



IAQ RADIO+

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Lee Pemberton Memorial Show

Life and Times of a Cleaning & Restoration Pioneer

Good day and welcome to IAQ Radio+ episode 771 blog. This week we honored the legacy of Lee Pemberton cleaning and restoration pioneer. Joining us with their thoughts was John Downey & Pete Consigli. Following our intro, we will replay the edited July 30, 2010 interview with a restoration pioneer.

Honoring Lee Pemberton's Legacy

The episode focused on honoring Lee Pemberton, a pioneer in the cleaning and restoration industry. Pete Consigli, John Downey, and Cliff Zlotnik shared memories and tributes to Lee, highlighting his contributions, mentorship, and dedication to the industry. They discussed Lee's impact on training, supplier relationships, and his unwavering support for small businesses. The group also addressed the importance of mentoring others in Lee's spirit and planned to distribute a written tribute to further honor his legacy.

Z-Man's Comments

It's unlikely that I would be sitting here today without Lee Pemberton. He was my first specialist industry supplier. First industry instructor. Successful businessman I respected and looked up to. He showed me how to write a fire damage estimate, the importance of a cleaning evaluation test kit.

He provided subcontracting opportunities during which he was always financially transparent and fair. He saw the Unsmoke System firsthand, it was his positive reaction and encouragement which gave me the confidence to try to market the system industry wide.

We shared a belief in the importance of associations; we were both among the founders of TRSCA- Tristate Restorers and Specialty Cleaners Association.

LEROY "LEE" PEMBERTON BY THE LETTERS

L learned, levelheaded, logical, longsighted

E empathetic, enthusiastic,

R reflective, reassuring, resourceful

O observative, openminded, outspoken

Y yeomanly, youthful

P passionate, patient, perseverant

E earnest, endearing,

M motivating, methodical, maternal, monumental

B balanced, believable

E eloquent, exemplary, exuberant

R resolute, responsible, reliable

T talented, transformative, tolerant, transcendent

O openminded, originative, oriented

N nurturing, nonjudgemental

Nuggets mind from today's episode

Lee Pemberton worked in a steel mill. Due to layoffs and labor strikes he sought other sources of income when he was out of work. He applied for a "skilled spotting specialist" position offered by a local drycleaner. Lee learned about textiles and textile cleaning, skills that would later serve him well. Lee found himself as the "new kid" working with several older women. Lee described his young self as unsophisticated and hard working. After a few months on the job the owner told Lee that he was going on vacation and left Lee in charge. Lee found himself, performing quality control, repairing broken equipment and waiting on customers at the counter. By 1961 Lee was running the drycleaners, a second smaller drycleaners and a laundromat, when the owner advised him that he was going to Florida for the winter and leaving Lee in charge. Bitten by the entrepreneurial bug, in 1963 Lee purchased the smaller drycleaners and learned that while managers

work long hours, the owner never stops working. After two years, a new mall opened and soon the local Sears and Penny's stores closed. In 1967, the town began undergoing redevelopment and Lee's drycleaners experienced a drastic loss of customers. It was either declaring bankruptcy or pursuing a new revenue source. Lee began offering drapery cleaning along with pickup, delivery and a take down and rehang service. Lee was trusted by his Jewish clients who needed help with pre-Passover home cleaning. Lee was hired by trusting customers to oversee the on-location carpet and rug cleaning being done by others. Lee was intrigued by ServiceMaster and Duraclean offering carpet cleaning franchises. From an advertiser in Popular Mechanics magazine Lee purchased instructions on how to modify a floor scrubber for foam carpet cleaning. The machine worked and Lee began cleaning carpet. Lee encountered a plush silver acrylic carpet that was trashed. In order to remove the soil Lee juiced up his gentle carpet foam shampoo with strong alkaline TSP. Lee hand-brushed the TSP solution into the bad areas and the carpet looked good. The next morning the customer called to complain that her rug had turned brown. Lee had no idea what was wrong, so he called a Pittsburgh rug cleaning plant (coincidentally owned by the President of the National Institute of Rug Cleaners) and asked if he could pay them to correct the problem. He rudely declined and told Lee to buy the rug and let this be a lesson to stay in his own lane. This experience changed Lee's life. With nowhere to turn for help Lee; purchased a ServiceMaster franchise. He learned how to correct the browning. After a number of years Lee dropped the franchise when he no longer received value for his franchise royalties.

Who made the biggest positive impression upon you? Four people, in random order. Jim Roden (Prochem) and Cliff Zlotnik (Unsmoke); brilliant innovative minds who simplified chemistry so that Lee could explain it to others. Jim Roden realized that Lee was skilled communicator who was the first person to pay Lee to provide training. Ken Hines, Sunbelt USA, Raleigh, NC the importance and value of offering customers choices. And Ed York, the man people loved to hate because he dreamed of concepts that ticked people off; who showed Lee the value of combining product distribution with training.

Regional Trade Associations Lee's own experience of not having a place to turn when he needed it was a motivating factor in being a founding member of TRSCA (Tristate Specialty Cleaners and Restorers Association). When TRSCA was founded in the early 1970s, carpet cleaners were secretive and mistrusting of each other due to lack of knowledge and there wasn't anywhere locally to attain knowledge.

