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## 1994 Technical Bulletins

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### SUCCESSFUL CARPET SPOTTING

A successful business is targeted to filling the needs of the customer. This simple statement is the core of carpet cleaning. If you cannot listen to your customer as to what they want and what their expectations are, chances are you will fail as a professional. With this in mind, think of the following scenario! You won a fine automobile (say a Lexus®) and, despite the tender loving care you have given it, there comes a time when it needs attention by a professional mechanic. You know the problem that has the greatest need is in the steering, but you just don't know where. Logically, you find a mechanic that says he can fix anything on that car.

Now from here we are going to examine two different types of mechanics:

1. The first mechanic asks no questions. When you do explain what you perceive as the problem he acts as if he were somewhere else or that your opinion is worthless or foolish. When you pick up your car, you find a list of things he did to warrant the charges; but he did not address the steering problem and you find out it still exists on the way home. Ask yourself: Would you be willing to take the car there again for repairs as well as recommend the mechanic to friends? Obvious, isn't it?
2. The second mechanic is willing to take some time to listen carefully to you. Your opinion may be incorrect and he is able to explain ahead of time the characteristics of the car and how, with his experience, he can solve the problem. He may also identify something ahead of time that you have not thought about that would extend your investment in the car and could be done at the same time as the time required in solving the obvious concern you have. Then, upon picking up your car, you find he not only solved the concern you had for the steering, but he went out of his way and cleaned the ash tray or vacuumed the inside. You now drive home reminding yourself of how smart you were for purchasing such a quality product. Again ask yourself: Would you at this time define yourself as a satisfied customer? Would you be willing to take the car there again for repairs as well as recommend the mechanics to friends? And, again, the answer is obvious!

I was flipping through the channels on the television the other night (Yes, it was driving my wife crazy). I landed on one of those incredibly stupid "info-mercials." You know the type, where everyone has a plastic smile and the audience cheers on cue. Normally, I would have just kept on going. Something on this one caught my attention though. They were selling a spot remover. You know the type. It magically takes out everything! I mean this stuff was fantastic. It removed iodine, butadiene, kool-aid®, mustard, you name it. The hostess was a bright, attractive, likable, intelligent-sounding lady. I would have ordered a pint or two if I had not known better. The fact is, the product is a gimmick. All of the spots were made fresh. All of the fabrics had obviously been sprayed with a fabric protector. The product obviously contained a reducing bleach (probably a slight amount of Sodium Hydrosulfite) since it took away the color from kool-aid® in a jar. Misleading advertising? Perhaps, but the fact remains that kind of ad makes an impression.

Now, let's relate these stories to your customer as it relates to successful carpet spotting. Do you sincerely listen to why you were called to clean the carpet? Most often, it is not because it is overall soiled, but rather because of an annoying spot. Herein lies the challenge of finding out why you were called and then meeting the challenge successfully. The best way of finding out the first part is to simply ASK. Example: "Mrs. Jones, before I get started in measuring the carpet, let me ask you, is there anything of particular concern you would like to show me?" After you have asked this, shut up and listen carefully! She is now going to take you to the "pet peeve" spot and give you the chance to tell her the way it will be professionally treated. You are now on the spot in more ways than one. The fact is that there are one or two particular spots that are what she is most concerned about. Her expectation of you as a professional is that you can remove those spots. After all, the lady on the info-mercial could.

You understand that the definition of quality is exceeding your customers expectations. Yet, sometimes in spot and stain removal, the expectation may well be wrong. You must begin by gaining an understanding of the spots themselves:

- What is the source of the spot?
- What is the construction of the carpet?
- How long has it been there?
- What has been done before you came?

This step of the spotting process we call "Pre-inspection". We feel that if you do not inspect, you can expect problems. Making wild statements such as, "I can get everything out" is about as wise as checking the level of a gas can with a match...you could well have a fire you can't put out. In order to avoid problems, you need to apply some common sense and explain the situation before you clean.

You know that spots on fabric will fall into one of three categories:

1. Spots: Foreign matter to the carpet which can be removed
2. Stains: More severe and which may have altered the dye structure of the carpet requiring aggressive spotting procedures; or
3. Damage: The fiber has actually been physically damaged. Let's face it; you and no other cleaner can remedy without repair or replacement.

You also know that no "magic" spotting chemical can restore pile that is lost or put color back where it has been removed.

Now, after you have identified the source, relate that to what it has done to the carpet. An example: acid dyes (red soft drinks) like acid-dyed carpets such as nylon. The conclusion is that it is not just a spot and may be more than a stain. Here is where honesty and empathy come in. Be willing to explain the degree of the "spot" and the possibility of removing it successfully. Explain how many variables there are involved in the possible "permanence" of a spot (carpet fiber and construction type, protectors, temperature of the spilled material, level from which the material was spilled, attempts by the consumer to treat the spot, etcetera). Make a demonstrated effort to get the spot out, using the best technique and technology you have available to you. Remember that no two spills of the same material act exactly the same because of these variables. Assume nothing, but use everything you have at your disposal to treat that spot.

The problem/opportunity that you face today is in the chemicals themselves. Have you noticed how many special spotting chemicals there are? The fact is that there are many ways in spotting to attempt to remove spots. In the past, you were taught to know and understand how to use the basic categories of spotters: VDS (volatile dry solvent); NVDS (non-volatile dry solvent); NDS (neutral detergent); ALDS (alkaline detergent); ADS (acid detergent); and rust removing solutions. Today, the selection of spotting chemicals is much wider. VDS spotters are being phased out and replaced with safer citrus solvents or citrus gels. There are several kinds of rust removers. Mild reducing and oxidizing bleaches are being used in special coffee removal and other formulas. Heat transfer solutions are used on many color stains. Yet there will still be times when all of this technology does not remove the spot. If the spot has not moved with all these different types of chemical treatments, you have crossed into the "stain zone". You can almost hear Rod Sterling, can't you? There are some inexplicable times when spots that you think would easily remove won't budge, no matter how many "magic" spotters you have tried. There are also times when things that you think won't come out do.

One of the best ways to practice spotting is to get some carpet samples, have someone trash them up, and then practice spotting without being told what it is. In a short time, you will find spotting techniques easy to master and you will be more effective as a professional cleaner. But, the key ingredient in successful spotting is not in the chemical. The technique, the training, or even the practice. It lies in listening to your customer. Understanding their expectations. Then explaining in a manner they can understand what you are and are not capable of. The key to successful spotting lies in communication, being open and honest and being genuinely concerned with their feelings and opinions. You won't have an audience that cheers on cue when you do it, but you will have a satisfied, happy customer. That is what it's all about.

*About The Author:*

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