

FOR THE ELITE OF THE DRYCLEANING INDUSTRY

Gimme, Gimme, Does Get!

*“Staying ahead
of the competition”*



BY
DENNIS MCCRORY

Here are some of John Hallward's ideas from his new book, "Gimme! The Human Nature of Successful Marketing" and how I see that can work for drycleaners. Businesses around the world spend hundreds of billions of dollars a year on advertising. Yet fewer than half of their campaigns succeed. That's a lot of money wasted. One of the reasons many advertisers fail is they forget their target markets are humans! Our human

traits, features, and emotions factor into whether advertising has an impact on us.

It's pretty simple: successful marketing appeals to the way our DNA and brains work. Advertisers need to understand more about how people process ads and make brand choices – specifically, using their emotions, attitudes, values, and memories. These criteria are what the author calls the "gimmes" – the self-centered demands we all have for emotional fulfillment of our different moods. As much as selfishness is viewed as a negative personality trait, it is innate and genetic. This isn't what our parents would have had us believe when they said, "Gimme, gimme, never gets ...", but it's the truth. Wanting things is genetically natural; humans are wired to be self-centered to ensure survival. So above all, marketing efforts should offer emotional pay-offs that satisfy consumers' moods, desires,

insecurities, and their status in the world. To be more effective, marketers should focus on consumers "gimmes," and less on "my store." For drycleaners, looking to advertise their business: one strategy would be to discuss its benefits – its expertise in cleaning many varied garments, a long history, free pick-up and delivery, or a low price point. The problem is that consumers aren't looking for drycleaning, per se. They are looking to have their clothes cleaned and renewed. And their choice of cleaners will be influenced by more than the above.

Consumers who use drycleaning want emotional pay-offs. They want to avoid the disappointment of not looking their very best. They want to experience pride and feel confident. They want their spouse to admire them (proving their worth). They want to show off their nice appearance to their coworkers and neighbors. Most consumers want to experience many of these pay-offs. And since many drycleaners clean clothes equally well, a successful brand will go beyond advertising its qualities to assuring emotional pay-offs. Golomb Group Members who do this tend to achieve greater brand commitment and brand equity, command higher prices and are more profitable.

We often see mature, established drycleaners struggle to maintain their success.

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GIMME, GIMME, DOES GET!
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Their marketing needs to keep evolving and changing the consumer experience to avoid desensitization.

Advertisers really have two main jobs, and they need to know which is most required for their brand: (1) get the right brand associations into consumers minds then (2) trigger, or activate, these at the right time. An example of excellent triggering is the old “It’s Miller Time” campaign, which leveraged the concept that after a hard day’s work, it was time to relax and enjoy a Miller beer. The campaign focused on the transition from work to relaxation, a beer consumption time. The campaign worked to trigger the brand at the transition period from work to relaxation, and associated the brand with the emotional pay-offs (for the human “gimmies”). “It’s Miller Time” is a beautiful, easy-to-remember slogan that activates positive feelings of quitting time, triggers the beer consumption urge, and ties in the brand name – all in one easy-to-remember memory unit. This is not about product features, how the beer is made, purity, or taste. These elements are already known to consumers. “Miller Time” triggers the brand and pay-offs at the relevant time association. Brilliant!

• **Be fresh and original.** For something to stand out and register in our long-term memories, it needs to be somewhat irregular. The Aflac duck is one example of a

brand that has done a great job of leveraging uniqueness and irregularity to engage the brain.

• **Simple is good.** Our brains are bombarded with stimuli. Advertising messages given in units, slogans, and stories win out over fragmented alternatives. Simple, emotional memory units

“A consistent color scheme should be carried through in your advertising, packaging, call office, uniforms, etc.”

get into our long-term memories better.

• **Enhance your brand with marketing properties.** Brands that use devices like icons (the inscrutable Starbucks logo), spokespeople (Tiger Woods for Nike), cartoon characters (Tony the Tiger and the white Michelin man), and other extra properties often get great results. Consider that wines that use names and drawings of animals on their labels, sell 17% bet-

ter than wines that don’t. Each has added a personality and something more to evaluate than the basic functionality of the product.

