

From Flatline to Fresh Start: Cleaning for Health

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Tim Clagg

Welcome into The Business of Cleaning Podcast 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 for Janitorial Manager and your host of the Business of Cleaning Podcast. This month we welcome Joel Craddock, president of Doc's Facility Solutions, Inc. His company was recently awarded Small Business of the Year in the Greater Rochester, New York Region. Welcome to the show, Joe, we're so glad that we could connect with you, and you challenged me right away, in our introductory conversation, asking me how I clean my individual office space, and how many different Lysol wipes because that's what I was using. I used to! You made me stop and think about these things that I never really question is why I do this?

Joel Craddock

Well, that is the question, and that's why I ask most people that. Prospects, business associates, my staff, when they're first hired, and even other business owners. I belong to a couple of networking groups where I work with and interact with several business owners and high-level salespeople. And, you know, asking that question, it's like, how does this happen? And why does it happen? And as I told you that day, most of the information people have in the cleaning world comes one of two ways. They come from us growing up as kids and well, that's the way I was taught by mom and dad or my grandparents or whatever. But more importantly, we all sat in front of a TV. And we would see these "This is the smell of clean, fresh flowers" or a "cool dewy morning", or you write something on the wall, and then wipe it away instantly, once you spray with the chemical. All of those fallacies in the marketing world are just that, a fallacy.

Tim Clagg

And I'm starting to learn that more and more and more, and I want to dive into your career. 40 years ago, the industry journey began going back to you as a young man, your first cleaning job started in your church for a quarter. What do you remember? What do you remember most from that first experience? And what are some of the key things from that first job that has always stuck with you even now, 40 years later?

Joel Craddock

Well, the first thing I realized was maybe even based on something my father told me as a kid. And that is you wake up every morning, and then there was something called a newspaper. I don't know how

many newspapers exist today, but you would open up and you look at the obituaries. And my father used to tell us, if you don't see your name, in the obituary, your employer expects you to be to work. So that was instilled very early in my thought process about if I woke up that morning, my employer expected me to show up. So, responsibility is what Dad taught me from a very early age. And also, the fact that while you do something and you get paid for it. Now people may say, well, a quarter an hour, why would you get out of bed for that? Well, when you're a kid, back in the late 70s, and early 80s, a quarter was a lot. And I saved that up and I was able to buy stuff for myself. And I even told my parents at one point, hey, that the dollar a week allowance that I'm getting, I don't need any more. I'm a self-made man, I make my own money in the family needs that dollar more than I do. So, it really taught me a sense of responsibility from a very young age. What do I take back from that job? It was your employer always expected you to do something for the money that they paid you no matter how much or how little it was, there was an expectation level that you would complete the job thoroughly. And again, being a young man, of course, I tried to cut corners. But when your employer caught you cutting corners, you realize very quickly that it was just easier to do it right the first time and not have to go back and redo it because going back and redoing it ended up meaning that you know, lost out on time with family and friends and things like that because you had to go fix what you didn't do. So, again, a sense of responsibility, but also a sense of don't cut corners.

Tim Clagg

Do it right the first time and you know, you were on the expedited process at a young age for the industry. While in college, you continue to work in the industry for one of the biggest cleaning companies in the Rochester area. And you found yourself already at the age 23 is the youngest operations manager that they had with already several 100 people reporting to you. First of all, at that age, you know, you're still learning as an individual going to school. Was that a little intimidating at first having that many people reporting to you?

