

by Lorne Tontegode

MEMO to management

I left dry cleaning to work in the automotive parts manufacturing industry. This is the most competitive and brutal industry in the world. Here's how auto parts practices would work in dry cleaning.

Before a customer leaves clothes to be cleaned, you would have to reveal everything about your plant. And I mean everything: how often you distill, type of soap and chemicals you use, your profit margins, details of your building and equipment lease, employee happiness survey and waste removal records.

Once someone became a customer, there would be penalties when clothes weren't ready on time. Any damage would have to be paid for. If you broke a button, you would have to send someone to the customer's home or office to replace it.

In addition, the customer would ask to see your books to make sure you weren't making too much profit. And, by the way, you would have to reduce the price of your service every year! What's more, if the customer found you were making too much money, you would have to rebate some of it back to when they started to do business with you.

BACK TO DRY CLEANING

Since returning to dry cleaning, I have been catching up with the people I used to know and the facilities I used to work with. I was surprised to see that not much has changed in the last 15 years. This has me excited about the possibilities for the people who are struggling to keep their business going.

Everyone says things are no longer the way they used to be. Well, of course they aren't! Can you give an instance of anything that has stayed the same? Some of the dry cleaners I visit also ask if anyone out there is doing well. They are surprised to hear that some are.

Dry cleaning customers are a lot different today. Now they are more aware, and look to value more than ever. They own a lot of garments that can be laundered and therefore may not need your services as often as in the past. You can't change this fact, so you need to look at other changes you can make. There is peace of mind in accepting what you can't change, while having the courage to make the changes you can.

You can't run a fabricare plant like an automotive plant. But there are many concepts that can be borrowed and applied to our industry. One of these is the extremely powerful Toyota Production System. It is revered as the world's best management system and has helped many companies stay competitive and prosper.

Here are the basic points of the Toyota system:

1. Base your management decisions on long-term phi-

losophy, even at the expense of short-term financial goals. (Is tomorrow even in your plan or are you working for today?)

2. The right process will produce the right results.

3. Create continuous process flow to bring problems to the surface. (A common mistake is buying equipment with a greater capacity than you need.)

4. Use 'pull' systems to avoid overproduction. (Don't order supplies until you need them or produce orders before they are required.)

5. Level out the workload. (Don't try too hard to get it all done today when tomorrow you expect a light workload. Conversely, get it done today if tomorrow is going to be crazy.)

6. Build a culture of stopping to fix problems, to get quality right the first time. (Problems such as a press that doesn't work right will only get worse and cost more if you delay in getting it repaired.)

7. Standardized tasks are the foundation for continuous improvement and employee empowerment. (Clearly provide information on tasks such as blowing down the boiler and accept and encourage feedback.)

8. Use visual controls so no problems are hidden. (Labels, colour coding, posted instructions, etc., can go a long way toward eliminating mistakes and oversights.)

9. Use only reliable, thoroughly tested technology that serves your people and processes. (Don't be a guinea pig with someone else's experiments

but be ready to stay up-to-date.)

10. Add value to the organization by developing your people and partners. (Everyone you come into contact with during your work day has the potential to either help or hinder you.)

11. Grow leaders who thoroughly understand the work, live the philosophy, and can teach it to others. (Everyone needs people he or she can count on.)

12. Develop exceptional people and teams who follow your company's philosophy. (They are the ones who do the work and represent you every day.)

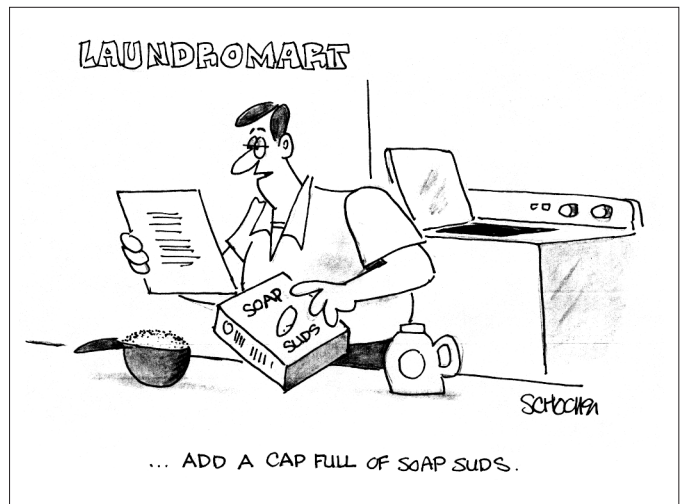
13. Respect your extended network of partners and suppliers by challenging them and helping them improve. (Keep suppliers of products and services involved in your business so that they can help you with solutions.)

