

Building Company Culture Vital to Retention Success with Edwin Eaton

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Tim Clagg: Welcome to the Business of Cleaning podcast for the month of May, your number one source for information on the commercial cleaning industry. We release new episodes monthly, live from the Janitorial Manager studio located in Toledo, Ohio. I'm Tim Clagg, the marketing communication specialist at Double A Solutions and your host for the Business of Cleaning podcast. Today's episode is titled "Building Company Culture: Vital to Retention Success." And this month, we have a gentleman whose business has had a lot of success in building a culture and retention, we're talking with Edwin Eaton, owner of iPro Building Services in blueprint, janitorial consulting. Edwin started iPro Building Services in 2013, and now they've been able to expand across three states ranging from Washington, Oregon, and Idaho, and continue to grow in the Pacific Northwest. Welcome aboard, Edwin. Can you believe that this summer will mark 10 years since you started this journey with your company?

01:09

Edwin Eaton: It's crazy to think that, yeah. July 1st is 10 years, and it doesn't feel like 10 years. It just feels like it started just a couple of months ago, just how crazy things are. But yeah, it's amazing to think that.

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Tim Clagg: What a perfect way to kick off the Fourth of July weekend. I'm sure with everything that you guys do, we'll discuss employee retention and culture. You guys have something pretty special planned.

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Edwin Eaton: Yeah, we actually did a live radio event this weekend for a local pro basketball team in town and just kind of got our feet wet with some event planning. We also did something at the local bowling alley as well with the basketball team. And I've got to say, I have a deep appreciation for event planners, because this is not an easy thing to do. So yeah.

01:55

Tim Clagg: The commercial cleaning industry wasn't even on your radar when you were a student attending the University of Washington. Go, Bruins, the Conference of Champions. At least we can

agree on that for a few more years before UCLA moves to the Big 10. But you were really focusing on Hospitality Management until your roommate's uncle contacted you guys for some help. Of course, like all college kids, you need money, right? Especially for that weekend nightlife. Of course, you guys jumped at the chance to make some spare change. What were your first impressions when you helped, having no prior experience in the industry? Did you think that hit the fast-forward button and you would see yourself starting your own company, and creating this nice movement that you guys have in your business?

02:49

Edwin Eaton: I think starting a company, yes. Starting a commercial cleaning company, no. It took a little arm-twisting for my college roommate to convince me to help out. But you know, I thought very highly of his uncle and things that he did within his company. So, I thought, let's do it. Let's see what happens. Again, like you mentioned, it was beer money for us, right? And so, it was one of those where they had three banks in our area, and they just needed some extra cleaners to hold over until they could find some replacements in that area. And so we did it. That's kind of how I got into the industry. And you know, honestly, I enjoyed it. There was nobody overseeing us. It was fast-paced. We had a time budget to get things done. So yeah, I got my feet wet and kind of sparked my interest for the industry.

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Tim Clagg: Would it be fair to say that if this occurrence hadn't happened, maybe the butterfly effect would be a little bit different for you, and not even ending up in the commercial cleaning industry with your business?

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Edwin Eaton: It's crazy to think that I've never been asked that question. But thinking back on it, if this experience hadn't happened, if we didn't get that phone call to help out, I don't think I would be in the commercial cleaning industry. You know, I was in school and working in the hotels, and I've actually talked to some of the people I helped train in the hotel industry and some ex-teammates from there, and they're all across the US working in different hotels, and still in that industry. I really think I'd still be in that industry. And I'm glad that that phone call came around and my roommate twisted my arm to get into this industry [Tim and Edwin laugh].

04:27

Tim Clagg: After graduation, you move back to Wenatchee. I've been practicing, I want to make sure I got that correct. And you mentioned working in the hotel industry. When did you reach back out to your roommate's uncle to pursue working in the industry?

04:46

Edwin Eaton: Sure! Well, you know, coming from Seattle, there's every chain hotel you can think of over there, and the money to be made in that market is amazing. Coming to Wenatchee, which you said right, awesome, [laugh]! Not a lot of people can pronounce that name. But, you know, coming back here, there are a lot of hotels here now, but back in the day, there weren't. Making the kind of money that I was making in Seattle here just wasn't happening. The only reason I actually moved back home was to take care of my parents. I'm an only child, and they both had some health issues. I had always

promised them growing up that I would come back and take care of them. But seeing the way the hotel industry was, there just wasn't a lot of money to be made. And I thought, "What can I do?" Having an entrepreneur-type spirit, I wanted to start my own business but didn't know where to start. Then I thought, "Well, you know, we cleaned some banks back in college, and it didn't seem too difficult. I wonder if I can just make a phone call and see if he'd be interested." So, I reached out to him, and he felt like it was a good idea. I mentioned that eventually, I wanted to start my own company, but he said, "Let's just do this, you run my operations over there, but I only have enough to support you for one month. And if you can make it happen in a month, then we can progress from there, and then see if we can continue to grow that."