Joel Craddock

It was very intimidating. Being a young man at that time, I also think, I see some 23-year-olds in today's day and age, and I think, wow, I was never that mature at the age of 23. I think that I probably had more of a sheltered life than most people, because of the way that we were brought up going to Catholic schools, and things like that. So, I didn't have a lot of interaction with large groups of people back as I was growing up. College was eye-opening for me. But being 23 years old, and responsible for that many people and that amount of business, the thing I can remember from where my one job was, and then the promotion that they gave me, there was no step in between. And I could remember going into the Director of Operations Office, in tears, I'll admit it at 23 years old in tears because I set a very high standard for myself, and I told the operations manager, I said, there's just no way I can do this, I need a stepping stone in between This is beyond my capabilities, I can't do it." And he said something that stuck with me. He goes, the fact that you are this concerned about it tells me I've hired the right person for the job. Because if you didn't care, I'd be worried. He says, you're right, you're not hitting the mile markers that you need to hit right now. But I also know you, and how hard you're going to work to get there and put in the time outside of work, educating yourself to get to the level to handle all this work. So he was right, I was wrong. I was able to handle it, but it was just so much out of my zone and my comfort zone at that time. And I see things posted on social media all the time about you know, when you stay in your comfort zone, there's no growth. Well, I grew a lot as a 23-year-old young man with my

responsibilities at work, and I was married, and we had a home, car payments and everything else. So I mean, there was there was a lot of responsibility on my plate at that time.

Tim Clagg

And how are you able to land the opportunity at such a young age in the industry?

Joel Craddock

You want the truth?

Tim Clagg

Well, like Jack Nicholson says "you can't handle the truth". Right?

Joel Craddock

Well, it's funny. I mean, I think part of it was my education. In the commercial cleaning industry, a lot of people come into it without having a college background, and I did. My major was in HR. I remember one-time starting work for that particular company and working my way up through the company, I was originally hired as what they call the troubleshooter. The basic duties were to either fill in for an open routine, somebody who was on vacation help with a new startup. Or if there were enough people that showed up on a given night, you might have been sent to a building where there was a lot of, you know, complaints and trouble that had been going on. And you were there to help solve and read and resolve some of the cleanliness issues. So, there was a construction cleanup job that they had, that they sent us to which was a multi-building location. Each of the buildings was three stories tall, and they had been built and had been vacant for a long time. And the restrooms had a lot to be desired. In essence, to keep it clean and PG version somebody had used a toilet with no water in it, that had been locked up for several years. So basically, all their bacteria continued to grow. So, it came up out of the bowl around the bowl, and then down to the floor. And the two guys I was working with at the time were like, there's no way we're going to clean it. We'll have the new guy do it. So, they came to me and said, hey, we're going to help you clean our restroom. I walked in and saw what they were talking about. I come out like no way am I going to do that! They said, look, if you clean that, we will get you a case of beer. So, I went in for a case of beer, I cleaned the heck out of that toilet. I found out that this was not a toilet that was not on a pedestal this was a wall mount. So, it had grown so much that it looked like it had been a pedestal and we realized it was a wall-mount toilet. So, I cleaned it up all by myself, and my employer kind of thought, well, if you can clean it, you can delegate it. So that's kind of how I got started on that particular road of working within that company. And have an education to go behind it, as well as having been a store manager for a retail location prior to that I had management experience. So, it helped me get kind of a step up in that organization very quickly.

Tim Clagg

On this path, you are headed on the fast track to upper management with this company! What ended up changing that kind of made you walk away from this opportunity after finding so much success? Right away with them.

Joel Craddock

And that is a very good question. Looking back, it was multifaceted. We were one of Rochester, New York's, at that time, largest employers. We had a lot of work. And we lost our largest client, which meant that there were several 1000 layoffs within the company due to losing that work. They rated everybody, kind of drew a line, and said, "Okay, everybody under this level had to go". So, I walked in that day into work, like the day after that account had been closed and cleaned up. We pulled all the equipment out of every single one of the buildings that we had, not knowing what to expect. And when I walked in, to work that one day, with a lot of people missing people that I had looked up to as mentors as people that gave me great guidance and all that. And I think in a way I had survivor syndrome, where it's like, "Why did I survive, and others didn't", who I looked up to as mentors. That resonated very hard with me, and I had a hard time understanding why, and having to be, the person who went and told some of these managers in some of these locations that we had, who had mentored me and helped bring me along and coach me to the success I had at that point. And having them tell them that they no longer had a place within the organization. It was just rough. And I kept in contact with some of the individuals and one of the guys that I had trained had started his own business, and I wanted to go work with him. I was going to be able to do more things because I figured at that point, there was not much more I could do where I was, and what better opportunity than get a ground floor, start with a new company, and be able to make a difference with a company and see how to build a company from the ground up rather than working for an established company. So, I was a glutton for punishment.