• **Enhance your brand with the human senses.** Another way to enhance brands is to enrich them through the five human senses. For example: Johnson & Johnson’s Baby Powder offers a unique distinctive smell (For a while, I sprayed a “country fresh” air spray over the finished orders on the line, just before packaging, to give them an extra air of freshness.); Perrier water comes in a distinctive green pear-shaped bottle (Unique packaging will set your work apart from other cleaners.); And Pepto-Bismol is a shocking pink (A consistent color scheme should be carried through in your advertising, in your packaging, in your call office, uniforms, etc.). In these examples, your brand is creating and leveraging elements beyond what is necessary for product performance. These extra senses offer more for consumers to latch on to, and allow the brand to be stored in more parts of the brain, in the different centers for touch, taste, vision, sound, and smell.

When you get a better understanding of the brain’s wiring, the role of emotions, how the senses work, how memories are created, and how we make decisions, it’s easier to grasp what marketing must do to resonate in the consumer’s mind. ♦

Reward Loyal Customers



BY ED ROTH

Last month I wrote an article describing the coupon frenzy that seems to have infiltrated itself into our society. After Thanksgiving the New York area went into a crazy shopping contest of “Who can

open earlier?” Usually, on Black Friday (the Friday after Thanksgiving) some of the major chains open their doors at 6 A.M. and advertise low prices and specials from 6 A.M. until noon. This year they all tried to outdo each other. Some opened at 5 A.M., and J.C. Penney outdid them all by opening at 4 A.M.. There is a big outlet discount center called the Woodbury Commons in Harriman, New York, off the NY Thruway. It opened its doors at 12 midnight. It created such a traffic jam that they almost had to close the thruway. What exactly is going on here? It seems to me that people latch on to any perception that they are getting a bargain. Why else would you shop at midnight after you’ve had Thanksgiving dinner with your family? Why would you get up at 4 A.M. to buy something for \$2 less than you could at 11 A.M.? My next door neighbor told me that his son asked him to stand in line at 12 midnight to get the new video game of “guitar player 3.” My neighbor opted to sleep at night and get the video game the next morning for his son. He told me, “I think the world has gone crazy.” Unfortunately, until they start building houses on the moon or Mars there is no other world at this time to latch onto, so we have to go along and realize this trend and somehow try to use it to benefit our businesses. I belong to several cost-management groups and we ve

discussed this topic to try to understand how best we can use this mindset in the drycleaning business.

First of all, my colleagues and I agree that if we differentiate ourselves and upgrade our product and images we would be better off than engaging in the coupon war. It’s not an easy thing to do. Better hangers, better packaging, different tissue, logo stickers on all items are all ideas thrown around. John DiJulius has said in his seminars that “the better the service, the less price becomes important,” but the attitude of many shoppers seems to be taking a different approach: “I’ll shop where I have coupons.” Customer service and smiles are certainly things we should constantly work on. Developing customer loyalty is very important. I recently had a customer leave and go to another cleaner for a lower price. Although her finances changed and she needed to cut back on expenses, she felt guilty enough to come back to me because of the loyalty developed over the years. Loyalty programs like frequent cleaner cards have been made so much easier to use with the new computer systems that if you don’t have one you should definitely call your computer company and see how to activate it. My Liberty



computer has a button that activates a frequent customer club. It keeps track of a customer’s spending and automatically spits out a gift certificate whenever a customer reaches a certain level of spending. Most every computer system has a similar built in feature. There is a simple key ring tag that identifies the customer as a member of the “Frequent Cleaner Club.” It’s so simple. It’s a no brainer. My key ring is starting to have more store customer cards than keys on it: CVS, Key Food, Staples, Dick’s Sporting Goods and of course UN Cleaners. If you are old enough to remember the

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“Members Only” brand of clothing about 20 -30 years ago, you’ll remember what it felt like to “belong.” Wearing a Members Only jacket meant you were special and belonged to a special group. In reality, it was only a brand name. It certainly wasn’t the start of branding, but it was enormously successful in creating a brand, a sense of loyalty, and a sense of “belonging.”

