



his existing plants for processing. Then a companion business to carpet cleaning caught Weidner's eye. He purchased a Fire, Flood Restoration business and acquired two experienced men who were hired for their operational know-how.

Utilizing the two processing plants, Weidner said it took six to seven years to put the five different, but closely associated, businesses together. When his daughter Catherine took an interest, Glead sent her to the IFI dry cleaning and laundry school in Maryland. She graduated first in her class and became owner when, after 40 years in the family business, her father retired.

"Adding volume through diversification was a means of increasing income while minimizing overhead. This was my key to success," said Weidner. Starting with only two family members and a helper, the company had 29 employees at retirement. When Catherine retired, they sold off all five parts of the business separately. "It was a lot easier and more profitable than having only one entity to sell."

His advice to anyone entering the cleaning business: "Today there is a need to pay attention to environmental concerns. If anyone knows very little about cleaning then buying into a franchise is helpful. New technology, the new cleaning machines make it easier to operate. Ongoing education by attending seminars, and taking proper training on spotting chemicals is important. Controlling expense in proportion to income is definitely a key ingredient.

"Jumping in with both feet is okay if you have a deep swimming pool, but in the cleaning business one has to keep his head well above water."

Newcomers to the industry can profit from these words of wisdom. Dry cleaning is a complex business and not one to buy into without adequate training and mentoring. ■

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# Where Toyota Went Wrong

This is the final philosophy in the Toyota Production System. All of them put together will enable you to manage your company better and keep out of trouble. If only Toyota had kept to their philosophies, they would have foreseen the latest debacle that was the acceleration issue. They forgot to stay with the core of who they are. I suppose that the last philosophy is the most important: "Become a learning organization through relentless reflections and continuous improvement."

A learning organization will almost never be caught going stale or finding themselves behind the times. They will also stay out of the trouble that Toyota found themselves in recently. Toyota did look to continuous improvement but they forgot about the customer and put their profits and sales at a higher value. They didn't reflect on who they were and therefore left out many of their own principles.

## TRUE FOR FABRICARE, TOO

In the fabricare industry, there are examples of plants that run the gamut. At one end, there are the quintessential professionals who operate by the book and you can see this when you visit the plants. They have been constantly monitoring the industry looking for trends and staying current. When a new idea comes along, they are quick to evaluate it and implement it. Their customers know that they are getting quality service and product. At the other end are the plants that have become stagnant. Let's talk about them for a bit.

## FALLING BEHIND THE TIMES

Back many years ago, there was a boom in the industry. Franchises in dry cleaning were popular and operating a plant was quite profitable. Many of my customers comment that the industry isn't the same any more. Well, nothing is the same any more. I still see plants where you could walk in and think that you were back in the 80s. The equipment hasn't changed, the signage is the same, the plant has never been repainted and the only difference is that it is all older and decrepit. Much of the lint that is in the plant could be carbon dated back to 1980!

Why is this so common? It's sad to see a business become a dinosaur. The industry is definitely different but these plants seem to think that it should have stayed the same. They blame others rather than themselves.

## GET YOUR HEAD OUT OF THE HAMPER

When you work as hard as a fabricare plant owner, it is easy to become complacent. Days turn into months and months turn into years and before you know it, you are

extinct. Plant owners will not see the decay unless they relentlessly reflect on what they are. This means that you need to step away from it repeatedly and on schedule to see what you are becoming.

What's interesting to see as well is customers can act the same way. A lot of old stagnant plants have the same customers coming in who have been there for 20 years. They don't notice the decay either, but when that customer moves or dies there aren't any new customers willing to come in. The plant just doesn't have an inviting feel to it.

## SET AN AGENDA

If you feel that you have become a dinosaur, you still have hope. Take a read through some of the past articles that I have written and follow the advice. There are many ways to improve. The first thing that I would recommend is a good cleanup and de-cluttering, as well as a fresh coat of paint. This will cost you almost nothing. You can even find some students, or others that are looking for a little extra cash, to help out. Do yourself a favour by getting out to see what other plants are doing as well. Join a group of owners like the Ontario Fabricare Association. Meet other owners and visit their plants for new ideas.

Think about this for a moment. When you see a company sold and new management coming in, there is often an influx of new customers to see what is going on. Prices are often raised and a new feel is present. You need to generate this atmosphere before you get in deeper and older. Kick start a new dynamic within your company and don't wait for someone else to make money where you didn't. To the quintessential professionals out there, keep up the good work and don't forget to mentor the others. I have seen some wonderful examples, and with more people moving forward we can make positive change. ■