Pemberton's Cleaning & Restoration Supply In the early 1970s while there were sales reps peddling truck mounted carpet cleaning equipment there were no local or regional distributors in Pennsylvania. Lee, a ProChem customer purchase larger quantities of chemicals to obtain free freight. Lee having extra space warehoused ProChem products and filled local orders. To fill customer demand; Lee became a ProChem distributor. Lee visited Ken Hines in Raleigh for the purpose of purchasing distribution software. Ken impressed Lee with the importance of selling multiple product lines. While manufacturers wanted exclusivity, customers wanted choices. Ken told Lee to provide what customers want. When Lee told Jim Roden that he was going to sell multiple lines to provide what customers want, Jim responded with the most powerful loud silence. Jim thought about it over the weekend and called Lee back on Monday and told Lee that he was right and hoped that he could live with the choice that Lee had made. ProChem and Pemberton's have shared a long and mutually beneficial relationship.

Training Lee always structured information well. With the success of Lee's private training courses and TRSCA events; Lee became a popular speaker and trainer for other regional associations. Presenters needed to have their ducks in a row and know what they were talking about when presenting to the tough audiences of New Jersey and New York trade associations.

Carpet clean war, steamers versus rug scrubbers Prior to WWII wool area rugs dominated. After WW II popcorn nylon carpets became popular. Until 1965 loose rugs were dominant. Popularity of wall-to-wall carpet installation created a demand for on-location carpet cleaning. Either shampooing or foam cleaning were the traditional and dominant method(s) for cleaning wall-to-wall carpets. When steam carpet cleaning was introduced the carpet cleaning industry was divided, it was rug scrubbers versus steamers. The scrubbers sought to ban the use of the

term steam in Yellow Page advertising. Both sides had “*test data*” to prove their method was superior. Steam was the “new religion” and the old guard fought viciously against it. Bill Bane (Bane-Clene) started the (SCCA) Steam Carpet Cleaners Association and rallied hundreds of cleaners for a rally in Indianapolis. Bane-Clene was a very effective manufacturer direct to cleaner sales model that proved that a well-trained technician with mediocre equipment could attain good quality results. Bane-Clene recently closed.

How did you get into fire restoration? Insurance adjusters would use our drycleaning and laundry service. When Lee got his first household of smoke damaged clothing, he relied upon the IFI (International Fabricare Institute the drycleaners trade association) to direct him to IFI members who were knowledgeable. When adjusters learn you do something well, they ask you to more. Washing walls, then complete small jobs, larger jobs, on and on. State Farm Insurance introduced Lee to a general contractor resulting in a symbiotic relationship.

What were your biggest business mistakes? Lee considered himself fortunate to have made his biggest mistakes early. While he considers himself to have been lucky, he cautions against relying on luck. “Don’t buy a pig in the poke” no matter how good the deal seems to be because you can lose far more than your investment.

Tips on bringing children into the business? Start early. Build their interest. Teach them the importance and value beyond money of doing a job well done. Treat them fairly, not preferentially nor badly. Pay them fairly. Be honest with them. Let them experience the intangible rewards, they aren’t little adults, they are kids! They won’t have adult stamina. Money won’t buy happiness.

Consumer changes? Carpet cleaning has become a commodity. The industry has forgotten about the consumer. We need to show the customer more than the lowest price. We need to educate the customer. Recommendations: become part

of the community, speak to church groups, garden groups, furniture stores, carpet and flooring retailers, interior decorators, etc. The industry has bad habits: dress appropriately, body art and piercing may be offensive or frighten the elderly.

Are you a techie? Lee has adopted and shared technology that makes small service companies of 1-10 people better. Remember that you are a marketing company first. Technology drives marketing. The internet offers high quality lower cost advertising. Due to improvements in equipment and chemistry, technicians can work years longer.

What do you see when you look in the crystal ball? The opportunity to grow bigger and stronger. General practitioners and specialists. Specialists in repair, installation, color repair, etc.

Trends? Consumers are cautious about who to let into their home. Education and professionalism build trust. Consumers trust businesses with brick and mortar. We've become a wasteful throw-away society with money to spend.

What would you like to be remembered for? Sharing needed and valuable information with small businesses. Involvement in being a part of grassroots distance learning.

ROUNDUP-

Dieter Weyel- Running a business sounds better than it is. Dieter owns a sewing machine and knows how to sew. There was a commercial sewing machine factory in Dieter's hometown in Germany. As a kid he worked there repairing sewing equipment. After repair the machines need to be test operated; so Dieter learned how to sew from testing the machines. Dieter later got a job sewing sails for boats. Lee provided valuable tips on survival e.g. employees work 9-5 owners often work much longer. As a teacher, Dieter learns something every time he teaches. Teaching

is a give and take. Sometimes the most valuable learning occurs during conversations after the class.

Lee Pemberton- Appreciated the opportunity to talk from the heart and hope that the listeners found value.

Z-Man signing off