Another enticement that stores have been using to lure customers to be loyal is the “gift card.” Buy a new comforter at Target and get a \$20 Target gift card! Of course, you’ve got to spend the gift card at Target, so it’s a win-win situation. Gift cards are actually regulated like credit cards, but you can offer “fake” gift cards that look like credit cards with a \$10 OFF certificate. With every \$50 order get a \$10 gift card that they can spend on their next visit.

All of these ideas take money off new orders of cleaning. Although they are tried and proven methods of keeping customers and creating loyal and happy clients, the bottom line is that they discount your orders.

Trying something new and different can be exciting. One of my groups came up with the idea of offering Starbucks gift cards to clients that brought in \$30 orders. One member in the group has a Starbucks in his shopping center. He bought \$5 Starbucks gift cards and advertised with an outdoor sign adorned with some helium balloons: “Bring in a \$30 order & receive a \$5 Starbucks gift card.” Of course he spoke to the Starbucks manager before implementing the offer. The response has been overwhelming. Where business had been flat, he now is at a loss for space and is considering buying racks to put in the spare space of his call office. At our last meeting he told us he was buying 20-30 Starbucks cards a week. More than that, it has created excitement and fun in his store. He is one of the new members of our group and really never thought of “promotions.” Whatever came through the door was his way of doing business. He never even

realized that the store next door to him was a party center store and getting helium balloons to accent his promotion sign took about 30 seconds. Another member who is also near a Starbucks is planning to offer this promotion in January. It doesn’t have to be a Starbucks. It can be movie tickets, an ice cream parlor, pizza store, restaurant, or any store that is nearby and reflects the kind of upscale perception that you want to brand for your store. The beauty of this type of promotion is that it offers customers something different. It does not discount your orders, which just perpetuates

the “where is my coupon” mentality. It creates word-of-mouth marketing. Your clients will tell their friends about it because it’s fun and exciting. Although people want to get something for nothing, it doesn’t have to be your cleaning orders that you are giving away. As long as it is something that has a perceived value, it can create an even bigger bang for your buck. Over the years we’ve read about buying movie tickets or giving away restaurant gift certificates to your customers. In this current wave of coupon frenzy I think it’s important to take a look again at this type of promotion. It has the ability to excite your current customers and create a marketing idea that can keep your customers loyal, while at the same time have them become customer

evangelists for your business through word-of-mouth marketing.

The funniest part of this article is that when I went into my email to send this in for publication, my latest email message was an offer for a Free Starbucks Gift Card.

You can’t make this stuff up!!!! ♦

Ed Roth is the owner of U.N. Cleaners in Flushing, NY. He is an active member of the Golomb Group. If you have comments or questions about Ed’s articles, please contact him by e-mail: edrothun@aol.com or tel:(718) 969-0207

**...something
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How To Marry Your Customer

BY BOB DEVANEY

It was late one Saturday afternoon in March 1976 that I was first introduced to the concept of customer retention. We had finished for the day and my father and I were just about to leave when a customer came in to pick up his suit. We noticed that our counter girl was having a hard time locating it so, of course, my father and I began looking through the lines thinking it must have been racked wrong. Several times the customer commented that he had to have the suit due to some important event that evening. As we continued to search he stormed out of the store mumbling something nasty about our incompetence.

Finally we discovered that the suit was marked in for the wrong day and was sitting at the bottom of a basket due for Monday. That's when my father informed me that we were going to start up the boiler, clean, press and deliver this guy's suit. I couldn't believe it! He was always telling me how expensive it was just to turn on the boiler every morning and now we were going to do it for just one customer's suit. This didn't make any sense to me at all. Why would we lose time and money for just one customer? But it didn't really matter what I thought because my father was the boss and that's what we were going to do!

A few hours later we were on our way to the customer's home to deliver his suit. As per my father's instructions, I knocked on the door, apologized to the customer and told him there would be no charge. Of course, he was thrilled!