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Tim Clagg: You mentioned that you didn't really have any true formal training. How much of it was trial and error? And how quickly were you able to be an independent thinker, observe, and then make those corrections to implement the next time?

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Edwin Eaton: Sure, yeah, everything was trial and error. But you know what, the background that I had, just with hospitality it brought me through from customer service to sales and managing people. So, I kind of had that background and the ability to go out and knock on doors and speak to people. That wasn't an issue for me. So, it took off in a hurry. And as we started adding more accounts, it was like, "Oh, I don't have any employees. It's just me. So now I've got to do the cleaning. And I've got to sell." But yeah, I mean, with the background that I had, it was a good fit. But learning the industry, I'm always learning. Since college, being in this industry, I'm still learning every day. There's something new that comes around, and there's always something to learn.

07:13

Tim Clagg: I like that mentality because I always discuss that with people in whatever industry they're in. If you're not learning something new every day and if you have 100% of the knowledge and everything figured out, then your life is complete. There's no purpose. So I really liked that style of thinking that you embody. You saw how much potential there was in the industry with this opportunity. You wanted to expand and you went to him with some plans that you had about expanding, but it was met with some reservation. What were the concerns from his end, that he maybe said, I don't know, I'm not sure if we want to expand?

07:58

Edwin Eaton: Really, it boils down to money. There just wasn't a lot of money there. I always say to myself, "No risk, no reward." And you've got to take that risk. But he wasn't willing to take that risk. So, we continued on with our daily stuff. But it reached a point where we were just really butting heads. I really wanted to make the jump and expand. We had some clients in town who had businesses in other areas, but it just wasn't an option. He'd say "We can't support it, we can't do this, we can't do that," and it just didn't work. And so eventually, we sat down and talked, and we decided on a mutual separation. He was going to continue to do his thing, and I was going to continue to do mine by starting iPro.

08:41

Tim Clagg: As a new business owner, how much did your background in sales and customer service allow you to quickly build relationships and develop relationships into getting contracts for your company?

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Edwin Eaton: Sure. I mean, it was something new that I had gotten into. Dealing with the dental offices and the insurance offices, and things like that was no problem. I could easily get in and talk to them. And being born and raised in the Wenatchee Valley, I knew a lot of people, so that was easy to get to them. But then as you start getting into the larger clients, that's a lot more difficult. There was a lot of trial-and-error as you mentioned. A lot of learning experiences going there and a lot of failures trying to get into these bigger places. But yeah, just the background itself helped me open a lot of doors and start learning.

09:34

Tim Clagg: You mentioned something that's close and dear to my heart, family. Family over everything. You moved back to the area, to take care of your parents, and to start this new business. Your wife helped you out doing so many of the day-to-day tasks to help make sure that this adventure was going to be a success.

09:56

Edwin Eaton: She did. She was in the banking industry for about 10 plus years. We dabbled a little bit in eBay. I used to sell just some things on there. I mean, you and I were both card collectors, that's kind of a hobby of mine. And so, I dabbled in that a little bit. And it was making some money doing that. And my wife who's never played a sport in her whole life, she met some friends through the bank who were in a hockey league, a Women's Hockey League, and they convinced her to play. I mean, for a person that's never played a sport, I think hockey is a pretty difficult sport to pick up and play, right? So, she got into that. And through that, she met some people who were part of this company that sells corsets, people that don't know, you think Kim Kardashian and things like that, that wear the corsets. And so she basically got into this situation where they asked her, we've got somebody that's down in Texas that resells some of the corsets that get returned on the regular, and we know you do eBay, would you be interested in maybe selling them. And so the next thing you know, our garage is filled with all these bins of corsets. And my wife said, "You know, what, I have enough supply here, and I'm selling enough on this, that I can actually quit my job and help support you do this." And so that made me feel a lot better, it kind of took that edge off a little bit. She was doing the day-to-day stuff for me, once we got employees, she was doing the payroll. Any type of paperwork that we needed to do for certain contracts. She was even going out there and helping me with cleaning and stuff like that, too. I mean, she was a tremendous help getting this off the ground. I owe a lot to her for what she did, leaving a well-paying job to, again, take a risk. And let's see where this goes.

