

Headlines & More



Supply Chain Disruptions are Causing Industry-wide Concerns!



EVEN WHILE IN MOST PARTS OF THE COUNTRY COVID IS FADING INTO THE BACKGROUND AND PEOPLE ARE TRYING TO RETURN TO A MORE PRE-PANDEMIC LIFE, THE LINGERING EFFECTS ARE FAR REACHING AND WILL CONTINUE TO IMPACT ALL SMALL BUSINESSES OVER THE COMING MONTHS.

One of the biggest concerns facing all businesses is the availability of raw materials, products, and availability of goods. With all the shut-downs nationwide, manufacturing was slowed to a crawl. We are now suffering through some of the real effects of this in the Laundry and Drycleaning industry. Supplies like hangers, poly, and some chemical products are becoming back-ordered and hard to get. Some traditional supplies are not as readily available as they have been.

“It is not only the availability of the materials to make these necessary products”, observes Peter Blake, NEFA Executive Vice President, “but it is then the shipping and transportation that we have to worry about. With everything on hold for so long, coupled with the lack of a consistent workforce, product delivery is a nightmare. Simply put there just is not enough trucks, shipping containers, ships, or people/drivers to deliver all the products needed. You are seeing it in our industry and in other parts of your life. Supermarkets, restaurants, even pool supply stores are experiencing shortages. This too will pass, but it will continue to negatively impact our industry in the short term.”

“Prices of these goods and services may keep rising in the short term,” cautioned Blake, “but they should stabilize as the urgency of supplying the increased demand dissipates. I am confident that this is not a case of anyone trying to monetize the situation, but it just shows how the effects of this pandemic have trickled down to every part of our economy. It is like throwing a stone in a pond and watching the ripples widen as it disperses. We are seeing that same effect on prices of goods and services on down the line. Unfortunately, the end users, your customers, are going to feel these effects. It is not just the businesses

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North East Fabricare Association
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MAY/JUNE, 2021

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE...

Post-Covid: Where is the Industry Headed?

WE ALL EXHALED A GIANT, COLLECTIVE SIGH OF RELIEF AS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY COVID RESTRICTIONS ARE BEING LIFTED. WE ARE FINALLY SEEING A RETURN TO A MORE PRE-PANDEMIC LIFESTYLE AND WE ARE ON THE ROAD TO RECOVERY!



*Peter Blake,
NEFA Executive Director*

It is great news. Churches are have opened back up. Weddings are back on. Family gatherings can be held once again. Restaurants are at full capacity and people are no longer as fearful about going out into society. Graduation parties, life celebrations like wedding showers, Christenings, baby showers are all being held again. Offices are opening back up. People are returning to work, and work from home is lessening. That is all great news.

I wish that will all translate to a return to pre-pandemic volumes, but I am afraid that is not the case. While life may be getting back to "normal", I believe the pandemic has created a shift in our consumer's attitude, lifestyle, and purchasing patterns and these changes may be more permanent then we would like.

I think comfort and casual wear will become the uniform of choice. A shift back to more traditional "business attire" is still a long way off, and I am not confident we will get back there anytime soon. People have gotten used to being comfortable, and they are enjoying some of the freedoms in dress and style they have been given. I think it would be prudent for our members to take notice and to plan for this style of dress to be around for the next several months at a minimum. You need to plan for it, prepare for it, and capitalize on it.

You need to continue to embrace the things I believe that will continue to develop and be the direction our industry is heading towards: more wash-dry-fold and laundry services, more complete textile cleaning including patio furniture, accessories like shoes & purses, and more convenience. Even as the pandemic fears subside, there is still an increase demand for contactless, cashless, convenient services. Pick-up and delivery is going to continue to grow.

Your potential customers will continue to be the people that value their time. They are the people willing to outsource tasks like lawn care, pool cleaning, housecleaning, and laundry. These are the people you need to target your marketing towards. These have all seen a tremendous uptick over the past year due to the covid restrictions, but even prior to that this segment was growing. The pandemic just accelerated some of these industry changes.

Take a look at your business, see what is growing, monitor what changes in patterns your best customers are making -- and then be prepared to adapt. I am always here if you need some assistance!

Peter Blake

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Supply Chain Difficulties Affecting Businesses Nationwide

Continued from page 1

we deal with, but every layer there are more and more impacts.”