On the ride home my father explained to me that we had just "married" that customer. He went on to tell me how vitally important every single customer is and going the extra mile would assure them returning again and again. In addition, this helps to create word of mouth, which is by far the most powerful method of

advertising for your business, he said. Of course I had to ask why this "word of mouth" was so powerful and he was happy to explain. Just look through any newspaper, magazine or even the yellow pages and you'll notice that every single advertisement claims that they are the best! Most dry cleaner's ads say the same old thing, same day service, tailoring, shirts, guaranteed satisfaction etc. Customers are bombarded daily with ads that they just can't believe because they exaggerate or outright lie. When a family member or a friend recommends a restaurant, hair dresser or dry cleaner you tend to believe them simply because they have no incentive to lie. This is why "word of mouth" is so powerful. This was one of my first lessons in customer service.



As years went by I experimented with many types of advertising and marketing methods to attract new customers. During the "good" years I was beginning to think I was somewhat of a marketing genius because everything seemed to work and we were doing great financially. As times began to change, somewhere in early 2002 or so, my marketing efforts were not working as well as they had previously. Business was slowing and I began to take a real hard look at what we were doing.

I joined the Golomb Group, I talked to other dry cleaners, I read all the industry magazines etc. and eventually I changed my whole approach to running my business. I focused my efforts on increasing quality, packaging and customer service. After all, these were the foundations of success in almost any business. I reasoned that this was the best way to keep customers coming back!

And then I began thinking about the customer service lesson that my father had taught me almost 25 years previous. I needed to find more ways to "Marry" my customers. I needed to go the extra mile

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Tae Jung Oh

Point Fosdick Cleaners

Gig Harbor, WA

Many times the profiles that we read, in our industry, describe the owner of a very large and successful operation. We read about the building of their operation and how they've made a wonderful life in the dry cleaning business. We read about their many employees, their huge promotions, and their vacations to exotic lands that they take as a bonus for their hard work. Sometimes we are envious and wonder how they have managed to be so successful while we struggle each day to get the work out and get our bills paid. Happiness is not always measured by the amount of money earned or the number of employees that we have in our payroll. Not too often do we read the story of a small shop owner who struggles to make it through each day. One such story is that of Tae Jung Oh.

Tae Jung Oh grew up in Korea. He owned a small hardware shop and was mildly successful by Korean standards. He had a very nice life, but he was looking for a better one. The American Dream is still alive in places like Korea that are halfway around the globe. Today, halfway around the globe is only a plane ticket away. That American Dream is what Tae Jung was searching for. A better life for his wife and his son. With that dream in mind, eleven years ago, at the age of 51, Tae Jung

Oh decided to leave Korea and move to the state of Washington in search of that better life. Since he does not speak much English, his son Won, spoke of his Dad's trials and tribulations in seeking that better life for this interview.

In 1996 Tae Jung left his homeland with his wife and 22 year

bought a dry cleaning video and taught himself the art of cleaning. He made lots of mistakes, but kept reading books to learn to clean better and better. It has not been easy. Today, Tae Jung Oh is working 15 hours a day, 7 days a week, in his dry cleaning plant, Pt. Fosdick Cleaners, in Gig Harbor, Washington, trying to scratch out that slice of the American Dream.

Happiness and success are not measured by the amount of money in your bank account...

Tae Jung's plant is a modest one. He has a Permac perc machine for the cleaning, and an Itsumi shirt unit to do shirts on the premises. His prices are average for his area: shirts \$1.55, pants and half pieces are \$5.50 and suits and dresses are \$12.95. He employs two pressers and a part time person for marking and packaging. Tae Jung does the cleaning and most of the counter. His wife works about 20 hours a week to help out in all areas. His son, Won, owns his own health care business. He is an acupuncturist. However, when his office hours are over, he arrives at the plant to help his Dad. Won works about 20 hours from Monday through Friday and all day Saturday to help his Dad. It has not been easy. Tae Jung Oh is still working 15 hours a day, 7 days a week, in his dry cleaning plant. Business is good, the work is hard and each day is a challenge.

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old son and headed for the State of Washington. When he arrived, he began his search for a business that he could own, work in, and prosper. He decided that the dry cleaning business was his best chance. He felt that through customer service he could distinguish his store and grow his business. All he really wanted was a decent honest living. He

MEMBER PROFILE
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There are several real tough problems that Tae Jung and Won are trying to overcome.