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Tim Clagg: Where there's risk, there's great reward, and you guys have certainly been able to achieve some high rewards here. Wenatchee is a city, that's right around 55,000 people. And you guys were expanding pretty quickly. Let's dive into the dedication and what it takes to be able to reach and get new areas growing because that's a process in itself. And especially too at this point, it was just still the two of you.

12:27

Edwin Eaton: It was, yeah. And as we started to build the Wenatchee area, we felt comfortable finally hiring our first employee. That kind of took a lot off our plate, to be able to continue to grow some more. And so, it spiraled from one employee to two employees, to three employees. And then we had a couple of customers. When I was with the other company that said, "Hey, we've got another office that's about an hour away, we love your services here, would you be interested in doing that?" I'm not the type of guy that's going to tell you no, if I see an opportunity, I'm going to go for it. So, I hopped in the car, drove out there, took a look at the other office, and put a proposal together. They said, let's do this, "When can you start?" We can start as soon as you need us to start. Okay, you're going to start next Monday. And so, again, we're off and running in a new area, and I don't have anybody doing it. So, I had to take care of it. But this time around, I have some employees on board that I can take with me to assist me with that. And so, we've kind of taken that mentality, we're not in a new area that we want to expand to, but we pick up something, we've got the employee support to help us get that going. And buy us some time to find some workers, supervisors, and management staff.

13:36

Tim Clagg: Before you guys expanded, right at this point before you started hiring those couple of people to help you, how exhausted were you? Because that's the thing a lot of people don't realize. You're putting in long hours because it's just you and your wife. Nobody else. And you're working six days a week. There's very little time off to enjoy hobbies and have some "you" time. So, at that point before that expansion, how exhausted were you?

14:07

Edwin Eaton: Well, being from Washington, he's not with the Seahawks anymore, but Russell Wilson, his hashtag was, there's no time to sleep, right? And that's pretty much what it was. There wasn't even enough time to lie down and close my eyes for very long at all because I'm back at it again. So, it was physically and mentally exhausting. But you just got to kind of push through that as a business owner to get to the top of that mountain and see the other side. I look back at it now, a lot of employees will see me now in the office doing office work and they're like, "Well, he says he actually goes out in the field." They don't know the story, but then they actually see me out in the field. And next thing with social media, they're making a TickTock or Snapchatting people that, "Hey, the boss is out. He's out here cleaning and doing stuff too." So, I still get out there in the field, because I know what it's like. But yeah, just physically and mentally exhausting getting through those first few years.

15:07

Tim Clagg: And what you just said, that goes a long way of earning respect, right? That's obviously an employee-owner relationship you want. That when they see you out there, getting your hands dirty, it just elevates that respect to a whole new level. That he isn't just pushing papers in here, he can get down and dirty with us out here in the field as well.

15:29

Edwin Eaton: Absolutely, I mean, that's, that's the biggest thing when they see upper management or even the owner out there doing something, then it makes them feel a little bit better about what they're doing as well. But you know, I tell them, I'm not afraid to get out there and clean the toilet if I need to if

there's an issue and you guys need me, I'll get out there. We've been jam-packed doing a lot of final construction cleaning, and we're not short-staffed by any means, but we've taken on a lot of work. And so just last week, we needed some floor work done. So, we grabbed the van, and the trailer loaded up the floor machines, I, the general manager, and our HR director went out there and took care of some work. It didn't need to be done that day. But we were helping out the staff to cut down the workload for them. It means a lot to them when they see us out there, and they know that we've got their back and we'll do whatever it takes to help them out.

16:16

Tim Clagg: We're speaking with Edwin Eaton, owner of iPro Building Services and owner of Blueprint Janitorial Consulting. Marketing is such a priceless tool in any industry, especially in the commercial cleaning industry. Something I know you and your company have tremendous pride in is your brand recognition. I look at your background and I see the zip-up, that's one piece, the baseball bat, the custom Nikes, and the sponsorship in the upper right-hand corner. You have four different pieces of company branding in your office alone. How invaluable is it, and if you can stress that to somebody just starting out in the industry, how crucial and vital is that?