HOW CAN YOU PREPARE & PROTECT YOURSELF?

One of the best things you can do is to have an open dialog with your salesperson and the companies you are purchasing from. You need to develop an honest relationship and let them know what you need -- and when you need it. If you are a loyal customer, they will do all they can to make sure you have the essentials and you can continue to operate. You also need to have some flexibility in your ordering patterns.

“There is a great deal of concern in the marketplace,” offered Mike Ross of Minda/AristoCraft Supply, “and I hope people understand what is driving these changes. We will always do our best to supply every customer with what they need. In order to do that, we need our customers to let us know what they need to get by. Keep the communications open. If you need 3 boxes of hangers -- don’t tell us six, because somewhere down the line someone will not be able to function on what we can get. We need to all work together to make sure our industry stays strong.”

“The other important issue is adaptability,” continued Ross. “We are trying to alert our customers to supply issues and the need to be flexible. You might not be able to get white shirt hangers. In the short term you may have to do with green or galvanized. We are in the process of shoring up some high grade suit hangers from a dif-

ferent source. They are an upgrade, but they may be the only way to satisfy the demand. For instance if you need boiler treatment, you may not be able to get a specific brand, and there may have to be a substitute. These are all potential solutions to some tough issues. We will do everything possible to help you remain viable and to have the products you need to operate.”

This is not a regional issue, or even an industry issue. This is a reality across the country for a wide variety of businesses. As factories come back online, and start to ramp up, the drain on steel and plastic resin is enormous. As products are starting to be made, the demand for transportation is huge. These issues will continue to plague our industry and will continue to escalate costs of goods.

“We have heard rumblings”, cautioned Blake, “speculating if certain companies are taking advantage of the situation to inflate prices. I am very confident that this is not happening within our industry and especially not within our area. I feel the distributors are facing the same pressures you are with a higher demand in products, a shrinking supply -- and an escalating cost of doing business. The cost of doing business continues to rise and it is affecting everyone down the line. Higher prices during this time can be expected.”

If you have any concerns or if you think there are other issues that have not been addressed, please reach out to the NEFA Office and we would be glad to discuss the issue.



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The “Talent Acquisition” Process

By Peter Blake, Executive Director, NEFA, MAC, and SEFA and originally published in National Clothesline



NATIONWIDE, SMALL BUSINESSES ARE FACING THE SAME OBSTACLE: LACK OF HELP AND INABILITY TO FULLY STAFF THEIR OPERATIONS. THIS IS THE SINGLE GREATEST CHALLENGE EXPRESSED BY

ALL BUSINESS OWNERS, AND WE ARE NOT ALONE. RESTAURANTS, RETAIL STORES, AND OTHER SERVICE BUSINESSES ARE COMPETING FOR THE SAME LABOR POOL.

We were facing this same problem before the pandemic, and now it is even worse. There are a great many reasons we can point to: FFMLA, Government assistance, federal unemployment subsidies, lack of childcare services, remote schooling, fear of COVID, and the list goes on. It is a perfect storm of obstacles to re-energizing the workforce.

At the outset, I thought with the number of businesses closing, and non-essential businesses being forced to stop operating at full capacity, pre-pandemic labor shortage would reverse itself. I was confident that people would be hungry to find and get back to work, but just the opposite has happened. It is becoming harder and harder to find people, and even more difficult to hire the right people to fit into your team. Every business owner needs to be in a constant state of “Talent Acquisition”. You can never feel that you are fully staffed, because at the worst possible moment, you will lose a key person and you are back at square one. If you need one person, try and hire two. In the long run being a little overstaffed will always cost less than being caught understaffed.

If you have extra personnel, you can always transition weaker team members to different jobs, or realize they are not a right fit and help them find something better suited for them. You always have room for talent and great additions.

WHERE TO FIND TALENT

There is no magic bullet. I am sure you are all using message boards, InDeed, ZipRecruiter, Monster.com, Craigslist and other avenues. I hope it is working for you, but if you are like most of the companies out there, the people you want to hire or look at seldom show up for the interview or have already joined another staff. This can get frustrating and can waste a lot of your time.