The most immediate problem is the fact that the landlord is not happy having a dry cleaner in the strip mall. Although they have five years remaining on their lease, they feel that the landlord will try to get them to leave as soon as possible. For this reason they are constantly looking for another location to move their plant. They feel the owner will not renew their lease, and will possibly try to get them to leave sooner.

Another problem, that seems to never go away, is the lack of counter help. Tae Jung has not found the right people who can cover hours and work the counter to take some of the pressure off his 15-hour days. He has tried many seeming reliable people to take over the counter but they never seem to work out. He cannot pay enough to get the reliable help that is needed, and he feels that the dry cleaning industry doesn't seem to attract people who are passionate about their job and reliable and honest in their work. This is a serious problem for Tae Jung and continues to haunt him. Without his family's help at the counter in the afternoon he would be in real trouble.

Even with these problems facing him daily, Tae Jung tries to keep his focus on building his business. For marketing he keeps his mind on his "A" List. These are his best customers. He remembers to send them birthday and anniversary cards. He makes sure they are happy by providing one-day service and the quality of hand-finished shirts. He sends gift certificates to his "A" List every 3 months. His other direct mail pieces of 20% to 30% off are sent to prospective clients twice a year.

One of Tae Jung's proudest accomplishments is that he has become Pierce County's first Five Star Cleaner. The Five Star Cleaner refers to his dedication to the environment and his commitment to

recycling of hazardous waste. He has diligently kept old records of all his disposals. He installed containment tanks even before they were required, and has adhered to the strictest governmental requirements. Despite this recognition and award, the landlord is still anxious to have him move.

Tae Jung Ho decided on the dry cleaning business eleven years ago because of the small cost of the buy in, and the ability to service people with the best possible customer service and quality cleaning. He believed that a good reputation and treating people special would guarantee that better life with hard work and devotion. Unfortunately, eleven years later he still finds himself working 15 hours a day. He still finds the customer as demanding as ever. He still finds the government agencies working hard to create more environmental restrictions even though he has gone beyond all expectations in receiving the Five Star Award for environmental concern. He still finds the search for dedicated and reliable counter people to be an enigma and constant irritation. It is not exactly the American Dream come true. It is more like the daily grind that many drycleaners find themselves in. However, Tae Jung and his son Won are optimistic that their travails will be overcome and their hard work will be rewarded. They are hoping to find that new space so the landlord problem will be a thing of the past. They hope to find the counter help that will make things easier each day.

Happiness and success are not measured by the amount of money in your bank account, or the number of exotic vacations you have taken. Although their grasp for the American Dream has been a bit more difficult than they had hoped it would be, Won assured me that his family is happy to be in America where their lives are much better and their future much brighter than their life in Korea could ever have been. ♦

Internal vs External Marketing



BY JAMES PEUSTER

In order to build your million dollar routes, an external marketing game plan must be in play to acquire new customers. Most operators accomplish this with direct marketing, door-to-door, fliers and other methods

of bringing in new clients. But what can you do internally that ensures not only a stability insurance for your business, but can also grow your operations through your current customer base.

Internal marketing can be part of a customer retention strategy. As you already know, attrition is part of our business. There are many controllables and uncontrollables in the dry cleaning industry. My goal is to be proactive on the controlling side. Obviously a system needs to be in place for operations to eliminate errors. But how do you combat the other reasons people stop using you? People move; lose their job, get divorced, etc. There is not much you can do. I did have a driver who kept putting a “Sold” sign on one of his best customers “for sale” sign. I strongly don’t recommend doing that.

Utilizing the marketing programs of your computer system is critical in the route building process. I focus on new customers, current customers and missing customers. Why does McDonalds or Budweiser advertise? Their marketing game plan is geared towards keeping their current customers and solidifying their buying and spending habits. We should look at marketing in that way, too.

Our customers have many other options when it comes to drycleaning. We need to be on top of this at all times. But how? Well, you basically have to be on top of all 3 levels of what I call your customer status. For new customers, you should welcome

them with a phone call and letter. Routes tend to take away the personal service they are used to getting by coming to the store. They often never see the driver and only contact us during a crisis of some sorts. By contacting them early, after the sign-up process, we develop some “real-person” contact and hopefully develop that relationship that is needed to keep them as a customer.