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Edwin Eaton: Marketing is huge, and I always tell this story. I can't remember where I was going for vacation. I had this vest on with the iPro logo and the guy sitting next to me was like, "Oh, that's a cool vest, what is iPro?" So, it's a talking piece. If you go out and you put on a piece of clothing like Nike, you're representing that brand. But if you have your own business, and you've got your own logos, you should be representing your brand everywhere that you go. I feel very highly about that. And so, every vehicle that we have is branded. It's progressed through the years, but we now have the Pacific Northwest theme that we put together. And so that just incorporates all the areas that we clean, and then the iPro logo is there. Every single cleaning technician and floor care specialist has a shirt. There's a logo on the front and a logo on the back. They have beanies and hats for the wintertime with the logo on them. We do sponsorships with local sports, the pro basketball team here in town, the hockey rink, billboards, and radio. We get our name out there as much as possible. The biggest thing is people don't think about cleaning companies, but when they see this logo, a lot of people around town know what it is. And I call that Toma, and I heard that before, and so you know top-of-mind awareness. That's all we're doing. So yeah, they're not thinking of a cleaning company, but the second that they are, we hope, and we better be the first cleaning company that they think of

18:40

Tim Clagg: When building a brand for your company, you want it to pop and stand out. Your company's colors certainly stand out and catch the eye immediately. So how much time went into not just coming up with a logo, but making sure it can be used in everything? You mentioned custom wraps for your vehicles. We need something that is going to stand out, pop, and be an eye-catcher.

19:06

Edwin Eaton: Absolutely, I mean that's the biggest thing. They may not know the logo, but when they see a color that sticks out, it catches their attention. Suddenly, they're drawn to whatever marketing you have on that piece, and they'll go back to look at it and read it. With the hopes of calling, you or going to your website. Color-wise, lime green just came to the forefront for us because really pops. Any color

that you put on black pops, but if you put lime green, it really pops. I mean if you can kind of see over here the jerseys that we have that are up there. That pops, and that sticks out, even though you can't really see it but the color pops and so it catches your attention. And so, it's just something that will catch your attention to draw you in so that you can see what else is on there.

19:51

Tim Clagg: How much of the design and the colors went off your love for the Seattle Seahawks?

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Edwin Eaton: [laughs] Actually, now that I think about it, maybe a little bit. I'm a big basketball fan, so the Sonics with the green and the Pacific Northwest, with all the trees and the greenery that we have here kind of stuck with the color and goes with the theme and the brand.

20:12

Tim Clagg: And of course, marketing carries over to social media. And not just taking part, but being engaging, and having a presence online. Social media platforms like Facebook, and especially yourself, I know you post content, pretty much daily on your personal page on your LinkedIn. Those are tools that get recognized and picked up by everybody. It's a good way for somebody who may not know what iPro is. They may come across some of your information, see what you guys are doing on social media and decide they want to do business with you.

20:48

Edwin Eaton: Absolutely, we've gotten a lot of business, just from social media itself. It starts with Facebook and Instagram, and for new business owners, it's free to just create your own account. You see it as a platform to tell your story. Throughout the years, it's progressed, to all the different social media outlets, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, YouTube, LinkedIn, everything. And so, it's an opportunity for us to tell our story. The biggest thing with us is we still post a lot of the work that we do but mostly we use it to celebrate our employees. That's the biggest thing with us now with our social media, to push our employees. We celebrate them in the office, but we want to make sure other people see it too. We've been able to create celebrations for employee anniversaries that come up and post out on social media. It's become a frenzy with the employees here, they'll say, "Hey, I got an anniversary coming up next month, when are you coming down to the office to take the picture of me and post that on social media, I want my family and friends to see that." So, it's a great feeling for me, but it's a great feeling for them too. And you say, this is going to be 10 years in business, and I'm thankful for every employee that we have. To be able to do something, which seems as little as putting them on social media to me, but to them, that's just a huge thing that it's almost like they become a local celebrity when it gets posted.

22:17

Tim Clagg: That fits right in with what we are going to be spending a lot of time in this episode on company culture and retention to the most important things in any business, but especially the commercial cleaning industry that sees right now around a 200% turnover rate. And you guys have managed some of the things you just talked about, celebrating birthdays. When did you realize that this was something that you and the company needed to spend more time evaluating, and appreciating these employees?

22:53

Edwin Eaton: Yeah, I think it clicked a few years back. We would have little employee meetings and things like that, and there wasn't a whole lot of interaction, it was just the supervisor, the manager, and myself talking to the staff. And that was that there'd be some pizza or some food and drinks but there wasn't a lot of engagement. After a few of those meetings, I thought, what can we do to have them come in and not just another meeting? How can we get them engaged and do fun things? It was doing fun things for them. Giveaways, and asking them questions, then people started getting into it. Then it clicked even more with me, we had the opportunity after the pandemic to purchase an office building. It was our main headquarters building and I saw it as an opportunity to design the office in a way that is going to be kind of a cool factor for the employees to come in. We designed it in a way that just makes it a cool place where people want to come to work. We're a janitorial company, there's nothing glamorous about what we do. Cleaning toilets and picking up trash, but if we can make the experience for the employees, when they first come to work, be engaged, want to come to work every day, and have fun by the time they leave the office, they're going to put in 100% when they're out there in the field, doing what they're supposed to be doing.