There are a lot of things you can do to make better use of those tools. If you need help – reach out and I can share some ideas

for you. If done right, those tools can be useful. You have to be quick, attentive, responsive and decisive. Everyone is using these tools and the competition is fierce. Do not just rely on putting an ad on those message services and expect a great return. You must be the aggressor. You must search for candidates that are actively updating their information. You need to go find them. By the time they see your ad, it may be too late. They will probably have been scooped up by someone else.

I am going to make a confession here, many of the ideas that I am referencing have come from the DLI Peer-to-Peer Zoom calls for members held weekly. There is no better forum to discuss issues, ask for advice, and to learn new ways to approach old problems.

To really be successful, however, you need to step outside the normal everyday tools and constantly be a “Talent Agent”. You must be on the lookout for the type of people you want to build your staff. When you are out at a restaurant and get exceptional service, maybe leave a business card with their tip letting them know if they ever consider a career shift, you are always look for team members. Retail stores, service technicians, home delivery people are all viable candidates for you to be on the lookout for. Any place you encounter the types of people you wish you had working for you – it is OK to put a lead out there and let them know there may be options. You can have something printed on the back of your business cards like: “Looking for a new career direction? Join the XYZ Cleaners Team. We are interested in exceptional people”.

Be prepared to recognize potential everywhere. Over the past year, many great employees have been kept working, but their hours have been cut. Do not be afraid to approach people with potential and offer them supplemental hours. Retail stores and restaurants are great resources. Let the prospective hire know that if they need more hours, you may have some flexible hours you can give them if they want to try something new. It does not always have to be a career change.

We often talk about networking for sales, but you can also do it for employees. Maybe you know another company that is struggling to give their employees the hours they need. Let them know you may be able to help the employee recover the lost time. You can work out an employee sharing program if neither business needs full time people.

Do you have some strong staff members? Ask them for referrals. Offer to pay referral bonuses if the employee works out. Incentivize them to help you build your staff. Have you thought of your customers? They already know and like your business, or they

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Idea of the Month: Employee Recognition



THE NUMBER ONE ISSUE PEOPLE ARE ASKING ABOUT IS HOW TO BUILD AN EFFECTIVE TEAM. ONE OF THE CRITICAL COMPONENTS TO THAT IS RETAINING YOUR EMPLOYEES.

Many members have been sharing their insights on the weekly Peer-to-Peer calls hosted by DLI for our members nationwide. This has been a very energized discussion. Later in July, DLI will feature a webinar with a couple of members exploring some of the changes they have made to help retain their staff.

This Issue’s “Idea of the Month” is to highlight your staff, and reward them for their support. This reward can come in a number of different ways.

“Keeping your staff motivated,” offered Peter Blake, NEFA Executive Vice President, “is essential to having a good team. You

need them to know you value them and their efforts. When your current staff are fans of the companies, they can help you recruit new people to the team. These incentives can be everything from monetary to personal recognition.”

Here are some of the unique ways members are showing their appreciation:

- On hot days, bringing in watermelons and cases of cold water. Couple that with iced down towels and it is a great way to let them know you care.
- Taking a key staff person out to dinner with their spouse as a sign of gratitude and to get to connect with them outside the plant.
- Unexpected gifts like movie passes, restaurant gift cards, etc for a job well done.
- Recognition for length of service and highlighted in company’s social media platforms.
- Merit raises and increased pay or bonuses.
- Staff Pizza Parties on a Friday afternoon of a hard week

Do you have an idea you would like to share? E-mail it to peter@nefabricare.com

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The Talent Acquisition Process

Continued from page 5

would not be customers. It is ok to let them know through your email service, texting, or even Facebook & Social Media that you are looking to add assets to your team. You may be surprised what you find. Kids graduating High School looking for options or stay-at-home Moms and Dads whose kids are off to college and they are thinking about re-entering the workforce. The best candidates can often come from unlikely connections.

Also, keep in mind, you will rarely find the right person with dry-cleaning experience and someone who already knows the industry. If you do – phenomenal, but for the most part you need to be looking for the types of people you want to work for you. You can teach every aspect of this industry, but it may be harder to teach good teamwork, good customer service instincts, and integrity. Look for the core values you desire – and you can train for the rest.

“We look for three things when we hire people. Intelligence, Initiative, and Integrity. If they don’t have the latter, the first two will kill you.”