You should know your current customers habits and especially be able to list your top 20 by name. That is why someone needs to be a customer service agent focused on maintaining your routes. I often strive to develop some type of rewards system to keep your current customers loyal and then hopefully become raving fans of your business. Many routes grow by increasing your contact with your top customers. Referral options and seasonal specials will develop retention.

Customers that are starting to become irregular in their use can be hit head on by staying on top of marketing reports. Monitoring their habits and communication with the driver and route manager will ensure that these clients do not leave. If they do, then you at least have a lesson learned. You see, we need to be so in control of all aspects of our business and that includes monitoring your route customers. That is why I love the route—You can have a profitable route in which it is easy to manage the customers. You have fewer customers in your database doing more business.

When building profitable routes, my goal is to build an external marketing game plan and offset it with an internal strategy so that we don’t recycle customers. I also strive to set route standards that ensures growth. Marketing takes time and money and must be productive in order to be constructive. ◆

James Peuster is a nationally known author, speaker, trainer, and coach who specializes in route development through Marketing, Management and Maintenance training. James has costs groups specifically designed for route costs and growth and his website is www.therouteapro.com

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mile and try to stand out from the pack if I was going to survive.

After putting quality and customer service on track my next step was to completely change my marketing strategy. Instead of sending out thousands of coupons offering endless discounts and deals I decided to listen to the experts, listen to successful dry cleaners, and incorporate that information with what my father had taught me so many years earlier. I began researching this thing called retentive based marketing, which was basically a fancy term for marketing that is designed to keep your customers coming back.

Surprisingly I discovered that I already had several effective retention based programs that I wasn't taking full advantage of. The most obvious was the use of VIP express bags. These bags offered convenience, encouraged larger orders, faster drop off, reduced counter labor and allowed me to put my business name in every customer's closet!

At first I was cheap with handing out the bags because all I could think of was the cost. Finally I decided to make a sincere effort to put one of our bags in every single customer's closet. It had become my mission to "WOW" my customers in every way I could think of. Go the extra mile.



My next step was to create a "New Customer Kit".

This is by far one of the best marketing tools I use. I ordered some small plastic shopping bags (8"x3"x4") from Nashvillewraps.com and had my logo put on them. In the bag are 3 powerful retention based programs.



1. VIP express bag – Folded neatly into the kit is one of our VIP bags. We only use the best from Cleaner's Supply. Heavy duty, double grommet and a carrying strap.

2. Automatic Rewards Card – Attached to the VIP bag is an extra large luggage tag that has two compartments. One is just big enough for a business card. We use a two-sided business card in this compartment. On one side is the manager's information and on the other are the VIP preferences

(starch, hanger, repairs etc.). In the large compartment (4x4) we put our automatic rewards program card. On one side it says 50% Off and on the other side it has 15 spots to be stamped. Each time a customer



comes in with a \$10 order or larger we give them one stamp. After they re card is stamped 15 times their coupon becomes active and they can use it on their 16th order. We then start all over again. Customers absolutely love this card.

3. Welcome letter – This is a well-designed two-color letter that welcomes the customer to your business. We include the services we offer, contact information and a 2nd visit coupon for 30% off. This 2nd visit coupon encourages them to bring in a second order when they come back to pick up their first order. This effectively means

MARRY YOUR CUSTOMERS
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they have to come into your store 3 times.

In addition to the above we also include some little mints that have our name on them a mini-lint roller, and a flyer of the month. Our flyer of the month gets stapled on every order and promotes a different service each month.

I think it's important to brand your business by offering services that help make you stand out and be different. Some examples of this are area carpet cleaning, email coupons, recycling, home delivery, open Sundays, designer hand bag cleaning & repair, tailoring etc. Investigate your competition; discover their weaknesses such as poor service, short hours, no tailoring, etc. Promote these services to give yourself an advantage. The idea is to give the customer as many reasons as possible to come to your store and not the competition.

Remember, there are many services, advertising methods and gimmicks that can help your business but the most important of all is providing consistent quality and great customer service. Nothing works better to keep your customers coming back over and over and get them spreading the word.