24:10

Tim Clagg: One of the things that you and your company have had so much success in is selling your employees. Normally you go to a social media page, or even on Google, you come across reviews or even the company's website. However, you sell your employees to both your customers and future customers as well.

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Edwin Eaton: We do! With a lot of cleaning companies, especially ones that are well established and have been in business for a while, you add your references piece. All the references are like businesses that the current customer you're going after. We encourage our potential clients to look at our social media, our LinkedIn, to see our employees, that's a big thing that we do. It's like, "Hey, this employee has been with us for five years. This is the employee that's going to be in your facility cleaning," You know who this person is, there's a little blurb that tells all about them and things like that. And then when we do start the accounts, we give them a little blurb that this is the person so that they trust us more, and they feel more comfortable with this person that's going to be in their account. It's not going to be a different person every single night, it's going to be the same person. For example, this is John. John is your cleaner every night, he likes rock bands. Doing that, our customers when it comes to the holidays, they're giving gifts to our cleaners, it's almost like it's their second family. They're taking care of our cleaners because they know that our cleaners are taking care of their facility. It's gone a long way celebrating employees.

25:58

Tim Clagg: That goes a long way too. One thing that you've been really engaged in, is letting your team leaders and employees get involved in the company meetings, not just having a voice but running, researching, and gathering information on a specific topic that's assigned to you or a topic that they may research and come up with on their own.

26:25

Edwin Eaton: Yeah, it's been a great tool for us. I had a general manager back in the hospitality days, who would conduct weekly manager meetings with an open Q&A session. Managers could ask questions to the General Manager. I brought that concept here. Having normal manager meetings was great, but it didn't seem like the employees were engaged and fully grasping the information we were trying to give them. So, it started that way with the manager meetings, and then it slowly progressed, and we found different ways to get everybody to interact. We have three different offices, and multiple managers and supervisors in each office. The ones that are here don't see the ones down in Oregon, hardly ever. So the best way to do it is with technology, especially in the pandemic, Zoom became the go-to platform. We can hop on Zoom, and have our manager meetings. I always start it, and we always start with the question, "What's one success you had throughout the week, or the last week?" It opens the gate for them to start conversing with each other. And then it's progressed to me talking to bringing on special guests, not just guests that are in the cleaning industry itself, but other people with leadership roles and things like that. I give them little topics if they want to speak to the staff, and they do that. That too progressed to picking two managers every week, to do a presentation to the management staff during the meeting. It could be how to run a staff meeting, or, how to handle an employee that complains a lot, and you would handle this. So, with them, they come to the meeting, and it starts with them speaking for 5-10 minutes, everybody's nervous, but the whole point of it is to get them comfortable with sharing ideas and being able to speak to the staff. It's progressed from them just speaking to putting on full-blown PowerPoint presentations for everybody, and they're figuring out what works and what doesn't work, and if we're critiquing them or congratulating them. And the cool thing about it is they wouldn't see each other before, and they're calling each other now. Asking for advice, like "How did you handle this situation?" and on the manager meeting, they're thanking each other. Their successes are, "So and so helped me out last week, with this situation that I had." It's been a great tool, and it's worked. Creating that company culture starts with the management team, and if they understand the culture, really feel it, and vibe with it, they share that with the staff as well. And I can see that with the staff meetings that they're putting on now too.

29:04

Tim Clagg: It's been a great resource and a good measuring tool for you to see the potential. Because of these meetings, you've been able to see who may be a good fit for a management role down the line or who's ready right now?

