

HOW TO START YOUR OWN HOUSE AND APARTMENT CLEANING SERVICE

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House and apartment cleaning services are gaining in popularity. These are business services that are growing in demand as a result of more and more women seeking jobs outside the home. Their need to supplement the family income creates the opportunity for you to set up a lucrative business.

Ten years ago, businesses of this kind were serving only the affluent - homes of the wealthy people where women didn't want to be bothered with the drudgery of house hold cleaning, and had the money to pay someone to do it for them. But times have changed, and today the market includes many middle income families in every residential area across the entire country. The potential market among apartment dwellers is great also. All in all this is a business that has grown fast, and has as much real wealth building potential as any we can think of.

This is a cleaning service generally associated with women; however, men are finding that they can organize, start, and operate very profitable home and apartment cleaning businesses just as well as women. It's an ideal business for any truly ambitious person wanting a business of his or her own, especially for those who must begin with limited funds. Actually, you can start this business right in your own neighborhood, using your own equipment, and begin making a profit from the first day.

Many enterprising homemakers are already doing this kind of work on a small scale as an extra income producing endeavor. There's a growing need for this service. Organizing your efforts into a business producing \$50,000 to \$100,00 a year is quite possible, and you can get started for \$100 or so, always using your profits to expand and increase your business.

Absolutely no experience is required. Everyone knows how to dust the furniture, vacuum carpets, make the beds and carry out the trash. But you must ask yourself if making a house clean and bright is important and uplifting work. If you look on it as degrading or as drudgery, don't involve yourself in this business.

Starting from scratch, you'll need a telephone and an appointment book. You also need an advertising flyer, such as the following:

HOME OR APARTMENT CLEANING

We do the work - You relax and take it easy.
You get the best job in town, at rates you can afford. Your satisfaction is always guaranteed!
For more details,
Call Sue: 123-4567 - ABC Cleaning Services!

You can either type this notice out or write it in long-hand with a pen. Either way, it's going to be your first advertising endeavor, and bring in that first customer for you.

It would be a good idea to visit your stationery store to pick up a pad of "fade out" graph paper, a couple of sets of transfer (rub-on) letters, a gluestick, and if they have one, a Klip Art book.

Take these materials home and clear off your kitchen table. Take a sheet of graph paper, and temporarily tape the corners down on the table. Then take a pencil and a ruler, and mark a rectangle five inches wide by six inches long along the lines of the graph paper. This will be the overall size of your flyer when it's finished.

Look for a Klip Art piece depicting a harried housewife engrossed with either cleaning tools or in the act of running a vacuum cleaner, or some other household chore. Cut this piece out, and with your gluestick paste it in the upper left-hand corner of your rectangle. Then take your transfer letters and make the headline: HOME OR CLEANING. Next, type out the body of the message on ordinary white typing paper. Be sure to use a relatively new ribbon, preferably a black carbon ribbon, and upper case letters. Cut this strip out, and paste it onto the graph paper, centered just below your headline. Then use some transfer letters that are about twice as large as your typewriter type, and paste up the action part of your message: For details, call Sue: 123-4567. Cut out a couple of border flourishes from your Klip Art book, paste them under your action line, and you're ready to take it to the printer.

In essence, you have a professional advertising "billboard." You can check around in your area, especially with the advertising classes at your local colleges, but generally they'll do no better than you can do on your own, using the instructions we've just given you, and they'll charge you \$50 to \$100.

Once you have this advertising flyer completed, take it to a nearby quick print shop and have about 200 copies printed. You should be able to get two copies on a standard 8 1/2 x 11 sheet, and running 100 sheets of paper through the press is going to cost well under \$10. For just a few cents more, have the printer cut them in half with his machine cutter, so you will have 200 copies of the advertising flyer.

Now take these flyers, along with a box of thumbtacks, and put them up on all the free bulletin boards you can find - grocery stores, laundromats, beauty salons, office building lounges, cafeterias, post offices, and wherever else such announcements are allowed.