Pay attention to the basics and genuinely care about your customers; these are the secrets of a long and happy marriage!

Bob Devaney is a Golomb Group Member and owner of Drycleaning by Dorothy and The Cleaner Spot franchise in Hingham, MA.

CONGRATULATIONS

**Michael Cummiskey of Michael's Fabricare in Wildwood, NJ.
Michael married his beautiful bride, Michele, on November 9, 2007.**

Dave Colehour of Best Cleaners in Eden Prairie, MN. Best Cleaners was name "Best of Cities " by *The Minnesota Monthly* magazine for the Western Subrurs of Minneapolis.

Mary Sahady of Diamond Cleaners in Pawtucket, RI. Mary finished the Marine Corps Marathon in Washington, DC in 4:56. This was her first marathon!

Why Do Shirts Shrink?

By Don Desrosiers

Believe it or not, shrinkage is a "bonding" experience. The cotton fibers of your shirts are made of lots of small molecules, linked together to form huge chains of molecules called polymers. Weak links called hydrogen bonds connect the polymer chains end-to-end. When the bonds break, the polymers crinkle up. Result: shrinkage.

Let's go back to when your shirts were made. When cotton fibers are spun into threads, they--and the polymers they're made of--are first pulled and twisted. That puts stress on the hydrogen bonds.

The bonds are stressed even more before weaving, when the threads are stretched on a loom. So much stress breaks the bonds. But new ones form to hold the polymers in the "stressed out" state.

Of course, the polymers "want" to return to their natural relaxed state.

To do that, they need bond-breaking energy. You help by throwing your shirts in the wash. How? Chemicals, such as water in your washing machine, or heat in the washer or dryer provide the energy needed to break the stress-producing hydrogen bonds. When the bonds break, the polymers crinkle up and relax. That's when shrinkage happens.

What about the sweater I washed? It fits my cat now.

Wool shrinks because of the structure of sheep's hair. Like human hair, wool fibers have scales that are stacked like roof shingles. (Try this: Pluck a long hair. Rub your fingers along it from the root to the tip; then in reverse. Which direction is smoother? Look at the hair under the microscope to determine why.)

When wool fibers hit hot water or high temperatures in the dryer, the scales stick out like thorns.

They snag one another, clumping the fibers. Result: one sweater, size XS.

Can't they do anything to prevent shrinkage?

Read some clothing labels. Cotton manufacturers, for instance, often add chemicals called shrink-resistant or durable press finishes. The finishes form cross-links between the molecules of parallel polymer chains. The cross-links resemble ladder rungs connecting one polymer to another. They allow the polymers to withstand the stressful stretching of manufacture. The low-stressed polymers won't have the same "need" to crinkle up and relax during washing. You will really impress your customers if you give them such a professional and thorough explanation the next time you are asked why clothes shrink.

"If you do what you've always done, you'll get what you've always got."

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5 Ways to Thank Your Customers

Remember to thank your customer – every day and in every way. Here are five good opportunities.

1. When customers do business with you. Thank your customers every time they use your services. Customers always have the option of taking their business to your competitors, so never take them for granted. Marketing to your current customers is an easy way to be sure every customer knows you appreciate their business.

2. When customers offer comments or suggestions. Thank your customers for their feedback. Doing so says that you value their opinions. Example: “Thank you for taking the time to tell me that. It helps us know where we can improve.” When it comes to improving your service, who knows better than your customers?

3. When customers recommend you to someone else. Thank your customers when they tell someone else about your business. They’re putting their reputations on the line. Respect this fact and send a handwritten “thank you” note or small gift to the customer who recommended you. This is ten-times more effective than a preplanned referral program.

4. When customers help you to serve them better. Thank your customers for being prepared. Let customers know you appreciate their extra efforts – when they remember to bring back their receipts or have their clothes sorted before you wait on them – because they make it easier for you to help them.

5. When customers complain to you. Thank your customers for their complaints. Unhappy customers are offering you a second chance to make things right. It’s how you respond to customers’ complaints that will cement their loyalty.

Customers need to know that you value the gift of business they bring you. The most effective “Thank You” is immediate, specific, and sincere.

THANK YOU