, set, write it down!

- Write down a description of your ideal workday.
- Write down your financial and business goals.
- Make a list of the things you will enjoy about running your own office cleaning business.

Ideal workday

What would you do if you had the financial security, the time, and the energy to do the things you wanted to every day?

Write a paragraph that describes your ideal workday as if it were already a reality.

Be specific. Color your description with detail, place yourself in the picture and vividly imagine how you feel while doing the things you describe.

Positive & enjoyable aspects

Next, make a list of the positive aspects of having your own office cleaning business.

Picture yourself on a typical business day. Imagine the satisfaction you feel as you leave behind bright clean offices.

See your customers thanking you and handing you their generous checks.

What other positive emotions do you feel?

Clear & simple

Get crystal clear about the reasons you want to operate your own business.

Boil down your ideas into a list of five to ten clear and simple statements. Write down these statements in the present tense, as if they've already become a reality.

Put your list where you will see it every day, such as your fridge or your bathroom mirror.

Be accountable – share your goals with a friend

According to researchers at Dominican University, people who write down their goals significantly increase their chances of success. The ones who did really well in the study also shared regular progress reports toward their goals with a friend.

So get a friend involved. Once a week, email them a simple report describing the steps you have taken toward reaching your goals. This action adds an important element of public accountability. It also helps to solidify your commitment and more realistically assure your success.

Specify your goals

How many clients do you want to have in one year from now? What about six months? In one month?

In order for this exercise to work, it is not important that you know how to go about getting them. All you have to do now is decide how many office or commercial cleaning contracts you want, and how soon you want them.

You have learned:

By writing down our goals we stimulate the energy, creativity, and desire necessary to make them a reality.

Be patient and achieve all things. Be impatient and achieve all things faster.
– postmodern proverbs

In this chapter

- Basic cleaning kit
- Indispensable tips of the trade
- Earth-friendly cleaning solutions vs. brand-name solutions

Use the supplies on-hand

Most office managers will assume that your service will provide the cleaning supplies. If you do not yet have some of the basic equipment and supplies, use the office supplies.

Generally, business offices stock a closet or storage room with cleaning supplies. Items such as a step ladder, vacuum, broom and dustpan, cleaning solutions, buckets, paper towels and trash bags may be kept there. It is usually perfectly acceptable to use the clients' cleaning products. However, ask your client, to be certain.

Your cleaning service stockroom

You cannot always count on supplies being available at your jobs. Below is a list of supplies your service should keep stocked. Purchase cleaning products in bulk. Store the containers in your office or storeroom. Refill between jobs.

Purchase buckets and caddies designed for carrying cleaning supplies from the company vehicle to offices. *Tip:* Store rubber gloves separate from cleaning products. Do not use gloves if cleaning solutions are suspected to have inadvertently spilled inside.

Supplies for the job

- Plastic trash bags
- Rags - microfiber
- Razor blade
- Small screwdriver
- Soft & hard feather dusters with extension
- Assorted scrub brushes
- Tote in which to carry supplies
- Vacuum
- Steam cleaner (optional)

Cleaning products

Simple Green *

General cleaner, powerful and strong-smelling. Effective on painted surfaces like baseboards, molding and wood. Dilute with plenty of water.

Soft Scrub

Use on porcelain & plastic basins. Contains bleach so beware. Mildly toxic.

Citrus Cleaner

General cleaner, good for wiping down office-kitchen counters and bathroom fixtures. Glass cleaner, use with paper towels or preferably a yellow micro fiber towel.

Murphy's Oil Soap

Use diluted on wood floors, wood veneer cabinets & untreated furniture. (Be careful with Murphy's. Make sure to dilute it with lots of water. Never use on fine or antique furniture.)

Vinegar

Excellent for almost any cleaning chore when diluted with warm water. For general dusting, apply to a damp cloth.

Essential oils

Used for deodorizing vacuums and rooms, just mix with water and spray into vacuum while the motor's running. Lemon, lavender and eucalyptus work well. Choose a fragrance that you like.

Citrus essential oils are natural degreasers and can be used to remove stains on many surfaces including stainless steel.

Baking Soda

A great deodorizer and stain remover when combined with vinegar, tea tree oil and lemon.

Micro fiber cleaning cloths

These handy cloths are a must. What's not to love? They're a cinch to wash and rinse out quickly, and create very little lint, which is often a problem with other rags.

Vacuum

Consider purchasing a used one, one that is not too heavy for your crew members or you to cart around, but one with a powerful motor.

Reconditioned is the way to go – you can pay premium for a brand new one, just keep in mind it is going to get beat up. Most offices usually keep one tucked away in the utility closet. Just ask if you may use their vacuum.

Steam Cleaner

Owning a good reliable steam cleaner can open up some new revenue streams in the form of additional work cleaning upholstery and venetian blinds. Buy a new one, or find a decent one for a reasonable price online.

Bleach

Use bleach only in extreme circumstances. It will remove most stains, yes, and people believe that super-white means super-clean. However, bleach is toxic and traditionally overused. For example, restaurant cleaning crews tend to overuse it. Ever entered your favorite diner only to be greeted by the unmistakable odor of bleach? It is quite an effective appetite-killer.