When a prospective customer calls, have your appointment book and a pencil handy. Be friendly and enthusiastic. Explain what you do - everything from changing the beds to vacuuming, dusting and polishing the furniture and cleaning the bathroom to the dishes and the laundry. Or, everything except the dishes and the laundry - whatever you have decided on as your policy. When they ask how much you charge, simply tell them six to ten dollars an hour, but for a firm cost quote, you'll need to see the home and make a detailed estimate for them. Then without much of a pause, ask if 4:30 this afternoon would be convenient for them, or if 5:30 would be better. You must pointedly ask if you can come to make your cost proposal at a certain time, or the decision may be put off, and you may come up with a "no sale."

Just as soon as you have an agreement on the time to make your cost proposal and marked it in your appointment book, ask for name, address and telephone number.

Jot this information down on a 3 by 5 card, along with the date and the notation: Prospective

Customer. Then you file this card in a permanent card file. Save these cards, because there are literally hundreds of ways to turn this prospect file into real cash, once you've accumulated a sizeable number of names, addresses and phone numbers.

When you go to see your prospect in person, always be on time. A couple of minutes early won't hurt you, but a few minutes late will definitely be detrimental to your closing the sale. Always be well groomed. Dress as a successful business owner. Be confident and sure of yourself; be knowledgeable about what you can do as well as understanding of the prospect's needs and wants. Do not smoke, even if invited by the prospect, and never accept a drink - even coffee - until after you have a signed contract in your briefcase.

Actually, once you've made the sale, the best thing is to shake hands with your new customer, thank him, and leave. A little small talk after the sale is appropriate, but becoming too friendly is not. You create an impression, and preserve it, by maintaining a business-like relationship.

When you go to make your cost estimate, take along a ruled tablet such as those used by elementary school students, carbon paper, a calculator and your appointment book. Some people find it easier to work with a clipboard and ordinary blank paper with carbon. Later on, you may want to have general checklists printed up for each room in the house, with blank lines or space for special instructions.

Whatever you use, it's important to appear methodical, thorough and professional, while leading the prospect through the specifics he or she wants you to take care of: "Now, you want the carpet vacuumed and all the furniture dusted and those two end tables, the coffee table and the piano polished as well, I assume?"

Simply identify the specific room at the top of the sheet of paper, then lead your prospect through the cleaning steps of each room, covering everything in it. Your implications of putting everything in "ready for company" shape will cause the customer to forget about the cost, and hire you to do a complete job. Always have a carbon paper under each piece of paper you're writing on, and always look around each room one more time before leaving it; then ask the prospect if he or she can think of any special instructions you should note for that room.

Finally, when you've gone through each room in the house with the prospect, come back to the kitchen and sit down at the table. Take out your calculator and add up the time you estimate each job in each room will take to complete. Total the time for each room. Be liberal, thinking that if you can do the carpet job in 15 minutes, it will usually take the ordinary person 30 minutes. Convert the total minutes for each room into hours and tenths of hours per room. Add the totals for each room to arrive at your total hours to clean the entire house.

Talk with your customer briefly, wondering how she can ever find the time to get everything done at home, especially when holding down a full-time job. A little bit of small talk, a quick mental evaluation of the customer's ability to pay, plus your knowledge that you can get everything done in four hours, instead of the six hours it would take most people, and you summarize by saying:

"Well, Mrs. Johnson, you've certainly got enough routine cleaning work to keep you busy all day every day of the week! I certainly don't know how you do it, but any way, we'll take this whole

problem off your shoulders, save you time, and actually give you time to relax. We can do it on a regular basis, every other week for \$120 per month, or the one single time for \$75.

"I can well imagine how tired you are when you get home from work. If you're at all like me there are times when, faced with all this housework, you want to run away someplace and hide. Now, we'll take care of everything for you - keep the house spic and span, ready for company, allow you to forget about housecleaning chores, and for a lot less than it's costing you now in time, work, and worry. And we guarantee that our work will more than satisfy you. So, would you like to try our cleaning service one time for \$75 or do you want to save \$15 a call and let us take over all these chores for you on a regular basis?"

Here you begin finding a place in your appointment book, and tell her: "Actually, I have an opening at 8:30 on Tuesday morning. We could come in every other Tuesday at 8:30, clean the whole house and have it done before you get home from work."