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Edwin Eaton: Absolutely! Again, it's trial and error when you do this. I've always said, a great cleaner isn't necessarily a great supervisor or manager, and a great supervisor manager isn't necessarily a great cleaner. So, you have to find some kind of balance there. And I've told the story before, but I've had this cleaner, she's been with me, and I think this year is her six-year anniversary. A great cleaner, OCD. She's the kind of girl that will get on her hands and knees and clean the baseboards, even though it's only supposed to be done once a month on the scope of work. She's out there doing it nightly, her eye for detail was great. I thought, this is great, she's been with us the longest at the time, and I thought it's a great fit to elevate her to a supervisory role. We trained her for a month or two, and we felt very comfortable, cut her loose on a Friday night, which is usually our busiest night. I came in Saturday morning, I had left my golf clubs at the office to pick them up to go golfing and just about 10 in the morning, and she started at four o'clock the night prior. And she was in there, bloodshot red eye, typing up her nightly recap. And because she was out there on her hands and knees and every single

account doing things that were supposed to be done on a nightly basis, and not really interacting with the employee, she just wanted to clean, clean, clean. And so, I thought, I don't think you're going to be a good fit for a supervisory role. I think you're just a cleaner. And she completely agreed. She's like, "You know what cleaning is my passion. That's what I want to do, I don't really have a path to interact with and be in charge of other employees." And so, I understood that. These meetings and everything give us a good opportunity to really evaluate everybody and see where they're at.

31:05

Tim Clagg: What type of employees are you looking for? I heard somebody recently, when I was listening to a podcast, say, I don't want an employee that's worked for several cleaning companies, I would rather hire someone that has no experience, but shows the hunger and thirst for knowledge and to learn.

31:23

Edwin Eaton: I can go both ways on that one. Somebody that has a lot of experience, that's always good, but there's also the bad that they're stuck in their old ways, and they don't want to take on, the way that we do things. And I've seen that. Then there are some that have been in the industry for a while and adapt and change. That part of it is good. Usually, somebody that's fresh, and knows nothing about the cleaning industry. The big thing is common sense, you think it's common, but there's not a lot of it out there. And so, we've kind of looked at that. Some of the questions that we ask in the interviews aren't really pertained to cleaning, it's just common sense type questions. If they knock it out of the park on that, then we bring them in and start training them, and we see from that point. Both works, it's just the type of mentality and mindset that they have.

32:16

Tim Clagg: Finding that person that understands what the company goals are and has the right personality. How important is that, because you were discussing earlier, you may have had an employee that may be disgruntled. How important is it to get somebody that's going to buy in right away with the culture, if you don't have somebody like that, that sometimes rubs off down the line. If you get somebody like that, who isn't buying into the team and weighs in with the company's goals and objectives, then it could quickly trickle down the line. One person becomes a few, so making sure you're getting that right person is vital.

32:57

Edwin Eaton: Yeah, it's very vital, and it can become a huge issue. We call it, it's almost like cancer. Having cancer within the company. It can bankrupt a company if you don't catch it right away. We have had those people in the path, especially with management staff. We had managers who were basically dictators sometimes, and the staff complete rebellion against this manager. We've put together some training programs, and something new that we're doing, as well as we're hiring a leadership coach. This is not just for the management staff, but for any employees that want to be part of it. The coach comes in with tips and tricks, talks to you, and works out issues. I'm starting to invest more in our people, and that's the biggest thing so that I get the right people on board. Between the managers, myself, and the leadership coach, we're able to see and weed out the people that aren't following the company culture that we want.

34:01

Tim Clagg: It's been widely talked about especially in the United States, including Congress in DC, about rolling out a four-day workweek. First of all, is that something you're for? Is that something in your industry that with business continuing to grow, you would want to get to the point where you can offer a four-day workweek? Could you still achieve and hit the numbers and drive revenue? Is that something that you see maybe being achieved in this industry, in the future moving forward?

34:41

Edwin Eaton: I didn't believe it at first. It's difficult in some situations with the cleaners, just depending on what accounts they have, but we're looking into it. Some of the key managers I have, I've actually rolled that out this year with four-day workweeks. It's either a Tuesday start day, or whatever. They'll have at least a three-day weekend. For the management staff and supervisors, it's vital that they get some time away to recharge their batteries and come back fresh. It's actually worked, one of my managers mentioned that she was able to go over and watch some baseball games over in Seattle. She had three days to enjoy it with her family. Whereas before, even if it was Monday through Friday, her phone was still ringing on Saturday and Sunday, and still working. But now they have the opportunity to completely unplug, knowing that there's another manager that's taking over their roles when they're gone. So, they're truly getting their four days and three days off. It's worked with the management staff so far. I'm becoming a believer in the way that the four-day workweeks are working.

35:46

Tim Clagg: It's something that I think is going to be more obtainable and sustainable in the future, in this industry, and right now in the United States as a whole to keep an eye on. Three years removed from COVID, what are some things that you saw? You mentioned that you had to make some eye-opening changes. The industry did lose some smaller cleaning businesses, but what really opened your eyes during that time off, which you implemented right away to make changes in your company?