One of the worst traits of bleach, other than its toxicity, is that it tends to splash when applied, permanently ruining everything around it.

Whiter-than-white?

Bleach *will not* render everything whiter-than-white. Stained rubber caulking, which may be the case around toilet bases or between tiled walls and sink cabinets, will not bleach white. The caulking must be replaced with new caulking, then cleaned regularly in order to stay white and new-looking.

In some offices, "invisible" or see-through caulking is used in kitchens and restrooms. Mold frequently forms underneath, and the caulk cannot be seen, but dark mold can. It is impossible to clean because it cannot be reached.

Don't lose your mind over these details. But do inform the office manager that your service cannot clean those details, due to the invisible caulking. Inform them because otherwise they may think you are not doing your job.

If our clients insist on the use of bleach, apply it at the end of the job (don't breathe in the toxic fumes while cleaning), and use caution.

Tips of the Trade

Cleaning sponges

Use two-sided sponges. They have a standard sponge on one side, and either a thin blue or a thin green scratchy pad on the other. The blue side is for scrubbing and will not scratch most surfaces. Green, on the other hand, will

scratch most surfaces. Green is for scouring and should usually only be used on stovetop burners for scouring off burned-on food.

The rough blue surface is helpful for scrubbing most surfaces in kitchens, restrooms, and on desktops. Use a clean sponge for each of these places to avoid spreading germs and bacteria. Use it on tile, ceramic and stainless steel stovetops, countertops, glass shower doors, and greasy or gummy spots on floors and walls.

The important point is, be aware of the potential for scratching many types of surfaces with the scouring pad. Use the scouring pad only on a limited basis.

Down to the nitty-gritty

The lint roller comes in extremely handy at the end of a job. Use it for removing stubborn lint from upholstered furniture, even walls and floors. It can make things look fresh and new, lending a final finishing touch that is almost impossible to obtain any other way. (If the lint roller is forgotten or runs out of sticky tape, use rubber gloves.)

Also good for details is a small, retractable razor blade with a plastic grip. Once in a while there is a need to scrape off stray dots of dried paint from mirrors or windows.

A tiny screwdriver is indispensable for removing gunk from narrow or hard-to-reach areas such as the tracks for sliding glass doors and windows. Such tiny tools are designed for use with electronic instruments or eyeglass repair. Simply cover the sharp end with a fine cotton rag or two folded paper towels and slide it along the dirty groove to clean.

Earthy-friendly or brand-name?

You and your crew members may prefer using environmentally nontoxic, nonabrasive products, as we do. In that case, do not use your clients' products and supplies if they are potentially hazardous to your health.

Our personal favorite cleaning solution brand is Aromatherapy Naturals, which is made with essential oils.

Diplomacy

For all this talk of self-employment, the client really is your boss. Aim to please, as this is the way to build the business. Just keep in mind that you are not obligated to use every product your customers ask you to use. Especially if in doing so, you or your crew members feel unsafe.

You have learned:

Which cleaning tools and supplies you will want to keep stocked.

Tips of the trade.

To use diplomacy with your clients when it comes to choosing the right cleaning product for the job.

If you have a bias toward using nontoxic products, you are not alone. We do too. We hope you find earth-friendly products just as effective as the toxic ones.

On our website we have many cleaning tips with natural cleaning formulas that work well!

In this chapter:

- General cleaning techniques
- Things to do every time you clean
- Toxic vs. Non-toxic (The case for earth-friendly cleaning products)

Your service will get the best advantage by being professional. Show up on time, be prepared, and work efficiently. However, to really get an edge on the competition, develop expert cleaning techniques.

If you are working with a partner, figure out who the detail person is and who the big picture person is and divide the work accordingly. I'm the tortoise and Ev's the hare, so we had some adjusting to do.

And, of course, this has *never* happened to us, but partners do occasionally get on each other's nerves. especially if one person perceives that they are working harder than the other. After years of working together, our advice is "get over it." Adjust your speeds and work it out or split up.

Things to do each time you clean an office

In every room:

- Use a long handled duster and dust up high on the walls and on top of bookshelves, storage units and other furniture.
- Dust around ceiling lights to remove cobwebs.
- Carefully clean desktops and keyboards and wipe down computer monitors. Spray glass cleaner onto your cleaning cloth -- do not spray any product directly onto the monitor screen.
- Pay special attention to the backs of computers and any equipment that may be stored under desks or on the floor.
- Clean away any spider webs accumulated under desktops or behind computers.
- Wipe visible baseboards clean.
- Move tables, desks and chairs, wipe away dust bunnies from underneath furniture legs and feet.
- Clean out tracks beneath sliding doors and windows.

Leather furniture should be treated with care. Generally you'll only want to dust leather pieces, never get them wet. The cleaning tips section of our website

includes special leather cleaning techniques you may use on occasion. Vacuum carpet or otherwise clean floor. Shake out small rugs or vacuum them. Empty trash and recycling bins.

Office kitchen

- Wipe down upper cupboards and storage units with a damp rag.
- Wash down the walls, cupboards, clean the sinks, countertops and wipe down exterior of the refrigerator.
- Clean the microwave oven inside and out.
- Open the fridge door and wipe down the exposed parts of the shelves as well as the floor of the fridge in front of the bottom shelf.
- Clean the floor, wipe down floorboards.