The customer agrees that 8:30 on Tuesdays will be fine. Then you ask her if she prefers to be billed with the completion of each house cleaning session or on a regular monthly basis. Point out to her that by engaging you on a monthly basis, she picks up a free house cleaning every three months.

Now that you have your first customer, you want to fill in every day of the week, each week of every month with regular jobs. Once you have one week of each month filled with regular jobs, it will be time for you to expand.

Expansion means growth, involving people working for you, more jobs to sell, and greater profits. Don't let it frighten you, for you have gained experience by starting gradually. After all - your aim in starting a business of your own was to make money, wasn't it? And expanding means more helpers so you don't have to work your self to death!

You can operate this business quite successfully from the comfort of your home, permanently, if you choose to. All you'll ever need is a telephone, a desk, and a file cabinet.

So, just as soon as you possibly can, recruit and hire other people to do the work for you. The first people you hire should be people to handle the cleaning work. The best plan is to hire people to work in teams of two or three - two for jobs not including dishwashing and laundry - three for those that do.

You can start these people at minimum wage or a bit above, and train them to complete every job assignment in two hours or less. Just as soon as you've hired and trained a couple of people as a cleaning team, you should outfit them in a kind of uniform with your company name on the back of their blouses or shirts. A good idea also would be to have magnetic signs made for your company and services. Place these signs on the sides of the cars your people use for transportation to each job, and later on, the sides of your company van or pick-up trucks.

Each team should have an appointed team leader responsible for the quality and over all completeness of each job assigned to that team. The team might operate thus: One person cleans the bathroom, makes the beds, and carries out the laundry, while the

other person dusts and polishes the furniture and does the vacuuming. On jobs where you do the laundry and the dishes, the third person can pick up the laundry and get that started, and then do the dishes and clean the kitchen. By operating in this manner, your work will be more efficient and the complete job will take a lot less time. However, it is important that each person you hire understand that the success of the business depends on the "crew" doing as many complete jobs as they can handle each day - not on how much they get paid per hour working for you.

Your team leaders will check with you each afternoon for the next day's work assignments and gather the team together, complete with cleaning equipment and material, on the next day. Your team leader should be supplied with a stack of "hand-out" advertising flyers to pass around the neighborhood or within the apartment building before leaving each job site. A good supply of business cards wouldn't be a bad idea for them either, in order to advertise your services to others they come in contact with. The only other form of advertising you should go with would be a display ad in the yellow pages of your telephone directory.

Design on paper a system of clean-up operation that can generally be applied to any situation, then drill your teams on speeding up their activities to make the system work even better. Just as firemen practice and practice, you should drill your people as a team in their cleaning activities.

Probably the biggest time-waster in this business will be in the travel from job to job. For this reason, it's important to spread advertising circulars to the neighboring homes when you're doing a job, or to the apartments on the same floor when you're in an apartment building. As the organizer, and person assigning teams to jobs, it will behoove you to locate, line up, and assign jobs as close together as possible. Keep up efforts to cut the time it takes for your crews to travel from one job to the next. Work at lining up jobs all in one block, or in one apartment building.

Your equipment needs will really be minimal: Cleaning and polishing rags, mops, a couple of plastic buckets, and furniture polishes. Most people will have the necessary cleaning materials, including vacuum cleaner, soaps and cleansers. But it wouldn't hurt to have these items available just in case you get a job in a home or an apartment without these tools. As your business grows, you'll be able to purchase all your needs at huge discounts, and these are the sources of supply to cultivate as you grow.

One of the most important aspects of this business is asking for, and allowing your customers to refer other prospects to you. All of this happens, of course, as a result of your giving fast, dependable service. You might even set up a promotional notice on the back of your business card (to be left as each job is completed) offering five dollars off their next cleaning bill when they refer you to a new prospect.

This is definitely a high profit business, requiring only an investment of time and organization on your part to get started. With a low investment, little or no over head requirement, and no experience needed, this is an ideal business opportunity with a growth curve that accelerates at an unprecedented rate. Think about it. If it appeals to you, set up your own plan of operations and go for it! The profit potential for an owner of this type of business is outstanding!