- Warren Buffett

THE COMPETITION FOR CANDIDATES IS FIERCE

Like I said earlier, everyone is facing the same challenges. The reality of today is that job applicants have many choices. With minimum wage continuing to rise and corporate pay structures in restaurants and fast-food businesses continuing to escalate, you need to set yourself apart. The days of posting an add, getting 30 applicants, and having your choice of employee is GONE. Now you are lucky to get those that apply to even show up. Things have changed, and for the employer it is not for the better.

Why aren’t they showing up for the Interviews? There are probably several answers including: really don’t want a job, already took another position, and have already decided against taking your position. I think these three are the most likely.

If they don’t really want to work or are only answering job posting to prove to unemployment they are looking, you can’t do anything about that. Trust me, you will not want them anyway. Like I said before, you need to be quick and decisive. You cannot hesitate or the qualified applicants will be grabbed up quickly and you will lose the chance. You must be flexible when scheduling phone and or physical interviews.

I hate to break it to you but working at a drycleaner is not on everyone’s priority list. As an industry we are not highly sought after. You need to be proactive with your reputation. As soon as an applicant is approached by a company, it is so easy to check them out on Social Media, Yelp, etc. When people have choices, they will gravitate to businesses they trust, believe in, and want to work for. You have a lot of control over what they see. Make

sure your Yelp and Google Reviews are good, and you are responsive. When working on your social media pages, highlight your employees. Stress their longevity. Feature ones that have been promoted or moved up in the company. Highlight activities you have done with your staff, or any highlights or recognition. When you demonstrate the value of your team members publicly, you are showcasing your work culture. You are highlighting reasons to work for you. When people are trying to decide to work for a company, these will all play a factor.

Lastly, keep in mind that while pay structure is important, it is also important to highlight the other added benefits you may offer. Flexible hours, paid time off, 401 K, any and all of these benefits could sway the decision in your favor. If you do not have a 401K, now may be the time to initiate one. There are significant tax breaks available that makes it almost pay for itself!

Finding the right fit takes work and it is not easy, but you must do all the things you can to make you and your company someone that people want to work for. As Mark Albrecht of the Route Pros has told me countless times: “Everyone Wants to work for the cool boss and the cool company.” Your job is to make them understand: that is you!

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*United States Environmental Protection Agency

DLI Opens New Era in Professional Training



DLI COURSES MAY HAVE BEEN INTERRUPTED DUE TO THE PANDEMIC BUT THAT DID NOT STOP THE INSTITUTE FROM OFFERING COURSES.

posely kept the class size small so we could address any issues that might come up but there really weren't any problems."

The initial Virtual Stain Removal Course was comprised of six sessions over three weeks on Tuesdays and Thursdays for three hours at a time. The in-person version of this course takes three full, eight-hour days to complete at DLI's school. After completing the course students were invited to respond to an anonymous survey. All respondents gave the course high marks and reported having a positive learning experience.

Here are some of the comments they shared:

- "This was one the most informal and helpful classes I have ever taken. The knowledge that Mr. Brian Johnson provided made my job so much easier. Special thanks to Brian Johnson!
- "I did not have a problem with the three-hour format. Brian made the class informative and enjoyable."

Eighteen students recently completed DLI's first-ever Virtual Stain Removal Course this spring. DLI's School of Drycleaning Technology re-tooled the course to work in an online-only format and added extra flexibility to help students succeed in the course.

"Convenience was a huge factor for the students," said Brian Johnson, DLI's Director of Education & Training. "The students loved it because they didn't have to leave their jobs and families to come to the school. With the online course they could develop this critical skill without having to be away from work or home.

"The pandemic hit our industry hard," Johnson said. "In our school's 94-year history we were only closed one other time — during World War II. With this course, we offered in-depth, virtual, live training. Demand was very high for this course and we pur-

COMING SOON

DLI will offer the Virtual Stain Removal course again from July 13 – August 3. This time the course will run over seven, two-hour sessions. Space will again be limited to a maximum of 20 students. DLI plans to begin offering in-person courses again this fall. The course includes a set of pre-stained fabric samples students use to practice their skills. The course textbook serves as a handy reference guide to removing stains when the course is complete.

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Handling Linen Garments with Brian Johnson, DLI Director of Education & Training

- **Wednesday, July 21**

The BEST System for Getting Top Clients to Refer Others with Industry Marketing Coach Dave Coyle of Maverick Drycleaners

- **Wednesday, July 28**

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