We use micro fiber cleaning cloths. They don't leave lint, which is a great time saver and paper towel saver too.

About every third time (assuming you clean the office once a week) use a little Murphy's Oil Soap on wooden cupboards, diluted with water in a spray bottle. Murphy's will build up on wooden surfaces and can become gummy, so do not use it full strength.

Regular Simple Green, diluted in a spray bottle, can be used on cupboard surfaces of all kinds. It is gentle but has a distinct odor which some people do not like. Dilute it well with water to mitigate the scent.

Our favorite brand of cleaning solutions comes from Aromatherapy Naturals. Buy in bulk to save money.

A homemade favorite is a blend of liquid castile soap (Dr. Bronner's), white vinegar and water. Shake it well inside a spray bottle and use on all wood surfaces or laminates. I buy peppermint-scented castile soap – very fresh smelling.

Mens & Ladies Rooms

- Clean and shine mirrors, wash down walls.
- Clean sinks and countertops, scrub latrines inside and out.
- Scrub floor and clean floorboards.

Use wet-and-dry sandpaper (not too gritty, not too fine) or a wet pumice stone to erase hard-water rings inside toilet bowls and sinks.

Improve efficiency

When you know beforehand that something is going to take a lot of effort to clean – like a messy latrine for example, spray it or soak it with a cleaning product at the beginning of the job. Then begin in another room. By the time you are ready to clean the latrine, you've given yourself a head start and it will clean up faster, better and with less effort.

Risky Products

The wise adage "do no harm" is as useful in cleaning as in other areas of life, such as raising children and driving to work.

Familiarize yourself with the products you use and learn what risks are involved in using any cleaning agent. You are there to make your clients happy with your cleaning job. As cleaning professionals we do not want to lose our clients, and we never want to ruin their property through carelessness or any other means.

Read labels

Slow down if you must and read the labels on the stuff you are using – before you use it. Do as the labels suggest, and test an inconspicuous spot before you use an unfamiliar product on an entire surface.

Office managers (if they have an opinion about it) are likely to want you to use commercial products with bleach to remove stains. However, use caution with anything that contains bleach. There are a lot of them, so read the labels. Some surfaces can withstand bleach, some cannot. Wooden toilet seats painted white look as if they could be bleached clean, but the white wood may stain yellow if you use bleach on it – probably not the result your client is seeking.

Toxic vs. Nontoxic Cleaning Products

As we've said, our bias is toward environmentally friendly products. This can be a selling point for some clients, but others do not care. And still others will mistake "friendly" with "wimpy." If you prefer only earth-friendly solutions, we suggest that without getting up on a soapbox ;), you try not to risk losing a job over this sensitive issue.

In general, we've learned not to tell people upfront that we prefer using alternative or non-toxic products. They may not hire us, thinking (mistakenly) that we may not do a good enough job on their stained toilet seats. Most surfaces will get clean without the use of harmful products. However, it is best to let the client bring up the topic of toxic vs. nontoxic cleaning substances.

The truth is, most of your clients won't be peering over your shoulder inspecting

your work while you clean, so use whatever works.

A client of ours recently left a jug of commercial brand calcium deposit remover out for us to use. One glance at the warnings on the label (including cancer-causing and asthma-inducing gizmos, of course, that were only harmful when inhaled) and I knew I wanted to avoid opening that jug if at all possible.

I had brought along a natural product that claimed to do the same thing the toxic product claimed to do. I was happy to see that it did indeed remove the mineral deposits on the chrome faucet and glass doors. I did not bother telling the client that I didn't use his Super-Cleaner. The goal was to clean off the mineral deposits and I did.

Use the safe product first, such as Aromatherapy Naturals solutions, applied with a bit of elbow grease. If that doesn't work, consider using the other product. But if the harsher chemical cleaners are used, read the label and heed the warnings. Wear rubber gloves to protect your skin.

More Cleaning Techniques for Specific Jobs

General cleaning

A good general rule of thumb is, start high, end low. What you don't catch with a sponge or a rag, gravity will bring to the floor. So clean the floor last.

The one real exception to that rule is when cleaning walls. When cleaning walls, start low and scrub up the wall. This keeps dirty streak marks from running down.

Floors:

Vacuum or sweep up the crumbs and whatnot. Wipe the floor with a damp towel or rag.

Mops are not efficient. They leave streaks and don't give you enough control to do a satisfactory job.

Use a Swiffer to mop floors.

These inexpensive tools break down into portable parts, and attach a micro fiber cloth to it. Spot clean with the blue scrubber – the textured sponge for stuck-on lumps of goo.

Clean floorboards, window tracks, and tiny dirty corners with a corner of your micro-fiber rag, by hand. This is a lot of work but well worth it. Use a small

screwdriver covered with a rag or paper towel to get at impossibly small corners.

Pets in home offices

Increasing numbers of people work in an office located inside their home. This phenomena blurs the line between home and office. Our cats love to lounge on the ottoman in our home office.

When the family dogs and cats are welcome in the home office, the cleaning crew must deal with it. Here is some useful information about cleaning where there is hair in the air.