14. Continuously solving root problems drives organizational learning. (Did things go right or wrong on your last project and did you learn from it?)

15. Go and see for yourself to thoroughly understand the situation. (Run the counter, run the dry cleaning machine, run the shirt unit, visit your supplier's facility.)

16. Make decisions slowly, by consensus, thoroughly considering all options; then implement these decisions rapidly. (Consult with the people who do the work and if all agree, do it today, not tomorrow.)

17. Become a learning organization through relentless reflections and continuous





improvement. (Talk with your people, and anyone else who will listen, and ask for suggestions.)

You may think these principles look like common sense. Or you may think they are over-the-top and don't really apply to your situation. But if you master this Toyota Production System, you will be nearly guaranteed success.

Let's face it, the only reason that you are in business is to make money. Unless you run a not-for-profit organization, you need to bring in more money or

spend less to make more profit. The Toyota Production System can help you with this. In my next column I will talk about how you can be ready for tomorrow by making the right decisions today. ■

Lorne Tontegode is general manager of Langstaff Equipment Services Ltd. His years away from the fabricare industry have given him an insight into successful management techniques that he is sharing with *Fabricare Canada* readers. He may be reached at lorne_tontegode@rogers.com.

Stan Caplan

By Darcy Moen

On May 30, 2006, the dry cleaning industry lost a valuable asset with the passing of Stan Caplan.

Stan served his country by joining the Marines. Uncle Sam had not only provided Stan with a job and a cause, but an education as well. It is perhaps little known, and may come as a surprise to some, that Stan held degrees not only in Engineering and Accounting, but he also held a Law degree.

For over 35 years he owned and operated a large dry cleaning and laundry service on the base at Ft. Meade, MD, as well as two package plants with attached coin-op laundries. In 1978 he joined the International Fabricare Institute, leaving his role there as Chief Instructor in 1982 to begin a private consulting practice.

Stan would go anywhere and everywhere to assist a cleaner who needed to improve administration,



stain removal and quality workmanship. Along the way, he began to document his methods and created numerous study guides from his experience as a management group leader and as a plant owner. These manuals, videos and lessons are much in demand as instruction courses today.

Stan visited Canada frequently as a speaker, instructor and consultant. His wisdom added to the profitability of many dry cleaning operations. He is survived by his wife Tillie and three children

Saskatchewan's Larry Tessier

Every few years he chairs the Saskatchewan Professional Drycleaners Association (the years no one else wants the job, as he says). The rest of the year he heads Busy Bee Cleaners in Regina. I had a quick visit to this 2800-sq.-ft. plant and was impressed by the innovations and forward thinking of its owner.

Busy Bee was a franchise in 1978 when Larry's father, Omer, opened the plant. By the time Larry took over, the franchise was dissolved but, more importantly, a dandy location in a new mall became available just as the lease on the original location ran out. The move was very significant because the new location is in the white collar section of Regina, while the old store was on the blue collar side of the dividing highway.

His was the second business to move into the mall and had nothing but a sign to tell customers he was open. For the first hour, no customers appeared, but they started later and by the end of the day the plant had twice the volume it usually handled. Good for Larry, but the staff decided there was too much work and all but two quit!

Fellow dry cleaners can picture the strain of the following weeks as Tessier found, trained and motivated a new staff. Growth continued and the plant was able to acquire additional space by expanding behind the business next door, forming an L-shaped plant.

Cleaning is done in two 40-lb. Souvrana tandem machines and laundry is handled by a 35-lb. Huebsch and an 18-lb. Wascomat. The newest equipment purchase was a Sankosha tensioning pant unit. Both the operator and Larry say it not only provides a quality finish but also speeds production. And to underscore