



2007 Tech Report

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A Monthly Update and Forum for Restoration Contractor Specialists

Marketing Matters

Learning to spot problem clients

The good clients are the reason that you are in business. But every entrepreneur experiences those troublesome clients who make you rethink the reason you went into business in the first place. According to Robert Middleton of Action Plan Marketing (www.actionplan.com), those problem clients who will waste your time or never buy fall into some general categories. Learn to spot them and you can save yourself a great deal of time and trouble.

Stumps (Stuck-in-the-Mud People) – These people have limited points of view. They know what they know and are not interested in new ideas or changing the way they are doing things. They never ask a question or will always have reasons why your ideas won't work. As a result, they are unlikely to buy professional services.

Takers – These people ask dozens of questions and take good notes. But watch out if they ask you for a proposal or plans too early in the process because they will take them to their cousin Johnny who will do the work using your ideas.

The Boss-Made-Me-Do-It Types – These are people who have no stake in the business but are talking to you because they have to fulfill an obligation. They don't care about your service and are just taking time.

Opportunists – One step above the takers, these people want the lowest price, the bare bones package and the minimum they can buy. But – and this is a big one – they expect first class service when they pay economy fares. An opportunist is high maintenance and will take up big chunks of your time. If you decide to work with them, get an explicit written agreement with clear boundaries.

Don Quixotes – These are the dreamers who will talk and meet forever to explore possibilities but rarely get down to action. If they represent a company you are trying to work with, they will have trouble getting buy-in and support. Look out for prospects with grandiose visions that are well above their level of expertise.

Check out the NIR Forum

Check out what other NIR members are talking about on the NIR Forum. Registration is free and easy. (Type www.nir-inc.com/forums/index.php into your browser to get started.)

Management Issues

A cautionary note about holiday parties

The holidays are a great time for businesses to show appreciation to their employees but when alcohol is a part of your holiday gathering, be forewarned. Those who drink excessively can create problems for the company as well as themselves.

Without meaning to be a grinch, we should remind you that 40 percent of all traffic fatalities are related to alcohol. It used to be the case that only the intoxicated driver was liable for injuries caused to another person. However, 40 of the 50 states have adopted Dram Shop Acts which create liability for a social host or establishment. If you are in one of those states, you can be liable for injuries to a third person caused by an intoxicated guest at your party.

Here are some suggestions that can reduce the likelihood of problems at your company party:

- Don't serve alcohol. Make the function a family event that can offset the lack of alcohol.
- Limit alcohol consumption. Give each employee a specified number of drink tickets. Another approach would be to limit alcohol service to a certain period of time such as the first hour of the party or an hour before dinner.
- Make employees give up their keys at the door. They can get them back only after a responsible person makes sure they are sober and can drive home safely.
- Arrange for designated drivers or reimburse cab rides home.
- Hold the party at a hotel and offer complimentary or discounted rates on hotel rooms. That eliminates the need for employees to drive home.
- Avoid serving only appetizers. Serve meals rich in proteins and starches to absorb alcohol.
- Don't serve punches that hide the alcohol content. Sweet punches are often consumed quickly because they taste like fruit punch and can mask the taste of alcohol.

NIR helps you boost your business

From networking to education to marketing assistance, the National Institute of Restoration supports restoration specialists.

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Working Smarter

Increase your productivity by working smarter

Multitasking doesn't work according to Stever Robbins, president of Leadership DecisionWorks. Robbins says that while workers in the U.S. are putting more hours and taking less vacation than our counterparts in most other industrialized nations, we are not the most productive country in the world. According to an article in *The Economist*, in 2005, France had the most productive workers. And everybody knows that the French work fewer hours and have lots of vacation.

Working smart means getting more done in less time and Robbins offers these tips to help you.

Get in the zone

To work faster, you must get in a zone – a state that is something like running a marathon. Getting in the zone requires you to bring your full focus to one task and build momentum until you produce results.

But getting into that zone is not easy. You must first eliminate distractions. Turn off the phone, ignore the email and definitely get away from the TV. Most people multitask and believe that they are getting more done when the opposite is true. We feel busy but too often that busyness is created by switching from task to task rather than making forward progress on any one job.

Increase focus

Look at how you spend your time and concentrate on those activities that produce income. It's easy to confuse being busy with being productive. Email is a great way to waste time feeling productive but most of the time email is just busy-work. If you spend two hours a day handling email, that is 25% of your time. Unless that time contributes 25% to your total income, it's a low value-added activity according to Robbins.

The 80/20 rule is a well-established principle in business: you get 80 percent of your results from 20 percent of your efforts. The key to working smarter is to determine what activities give you the best results and focus on those.

Streamline

Most of us take on more than we can handle. Robbins advises us to learn the value of the word *No*. Turn away that new client if you are already working at capacity. If someone proposes a project that will give limited results, just say "no." Time is a precious resource and if you ignore how much time will be required to do a task well, you'll end up doing a lousy job on everything.

Nuts and Bolts

Emerging Trends survey forecast slow period

The 29th annual survey of emerging trends in real estate showed that uncertainty and challenges will characterize the real estate market in 2008. The annual survey by PricewaterhouseCoopers and the Urban Land Institute polled more than 600 developers, service firms and investors.

The survey revealed more confidence in the commercial sector than in housing. Yet the biggest concerns remained job growth, construction costs, interest rate changes, income and wage growth and inflation. The respondents also predicted that underwriting standards for mortgages will be more stringent in 2008.

Algae power a renewable resource?

Algae is gaining new appreciation as a potential source of fuel. The pond scum is a plus for the environment because it soaks up large quantities of carbon dioxide – a greenhouse gas – and produces tiny globules of fat that can be turned into biodiesel fuel.

Algae is very attractive to scientists who note that it does not require large volumes of freshwater or land as corn does. The main problem is bringing down the cost of producing algae oil in commercial volumes.

In the U.S., demand for plant-based fuels is quickly outstripping supplies, so the outlook for a productive use of the green sludge is good. Right now the production cost of algae fuel is about \$20 a gallon but scientists predict that the cost could be brought down to \$1.70 a gallon when the product and supply is fully developed.

Changes are coming to the Tech Report

After nine years as NIR's monthly newsletter written especially for members, the **Tech Report** will be getting a new name. The January 2008 issue -- the 10th anniversary issue -- will have a new look. Look for it after the new year. It will have the same great information but will be redesigned. You're going to love the new **Tech Report**.