There's no question, an office with cats and dogs lounging around is a challenge to keep clean.

Before attempting to wipe down floors, sinks, or countertops, wipe up pet fur with a paper towel. Vacuum it up before you clean. This renders cleaning with spray-solutions a lot easier. Saves time too, because you're not cleaning up from your cleaning job, which you can't escape if there's a bunch of dog hair in your sponge or on your cleaning cloth.

Smelly dog-odor wafting from the vacuum cleaner can be handled with essential oil. Apply five or six drops of lavender essential oil to the vacuum bag or hose before using. You'll be amazed how well it works. Carry a diluted mix of lavender oil diluted with plain water to spritz into the air.

You have learned:

General cleaning techniques.

Tasks to alternate.

About natural or nontoxic cleaning products.

Less is more.
– Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (architect)

In this chapter

- When estimating a job, pay careful attention to the amount and density of the existing clutter.
- Dealing with lot of clutter will make your job harder and take longer.

Neat or untidy – all types benefit

Some people are uber-neat, some are super-sloppy. Both types (and everyone else, whose habits fall somewhere between the two extremes) deserve respect and assistance. Everyone benefits from working in a clean office. Whether or not they clutter their desktops is their choice. Some like a messy desk, some like a cleared one.

However, you will benefit from discerning powers of observation when bidding jobs. Take careful note of the level of clutter on desktops, in hallways, bookshelves, restrooms, and other places that you will be expected to clean. Is it low, middle, or high-level clutter?

Underestimating the time it takes to clean an office or place of business may cause you to underestimate the fee. This happens because it can be easy to overlook clutter while giving the estimate.

Strike a fair deal

"Clutter Therapist" is an occupation for some, and we probably all know someone who could use their help. Some office workers will tidy their environment before you clean, and some won't. It doesn't matter as long as you and your clients can strike a deal you can live with. They need to get what they want, and you need to get paid well for cleaning.

Your goal is to give a fair estimate based upon the time it looks as if it will take to clean the place. Try to look carefully at details before you give an estimate.

You have learned:

Pay attention to the level of clutter in an office while estimating your fee.

Be here now. Be someplace else later. Is that so complicated?

– The Tao of Judaism

In this chapter:

- The set-up phase
- Two traits central to good business practice -- flexibility and organization
- A scheduling technique that will help you develop both traits
- Basic suggestions for your home office organization

In the office cleaning business, to remain sane and productive, you need two vital things: Flexibility and organization.

You may have been born lucky and possess these traits naturally. If you weren't, learn to develop them. Cultivate them both and you will prosper in the cleaning business and elsewhere in life.

The Set-Up Phase

During the set-up phase, roughly the first three months, your daily schedule will seem downright nutsoid. But this stage is exhilarating too. New things are happening every day. You're flyering the target offices and regions. The phone is ringing, you are going out on estimates, sprucing up your supplies and starting to get out and work. It's demanding, both physically and mentally, and it's also fun.

You made it happen. Your office cleaning company is getting off the ground and it feels great. Now more than ever it is important to remain flexible enough to juggle your new clients into a schedule that works for you and for each of them, and organized enough to keep all their names, numbers, addresses, and individual needs straight.

Meet Other People

If you haven't done so already, this is a good time to join your local Chamber of Commerce, or attend one of their monthly mixers. Getting out and mixing it up with other self-employed people is not only a good networking opportunity, but it will do you some good just to meet other professional people. House cleaning is an occupation of solitude for the most part. You might feel the need to socialize more or in a different way than you have before.

Your Schedule

After the initial three or four months of set-up, your schedule will solidify somewhat. Things calm down a lot, and you can take off your administrator hat most of the time. This is a good stage to be in. You feel secure and so do your

clients. You've gone through the initial weeding-out phase, where the clients who weren't going to go the distance with you have dropped out. Your other clients feel solid; they know you by now, and they know they can count on you.

Changing schedules

At this stage, though most of your clients are set into a routine schedule, you'll still be occasionally weaving new clients into it. If you do not need to change one of your existing client's schedules, do not change it. Offer the new client one of your available time-spaces.

Let them know that your schedule is full, but that you will fit them in. Although it's necessary for you to be flexible with your schedule, don't expect your existing clients to be that flexible with you. If you want to continue to build job security, don't change your routine unless you absolutely must.

Clients appreciate consistency, and may associate inconsistency with flakiness.

Tip: At this stage, charge new clients more than you would have when you still needed to fill out your schedule. Your service is in demand. Let your prices reflect it.

Make yourself a scheduling grid.

You have learned:

1. About the crazy set-up phase where organizational skills are very important.
2. Two indispensable traits to develop: Flexibility and organization.
3. Join the local Chamber of Commerce or some other networking group to find natural support systems for your business and personal life.

One thing you can give away and still keep is your word.
– postmodern proverbs

In this chapter

- Changes are normal, especially in the set-up phase
- Develop communication skills to build job security

Change is the norm

For most people, one of the trickiest things about self-employment is job security. It can be a little scary, because human nature is fickle. Office managers are human, and they can be fickle too. In your office cleaning business, clients will come and go. That's just the way it is.

