



Maintenance Company Uses Scientific Strategy for Cleaning

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By Noreen Willhelm

Space Management emphasizes a ‘health and wellness approach’ to its clients’ needs. Anybody can clean an office, right?

Not according to Kevin Ray Findlay, founder and CEO of Space Management, a Dayton-based building maintenance company. It requires training and good tools and, most of all, the right people using an efficient system. And it’s critical to focus on sanitation.

“We take a health and wellness approach,” Findlay said. “Our philosophy requires cleaning for health, as well as appearance.”

“I didn’t want to be a janitor service,” he said. “We approach it from a completely different, scientific point of view.”

The 12-year-old company specializes in health care settings – doctors’ offices, urgent care and ambulatory care centers, but it also works in banks, large office buildings, manufacturing and government offices.

“The service industry is hard to manage,” Findlay said. “You’ve got to have really good people and a really good system.”

It’s in his motto: “Better People. Better Results.”

“We’re quite a bit different from other companies and old-school janitors,” Findlay said.

Sure, his staff empties trash cans and vacuums, but they also focus on what he calls high-contact surfaces, such as doorknobs, using an EPA-registered hospital grade disinfectant daily.

Every day? Every day.

The same team cleans each building every night, Findlay said, and “every technician has a specific set of tasks that they accomplish.” One person does the “wet work” – restrooms, break rooms, sinks; another empties, cleans and sanitizes the trash cans, another; another vacuums and does the detail work. They wear yellow laminated cards, a kind of check list, detailing each individual technician’s tasks.

“Teams have more momentum,” Findlay said, and they work only in one building. “We have an OSHA-compliant base of operations in each of the buildings we maintain.” That means the company doesn’t use a centralized supply chain; vendors deliver supplies directly to the work site.

Debra Cassidy, of Hutchins Management, said she has worked with Space Management for years. She loves the consistency of the company’s work.

“You know you’re going to have a clean building,” she said. “You don’t have to say, “I’ve got visitors coming through.”

It's always clean."

Findlay contends the system creates better efficiencies, with employees working four- to eight-hour shifts.

He takes exception to a recent trend in the building maintenance industry that assigns cleaners to work during the day, in extremely large buildings that are fully occupied and busy, ostensibly to save energy.

"It's unrealistic and inefficient," he said. "No matter how discreet the (cleaning) person is, it's a conflict."

Occasionally, the company will assign a day service person in a very high volume location, disinfecting door handles, restrooms, and other "high contact areas," and underscoring their "cleaning for health" method. "That's a huge advantage for the customer," Findlay said.

Another key to Space Management's approach is triple-checking the work. The technician checks his or her own work, then the supervisor at each building double-checks it, and then the operations supervisor checks it yet again. If that's not enough, a quality assurance technician visits the facility during the day, just to make sure it's been cleaned to Space Management standards.

John Buscemi, principal with TriCom B2B, said his marketing firm has worked with Space Management since moving into TriCom's Vandalia head-quarters.

"They've been doing a nice job," Buscemi said. "It's not been a headache, and that's what I look for in that service."

The standards are laid out in a 300-page, illustrated manual that Findlay and his staff created. "We felt the industry didn't really have anything" that reflected his level of training, Findlay said, so "we developed our own certification system."

Called Level One Certification, it requires his staff to understand not just what they're required to do, but why and in what order. Findlay said it is an industry-leading program. "It's in-house, but I'm telling you, it's tough."

Trainees must absorb all the written materials and images ("pages and pages and pages of images") on every task, complete tests and work their first weeks on-site, near a more experienced employee.

It's that attention to detail that impresses Cassidy. One building that she managed had struggled to find the right maintenance company, the owners wanted to look as if it had just opened.

"I had three different companies in before (Space Management) were in there, and we just couldn't make them happy," she said. "But Space Management can do that. They maintain that new, brand new look."

Findlay said hiring presents its own challenges. The work does not pay very well, despite the continuing need, and turnover, compared to other industries, is quite high. "It's very technical, requiring a tremendous amount of skill, and that doesn't count the physical labor," he said. "The American market does not value the maintenance worker as they should."

In the cleaning industry, turnover of up to 325 percent annually is not uncommon, Findlay said, but he is proud that Space Management's turnover hovers around 100 percent each year.

Findlay has developed his own branded line of cleaning chemicals, color-coded for ease of use by his employees. The green label is the general purpose cleaner, the yellow, which smells like lemon, is a disinfectant; the blue label is for glass cleaning; and the red label is an acid used for removing lime scale.

He contends that buildings cleaned with his methods have healthier occupants than those cleaned primarily with appearance in mind. "It really does prevent illness," he said. "People in those buildings are healthier – it's a real, noticeable, verifiable thing."

He has turned down offers to begin cleaning up to five buildings for a large customer, suggesting instead that Space Management start with a single location and build from there.

"Nobody has the resources to start huge complexes all at once," he said, pointing out that new buildings mean hiring and training staff right away. "Big complexes, big buildings are tough." Using a single contractor, he said, may seem easier, but it's not the best solution from a service (perspective)."

Originally from the Detroit area, Findlay said much of his family was self-employed. "We had sort of an entrepreneurial spirit."

He came to Dayton because of extended family and ended up working for 12 years for a major national janitorial firm, before heading up his own.

The operation has grown significantly since Findlay started pounding the pavement 12 years ago looking for clients, yet his office is still in his house. He's though hard about building a new headquarters building, because he'd like the visibility of the sign on the side, as well as a center for the training that he's found so vital. But, those ambitions are balanced by his need to keep his supervisors out in their bright yellow, Space Management-branded trucks.

"I don't want them sitting in offices," Findlay said. "They should be in the field, taking care of our customers."

"We're growing," he said, "I think the opportunities are almost endless." But, he observed, "I'm a very cautious person – I'm careful to take on only the things we could do well."