36:18

Edwin Eaton: With us, something that was great, knock on wood, is that we got busier when COVID hit. The biggest thing was the support that we had from our suppliers before COVID hit. Obviously, there's still the cold and flu season that's going on, but electrostatic guns were already in place before the pandemic hit. Luckily, before it hit, we already had a few within our staff to be able to go out there for cold and flu season. It just happened that when the pandemic hit, these electrostatic guns just took off, and everybody needed to get them. If you didn't get one, you were hurting to try and figure out how to disinfect places. I think that was the downfall of a lot of cleaning companies. Luckily, we were able to get our hands on a lot more and be able to do that. Cleaning is now in the limelight because to keep these businesses open, now that people are coming away from home and being asked to come back into the office, they need to make sure everything's disinfected and cleaned to keep everybody healthy. So, for us, it's given us an opportunity with the pandemic to change some policies and procedures on how we do things, especially when it comes to disinfection and our cleaning procedures in each location that we're at. From restrooms to kitchens, and break rooms. It's really strengthened what we do, and it's strengthened what we tell our clients that we're going to do for them as well.

37:43

Tim Clagg: You recently started Blueprint Janitorial Consulting. How important is it to be able to offer a service like this, and be a mentor for someone looking to start and break into the industry with their own commercial cleaning business?

37:58

Edwin Eaton: Yeah, I just thought it was a great segway for what I've been through. Ten years this year of all the failures and the successes that I've had, and I see a lot of consultants that are out there in the cleaning industry. I couldn't put a percentage on it, but I know it's a pretty high percentage that a lot of these consultants haven't been active in the cleaning industry, or they haven't had their own cleaning company. I've been through that, and felt it was a good opportunity for me because I was getting phone calls and emails like, "Hey, can you help me out with this? Can you help me out with that?" I helped a guy out in Florida secure a \$90,000 a month account and didn't charge him a dime for it. I was happy to help him look through the numbers and get things going, and it was awesome when he won that account. So, I thought, if I can help him, I want to help other businesses. I've got a good list of clients that I'm helping grow their cleaning business. They listen to things that I've told them, things that I failed at, and things that I have been successful with, and it's working in their businesses.

39:11

Tim Clagg: That's one area that's lacking right now across all industries, that next generation of mentors. I've been fortunate and blessed to have some great mentors throughout my career. It really is important, especially if somebody is looking to go all in just like you did. Understanding your story, the trials and tribulations. That there are going to be good days, and there are going to be bad days. Giving back that's what it's all about, and you truly take that into perspective in your heart.

39:44

Edwin Eaton: Yeah, and I took it a step further and created a local networking group with three other guys through their local businesses here in town. One is in the automotive industry, the other in the real estate industry, and one in the insurance industry, and we're called Entrepreneurs Edge. We have a meeting once a month, and we invite one new business to come to be a part of our group, for a Q&A session. We bring food and drinks, and we tell them our story. Then we open it up to them, asking "What do you need help with, tell us your story, what's going on." I had the first meeting at my office, and I had a full spread that Charcuterie boards, some whiskey, and beer. The next meeting the other guy, has this custom Ford Mustang pool table, cigars, and drinks, and it's fully catered. We take pride in it because we want to make sure that they see what we're about. We want to share our stories and help them grow. The pro basketball team, you see their poster there, they got awarded the franchise three months before the season started. So, collectively, we took our expertise and helped them when they came to our meeting. We helped with marketing, getting a ton of sponsors, and we've been doing events for them. They've been leaning on us as their mentors to really help them move the needle for the team. That's the biggest thing for anybody that's been in business and has had success. To be able to give back and share with the other businesses that truly need help.

41:25

Tim Clagg: When you've been helping, doing consulting. What are some of the big issues that you're seeing people have who are just getting started in this industry? What mistakes would you tell any listener right now?

41:48

Edwin Eaton: The last three cleaning company owners that I spoke to, were all cleaners. They knew nothing about business when they got into it, and they felt because they were good cleaners, that it was just a segway for them to own their own cleaning company. However, what they discovered is that there is a lot to it. You need to know how to sell, how to talk to people, and the customer relations part of it. What I tell them is, in real estate, it's location, location, location, but in the commercial cleaning industry, it's communication, communication, communication. That's the biggest thing that I try to let everybody know. You can never over-communicate in this industry, and that's the biggest thing. Communicating with your managers, communicating with your employees, and communicating with your client. It goes a long way, and a lot of people have listened to that, it makes a big difference. The biggest thing I see is there are no business plans put together, and they're not prepared when they jump into it what steps they should take. I've been trying to help them figure out where to start. Like "What are the types of businesses that are in your area? Who can we target? How can I help you get this or that?" And we go from there.