As you are establishing your business and ironing out the kinks, frequent changes simply come with the territory. Therefore, when a customer you thought would be long-term drops your service, or when a crew member suddenly quits, do not take it personally. Changes such as these are the norm. Keep fine-tuning your business and have faith. Things will stabilize.

Possible scenarios to be aware of:

- Businesses may hire you for a one-time cleaning job, or possibly even ask you back for weeks, then suddenly cut you off with no explanation.
- They may spend an half-hour telling you how desperately they need a reliable cleaner, then call to say the office will be closed for a week. They promise to call you when they return...and then they never call. *(Actually, if this happens, do not hesitate to call them, because they may have legitimately lost your contact information.)*
- The office manager will hire you to clean his very grimy office, then drop you after your first few visits. Since the office looks clean to him now, he figures he does not need you anymore.
- People with extremely dirty offices will hire you, and then tell you that you charge too much. (Let them go!)

During the set-up phase, changes will happen. Learn to roll with the punches. Through diligence and reliability you will build a steady business. Before long you will weed out the weak clients and establish the strong ones who will want to keep your service forever.

Setting fees: Not an exact science

Sometimes you will encounter more of a mess and it will take longer than usual to clean. Other times you will go faster because the office is not such a mess. Except in the case of office move-ins and move-outs, it works in your favor to set your fees by the job, not by the hour.

Listening to the customer builds job security

The surest way to build business steadily is to be a fabulous office cleaner. You may think this sounds like a lot of work, and you're right, it can be.

However, it is possible to actually minimize the hard work by doing one thing, and doing it well: Listen to your client, especially when you first meet with them and they are showing you around the building. They will tell you exactly how to clean their space. Usually they know exactly what they want. Practice good listening skills, deliver quality service, and watch your business grow.

Note, text, or call

Maintain an ongoing professional relationship with all your clients through regular communication. Regular communication is not lengthy and time-consuming. It's just consistent. Think holiday wishes, thank you notes, and reminder notes. Notes and text messages, if appropriate, are more efficient and longer lasting than phone calls.

When you or your crew members complete a job, consider sending a text message, or leaving a post-it note on your client's office door. Simply tell them thanks for the business, and remind them of the date you will return. (Do not invite them to decide if they want you to return – just remind them when you'll be back.) In some offices it may be more appropriate to leave brief messages on their voice mail. Ask your client which method they prefer for this sort of communication.

Customers respond

Clients' may respond to your text messages or notes. Their replies are usually brief ("Can you switch to Monday instead of Tuesday night?") and informative ("Be careful in the office kitchen – broken glass on the floor"). When you find notes like that, know you are building job security through communicating with your clients.

Notes that sound critical are even a good sign. Your client is giving you feedback so you can work at improving. Hold their hands for a while, it doesn't hurt. The way we handle our clients' constructive criticism is the measure of our job security.

Keep any critical-sounding notes from your clients in perspective. As all professionals know, feedback from your clients is a gift. Always thank them for their observations and comments, whether meant as a compliment or as criticism. Then work to fix or improve the situation.

Short notes, giant steps

The note is the place to remind a client when their storeroom is paper towels next time, or to thank them for the heads-up about the broken glass. Most of all, the note assures them that you were there (as if the sparkling johns and freshly vacuumed carpets weren't enough). Your client has been reassured that they made the right decision about hiring you.

A handwritten note communicates more than what you actually write. It tells them you care. Take the time to write or send a brief note. One small note, one giant leap towards job security.

You have learned:

To keep regular communication channels open & build long-term job security.

Action speaks louder than words but not nearly as often.
– postmodern proverbs

In this chapter

- How to treat your clients like royalty, and reap the benefits of job security.
- 9 suggestions for fine-tuning your cleaning routines.
- Sweeten the pot with these non-cleaning tips.

Treat customers like royalty

We know that uneasy feeling that can creep up on you. At first, working for yourself can be difficult, especially if you are newly self-employed, and even if your company has been around awhile.

That is why it is very important to meet and exceed each client's level of expectation. The important thing is, that isn't very hard to do.

During the easy times, when your expenses are relatively predictable, it really pays to think ahead and give yourself an extra edge of job security by doing little extras that will make your clients glad to write those checks to you, month after month.

Give your customers better results than they expect

Your cleaning jobs should run as smoothly as well-oiled engines. Clean offices in the evenings during the week and occasionally on Saturdays, so you rarely see the people you work for. They will like you because they know they can depend on you to show up on time, deliver great service, and then some.

The key to your job security is truly in that "then some." Because they can depend on you, they can run their business smoothly and always feel like the Queen (or King) of their Castle. That's the way you want them to feel.

Invisible magic

Be invisible to them, that is, they never even see you. However, they see the benefit you bring to their work by keeping things clean and tidy. Your cleaning service is simply the magic that happens every week when they walk into the office to find everything gleaming and their work feels significant and orderly again.

Be the magic. Do one or two of the following tasks each visit. Your clients will notice and be very happy to keep you around. Experience the job security that comes from applying yourself with integrity to meet each client's needs. And not merely meet them, exceed them.

Then, you will keep your clients for as long as you choose. They will praise the name of your cleaning service, and even better, refer you to their buddies at other companies in town.

9 extra tasks to fine-tune office cleaning routines

If there is a stove in the office kitchen, scour the stovetop burners.

Scour the burners on a regular basis as standard procedure – many cleaning crews don't bother. It makes a good impression so do it if you have time. Some Comet or Bon Ami and a green scouring sponge applied with a healthy dose of elbow grease will usually remove that burned-on gunk.

Inside bottoms of the trashcans.

One week take the time to scrub them clean. Soak first and stubborn gunk is removed more easily.

Wipe down the shelves inside the fridge or clean out a refrigerator drawer.

Clean the inside edge of each kitchen drawer, or clean out the entire inside if it is one of those small office-size fridges. Wipe out the crumbs that catch in the pleats of the rubber strip on top and sides of refrigerator doors. Remove them with a soft damp rag or wet paper towel.

Wipe down and/or shine coffee makers. Use window cleaner to shine stainless steel coffeepots.

With particular care, wash dust off leaves of live plants.

Dust silk plants, and rinse the dust off plastic ones. Wash them off in the sink or tub and shake to dry.

Wipe down interior window ledges.

Wipe down sliding glass door tracks. Use an old toothbrush or a small cloth-covered screwdriver to wipe greasy dirt out of small spaces.

In addition, here are some non-cleaning ideas to include on your to-do list for building security into your business:

Send greeting cards once a year

Send holiday cards prior to Thanksgiving. They will not be lost in the sea of Christmas cards. This is a nice time to thank our clients for giving us the opportunity to serve them.

Return phone calls a.s.a.p.

Do not give office managers even the smallest of reasons to think of your service as less than professional.

In the kitchen or restrooms, leave a flower, a fresh cut lavender or rosemary stem. Carnations and daisies are inexpensive and will be appreciated. Keep it very simple.

Keep lavender essential oil with your supplies and rub several drops into the wooden door frames of the office manager's office. Subtle and fresh. They'll never figure out why, but every time you've come to clean, things just smell so darn good. No one said you couldn't be a little sneaky about it, did they?

You have learned:

1. How to treat your clients like royalty with little unexpected extras.
2. Suggestions for little extras that will help you fine-tune your cleaning routines.
- 3 Leaving behind a carnation is a simple and sweet reminder that you care about serving them in style.
4. Additional tips for building job security.

Have a nice day!
Thanks, but I have other plans.
-- Paul Fussell

In this chapter

- How to respond to rejection.
- How consistent flyering builds job security.

Nobody likes getting rejected

Rejection hurts, no matter who you are, or who has rejected you. Aim to minimize your experiences of rejection, and be prepared for it. Learn how to gain from your loss. Handling the inevitable occurrence of rejection will help you refine your business and your business techniques.

Reasons for Rejection

Sometimes simply not clicking with your client can be cause for rejection somewhere down the line. An initial awkwardness may never go away, and could result in the end of that job. They may hire your company for one or two sessions, then tell you they aren't interested in having you back.

Be aware that scheduling is one of the most important elements of this job. Get it right with your clients, and you've got a good chance at keeping them satisfied, with no reason to change. Get it wrong, and you may find yourself looking for a new customer.

The clients' perceptions of you

Superficial concerns such as personal style or appearance can be a cause for rejection. People's perceptions are very important. The point is not whether those perceptions are right or wrong, just that they make a difference.

When Evan decided to get serious about his cleaning business, he cut his hair short. Business picked up immediately. People do make snap judgments on appearances. It's a game. If you want the business, play by the rules of the game.

Dress well

There are a lot of flaky cleaning people out there who disappoint their clients regularly. You will succeed by playing against the stereotypes.

Dress well (as well as you can considering the nature of this job -- you do get dirty on occasion), be on time, and communicate clearly with your clients.

What to say if a customer rejects you

Let's say your new client calls a few weeks after your company started cleaning her

offices. She says they have decided that your service is not affordable for their budget and they no longer want to do business with you.

If you want to keep the job enough to lower your pay, ask if they would be interested in re-negotiating the fee. If you are not willing to do that job at a lowered fee, then just thank her for giving your service a try.

Set fees for the long-term

Don't spend much time feeling bad about it. Look at it this way: your schedule is opened up for another, better customer to come along. And you can see how important it is to try and set the fees right at the time of the estimate.

Setting the fees right at the time of the estimate is an art that requires practice. This part gets easier as your business grows, simply because experience will teach you.

Always Flyer

Flyer for more customers, even when you think you don't need any more jobs. Don't try to set an Olympic record for flyering every week. The key is in consistency. Aim for around one hundred flyers a week. It takes relatively few flyers to market your service to the people who will hire you.

And talk to people in your daily life. Let everybody you know know what you do. Ask for referrals. You may not yet realize how extraordinarily helpful your average person can be. So just ask. Sometimes that's all it takes.

Develop a waiting list

Always flyer, so that you are fielding inquiries from potentially better clients each week, while (politely) weeding out the existing pain-in-the-patootie clients. This is especially important during the first three or four months of your business.

It doesn't take much time to continually sow the fields of your daily bread this way. Then when a client drops into the abyss you can call the people who are patiently waiting, and reap the harvest.

In one hour of flyering you can replace that client with another one. If a customer rejects your service for whatever reason, just resolve to go out that day and flyer as many businesses as you possibly can. Chances are that you will get two or three calls within a few days, and business will look rosy again.