43:04

Tim Clagg: You have a chance after the 10th-anniversary bash on July 1st when you have a chance to sit back and take things in. What will be your goals for the company in the next 10 years, in the new heights, and what do you want to achieve?

43:22

Edwin Eaton: Sure. Just your question alone, if my college roommate's uncle didn't contact us - that's just crazy to of. 10 years from now, I've got my son, he's my stepson, but I've been in his life since he was three, he actually just added a hyphen to his last name and added my last name to it. He caught me off guard as a surprise on my birthday, went to the courthouse, and I thought, "Oh, man, what did he do?", and it was to meet in front of the judge and to get that official. My last name to his. It was very cool. So, 10 years from now, he's been in the business since he was 16, he's 21 now, and he's seen everything. It's progressing him to get him to learn, and hopefully, take it over, and go from there. My wife tells me to slow down and stop growing, and I tell her, I can't stop growing because if I stopped growing, something could happen and you could lose. For me, it's to sit back a little bit more and not put so much effort into continuing to grow the business but to transfer my effort into growing my staff and growing my management team.

44:41

Tim Clagg: And continue that excellence that you've had already for 10 years. That will certainly be your stamp, excellence, attention to detail, and going above and beyond. You mentioned it at the top of the podcast, we had a chance in our introductory call to talk about sports. You're a big sports guy. And we're both in the hobby of sports card collecting. But it's not just you that has that passion, it's also your daughter who's involved. You guys have built a bond, collecting cards, and have your own eBay store. How special has that time to develop this mutual interest in the hobby?

45:23

Edwin Eaton: It's pretty cool, I've been doing it since I was younger. There was a card shop that opened up here in town, and I just said, "Hey, let's go take a look," she was never really into it. We went in there, and she saw the cards, got into it, then we opened up a pack. The first pack and I think I told

you, was a 1990s Junk wax and NBA hoops. She opened it up, and the fourth card in was Michael Jordan, that was her favorite player. And that was it, she was hooked.

45:51

Tim Clagg: The goat, in my opinion, no discussion about any of that, he's hands down the goat.

45:58

Edwin Eaton: I agree. I agree.

It's been big, then she got into the fact that she sees me, my wife, and iPro. Then saw my wife doing eBay, and she has the business sense. So, she said, "Dad, we should start a store and sell these on eBay, we can make some money off of them, that gives us more money to go buy some more cards." And I thought, if you want to do it, we can set it up. It's called DDC cards, daddy-daughter cards, and that's our eBay store. I've taken most of the work on it, she just pulls all the cards and says, "hey, you should send those in, get them graded." When there's a sale, I've got to package everything, but she's been helping with that as well. It's pretty cool to share a hobby with my kids.

46:52

Tim Clagg: That's awesome. I'm a new father, 7 months old at home. Certainly, I hope that's something that I can pass along. Who knows, you mentioned your son taking over the business, maybe she will get involved as well.

47:04

Edwin Eaton: I think she has that business sense; she's going to get into it. She's been folding her eggs as it is, so she knows.

47:10

Tim Clagg: Edwin, I appreciate you coming on the show, sharing your knowledge, your secrets in retention, company culture, and the consulting side of things in the industry right now. Where can people follow you and the company online as well, if they want to give you a follow?

47:26

Edwin Eaton: Yeah, we've been talking about social media. So we're all over there. You can check me out on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram. Our website, it's kind of unique, there's no .com. It's just worryfree.cleaning/. So, really quick, because I'm a big sports fan, and we talked briefly. You were telling me that your mentor was Iron Eagle? That's pretty cool.

47:51

Tim Clagg: He's been a good friend of mine for the last couple of years. He'll be taking over for Kevin Harlan next year as the voice of March Madness. Knowing him for only two years, I've felt like we've been good friends for about 20 years. He's certainly provided me with some great feedback to apply to my game as a broadcaster. One of those people that helps make you a better person along the way, and that's what it's all about. Improving to be better at our lives, be better at working, and at broadcasting, or just in our personal lives.

48:28

Edwin Eaton: Absolutely, and that's one heck of a mentor to have.

48:30

Tim Clagg: It is certainly is, such a great guy! That will conclude this month's edition of the Business of Cleaning Podcast. Be sure to subscribe to us on Spotify, Apple podcast, Google podcast, or wherever you get your podcast from. From everyone at Janitorial Manager, my guest, Edwin Eaton. I'm Tim Clagg saying so long. Until next time!