Workplace Trends

In accordance with workplace trends, even employees with seemingly secure jobs are being advised never to get too comfy.

"Always be prepared to move on to your next job," is the advice of career counselors, who also recommend that employees be discreet about looking for another job while at work.

Companies have no loyalty to their employees, and in the current economy you never know when companies may be forced to downsize.

Self-employed? Always be prepared

So how does this translate into language for self-employed people like you and me?

"Always be prepared to move on to your next job." It's exactly the same advice.

Except, unlike employees, you do not have to be covert about it. It's both smart and natural for self-employed people to keep a keen lookout for new clients. Consider it intelligent networking.

Shift happens

It isn't simply that people are fickle (they are). Your clients are working under the same strenuous system as you. They are just as susceptible to job loss, solar flares, family crises, and temporary insanity as you are.

So be kind to your customers. Even when they ax your service for no good reason. Forgive them, forget them, then get out there and flyer some more. Find some new clients.

You have learned:

1. How to handle rejection and loss of a client.
2. How consistent flyering prevents loss of business.

In this chapter

- Tracking crew members
- Additional equipment and vehicles
- Managing crews

Expanding your business

If your business is outgrowing you, the time has come to start running crews. Building a business from a solo operation into a full-fledged company is a complex process. As the entrepreneurial spirit behind the machine, you will want a team of enthusiastic, loyal and cooperative employees. Please also read the chapter on legal realities for information about how to legally structure your expanding cleaning service.

Maturing the systems

Running teams will reduce the time necessary to work, and free up your time to manage your business. Now you can take on more clients. The business requires more responsibility of you and will certainly impact systems such as accounting, taxes and insurance, and scheduling procedures. If you are ready and willing to face these realities of the business world, your financial rewards can be very high.

Getting and staying organized is the key to success when expanding your business. Here are some guides for keeping the wheels turning smoothly.

Track crew members' hours

Provide and collect time sheets from crew members, or use an app designed to do so. The data you collect is useful not only for payroll, but for evaluating how your crews spend their time. Get information on how long it takes them to clean at each location as well as how much time they spend driving from one job to the next.

Tracking productivity is all in a day's work for a good manager. If a problem with time management exist, you'll be able to spot it.

Additional Equipment and Vehicles

Provide each team with its own set of supplies and equipment. Arrange a plan for cleaning and maintaining this equipment. Giving your crews some or all of the responsibility for care and maintenance encourages them to feel a sense of ownership in the company.

You will need to store these supplies somewhere; the expansion of your business may include renting an office space. You'll also want your crews to have fresh laundry (rags and cloths) at the start of every work day (or evening).

While your service is small, your home washing machine and dryer will do. When you expand, you may need to purchase an industrial or commercial size washer and dryer that can accommodate bigger and more frequent loads.

Managing Crews

When you discover teams with good chemistry, don't separate them unless you really have to. Good management strategy also requires you to be on the alert for personality differences and potential clashes that could bring a team down and affect your bottom line.

Divide cleaning tasks between wet and dry work. For example, you might assign one half of the team all the vacuuming and dusting, and the other half all the washing and scrubbing.

Suggest that team members alternate their tasks regularly to avoid burnout, and so that every team member knows how to perform each task. As much as possible, ask employees which tasks they enjoy doing and try to accommodate their preferences.

Uniform appearance for smart branding

Providing your teams with uniforms, or perhaps hats or t-shirts with your company name and phone number might appeal to you. Make arrangements for uniforms to be cleaned (or require each crew member to clean their own).

Decide whether you want to transport your crews to and fro, or arrange for them to drive their own vehicles. You may also consider ordering magnetic name plates for company vehicles to unify team appearance and provide a source of inexpensive, constant advertisement.

Hire temps

Make friends with your local temp agency. Be prepared to replace employees with temps on the spot, if and when your crew members call in sick, or for some other reason need to leave a job-site unexpectedly.

Keep your eye out for stellar employees sent by the temp agency. You might choose to hire them on permanently if they work out well.

You have learned:

1. Time tracking equals a better bottom line.
2. Additional equipment and vehicles.
3. Managing crews.

A strong foundation increases the value of everything you do.

– Aaron Wall, on SEO strategies

In this chapter

- Marketing online
- Social media marketing and networking
- 8 top reasons for having a website

Working the Web

When I say the word *marketing*, what pops into mind? Repetitious jingles can get into your skull and stay for decades. Marketing is as old as the hills, and in a continuous state of flux. Marketing is multi-dimensional. It includes a combination of actions, and one of the most significant things you can do is create a strong web presence.

No more middleman

Radio, television and the internet are crowded with ads. But the internet is unique in that it has somewhat leveled the playing field for all people in business. It attempts to provide a place for everyone (everyone with broadband), regardless of company size.

In the past, companies relied on middleman – usually journalists – to give them access to media attention. Now there is no more middleman. A website and participation in social media are indispensable marketing tools because they allow you to reach your customers directly.

Radical transparency is the new norm, and advertising continues changing rapidly, becoming more focused and effective as algorithms are developed to intuit and pinpoint consumer needs. A lot of marketing is now seamlessly worked into the context of the product or service itself.

Social media marketing

Businesses are expected to have a public persona. Your service will benefit from having a Facebook page, whereby customers can get a feel for your service and approach to business.

As people get to know you better through your posts and comments, they will be open to trusting you. Transparency and trustworthiness are crucial in the commercial cleaning business, and social media posting is just smart marketing.

Get on Facebook regularly and be the voice of your office cleaning business. Establish yourself as genuine and let others see that you are credible. It will help prove your dedication and commitment to your business success, and people will want to support you.

What's there to write about?

With posts, website articles, tweets or any social media, your goal is to advertise your cleaning business. Whenever you post, keep that foremost in mind.

The internet is a public space. Discretion is advised.

Never talk about clients or anyone in a negative way. Do not talk badly about the competition. There is an old saying, "nobody raises his own reputation by lowering others."

Put your best foot forward

Do not complain or whine. Do not name customers. No matter how crummy that one day was last week, it is wise to only talk about the good days.

Tell a funny anecdote about your work, talk about the care your company gives your customers. Observe good ethics and respect other people's privacy. Remember the context. Comments online do not fade away quickly. Something may go viral. Let it be healthy and positive!

Project your image

Keep your objective in mind. You want to attract good clients by presenting a genuine, positive image of yourself and your business. You need a web presence so real people, potential clients, can check out your style and substance at their leisure.

The virtual world is as valid as can be. After all, you found Suze & Ev on the web. We are helping you get started in business for only a fraction of what you would spend in the physical world.

Local searches the norm

Local searches are quickly becoming the standard as increasingly, people go online first, when doing business. Searching and finding local services online has replaced the Yellow Pages and classified ads, traditional methods that continue to increase in cost, and decrease in popularity.

Do a local search

Go to Google and do a local search for a cleaning service in your area. Who comes up? These are your smart competitors. There are probably only a fraction of them compared to those who still list their businesses in the traditional print media, the Yellow Pages and the classified ads.

Keep it in perspective

A town with a population of 40,000 can easily support *several hundred* cleaning services of various size and specialties.

You only need 15 - 30 offices or commercial businesses to be kept extremely busy.

Other search entities

Yahoo, Bing and many more search engines offer local searches as well. These search entities will eventually find your website.

Read the Action Plan on promoting your website.

8 top reasons you must have a website:

70% of your potential clients search online when they need services. Promote your business 24/7/365. Build a professional reputation from day one. Interact with your potential clients, don't simply advertise to them. Cheap compared to traditional print media, and much more effective. Improve communications and client satisfaction. Recruit cleaning crew members and employees 24/7. Offer additional cleaning services and products to your clients.

80% of people looking for a cleaning professional turn to the Internet first.

This is good news. Will everyone use the Internet to find a cleaning professional? No, only the ones with money to spend and very little time, and they are your ideal client. The hardest part of service-oriented jobs is getting in front these people and having their undivided attention.

Most cleaning services are still clueless about the benefits of using the Internet.

Get in now. Turbo-charge the launch pad for your new cleaning business. Blast right past the competition. We have seen it happen for many service-oriented careers. The web-savvy ones are winning the largest marketing share, while spending fewer advertising dollars and exerting less effort.

Start your new business by beginning with the website.

Begin promoting your new cleaning service while keeping your current job. Your website will work for you while you're doing other things, so it's easier and less risky to transition into your new career. Blanket the community with adverts and watch the traffic flow to your website 24/7/365, while you work, sleep, eat and play.

We so wish we'd had this tool when we were starting out!

A high quality website is not an option. It's a must.

People expect you to have a website. If you do not, they'll wonder if your cleaning business is legitimate. That's just the way it is. In addition, your website is a major convenience for them. Make it easy for people to find you. Put your website address on your flyer. Place it prominently on all your advertising materials and make it easy for your potential clients to get to know you.

Your website will help you craft your image, define your plan, fine-tune your presentation, and most importantly -- build the foundation for your cleaning business's future growth.

We can build you a website for your new cleaning business, just contact us.

Some final advice. Hey, we're full of it!

Read this book 3 times

Once, read straight through just to get a feel for it. The second time, print the book out, highlight the spots that resonate with you. The third time make notes in a notepad. Take the book along as a reference when doing your marketing, bidding and even cleaning. Or use your iPad or tablet.

Use the healthy-cleaning tips ebook

Print it out, carry it with you. When you run into a special situation with a stain or a material, look it up! Use the healthy cleaning techniques to protect yourself and your clients. Specialize in healthy or green commercial-cleaning. Why not? It will really set you apart from the Joe Average cleaning service.

Grow your business easily

Life and work go more smoothly when we remember to keep it light and upbeat. Stay on the sunny side.

Give your customers what they need, and your business will grow with very little effort.

Wishing you good fortune in all ways!

Suze & Ev

Disclaimer

Suze & Ev solemnly swear that all of the tips, tricks, steps, advice, recipes, procedures, practices, techniques, etc., in this book have worked very well for Suze & Ev in the starting of their cleaning businesses over the years. Suze & Ev make no promises or claims that you will have identical results, for you are not Suze & Ev. Therefore, you will have different results, quite possibly better ones! In other words, results may vary.