Tim Clagg

And again, you took a chance, right? Stepping outside of that comfort zone. And, you know, you took the chance, the first opportunity at a young age, and this was another opportunity that you thrived on. Docks is 11 years old. It's gone through a lot of transitions, you had a partner when you first started this business, and then an opportunity presented itself for you to be the sole owner after, you know, so many people experience burnout in the industry, and you became the 100% owner. However, right away, you guys lost about I think you shared the number 79% in revenue, as Docs was no longer a double certified business.

Joel Craddock

And that's when the other partner stepped away. That's how much work we lost because we were a minority-owned woman-owned business. So just with her stepping away, that created all the work that I could no longer do because I could not fill out the paperwork and everything that needed to be done.

Tim Clagg

And you turned it around, you turned it around. How after losing that much revenue for the first time, because this is a journey we mentioned at the top of the broadcast. So, this is curveball number one thrown at you, you're excited to take the opportunity to be the sole owner. This is kind of your baby, kind of you've molded. What are you thinking? What are you experiencing emotion-wise at this time?

Joel Craddock

Panic. Wondering how I was going to be able to afford the bills for the business, let alone my own personal bills. To the point that I even moved into my office building for almost four years before I bought my house. So, I lived in my office for quite a stretch, which is I guess intrapreneur-ish in the sense that you do whatever it takes to keep your business going. So They cut that, but I tried to save as

much money as I was paying in rent, so that I could have money to apply, you know, for a house and, a mortgage and things, but then having to refocus, because the clients that we were going after were ones that needed double certifications or single certifications to hit check marks within, their organization that say, yes, we're hiring women-owned businesses, yes, we're hiring minority-owned businesses. So, I had to change the focus and go away from jobs that had maybe government backing towards them, or they were in a position where they had to hit numbers for EEOC-type guidelines. So, I had to shift my mindset to find new potential clients. Because I've been in this industry a long time. For me, that was not that big of a mindset shift. But it was scary. Because it here all these other opportunities that mediate turned down in the past, because hey, that's not how we want to build our business. Now, I had to go back and say, oh, you know, "Tim, remember me? "A couple years ago"... Oh, and it was like, well, that's not my, vertical that we're working in, I had to change our verticals, and change our mindset and change our focus, so that we could, you know, establish ourselves again, and hire back the people that we had to lay off with that much loss of work and build ourselves back up. So, it was a scary time again, you know, outside the comfort zone, feeling kind of loser-ish, not having my own roof over my head and then having to live in my office, and you know, my car and things like that. But again, I did whatever it took to keep the company going.

Tim Clagg

Like Frank Sinatra, you did it your way. But also, from that, your employees. You get a chance to hire the people that you want. And I'm sure right away, people had seen, you know, Joel staying here, he's living here.

Joel Craddock

Well, they didn't know that only one person knew that. They worked in the office, but the rest of the staff was not aware of it, because I figured if the boss's gotta live in his office, maybe this would not be a successful business. So, I kept that hidden from everybody. The only person that knew was the person that opened the office in the morning because they would call to make sure that, you know, everything was okay, before they would unlock the door and come in the morning. So, you know, I appreciated the fact that they were that thoughtful.

Tim Clagg

One of the many areas of expertise that you have is particularly dedicated to cleaning for health, what fueled this passion in this part of the industry for you?

Joel Craddock

Well, that goes back to when I was married the first time, we had three children. Our middle son wasn't hitting the mile markers. And we kept going to the doctor asking what was wrong with him. What's wrong with him? They finally came back with a diagnosis of, autism. Now, he is 25 years old. So, he was about two when they diagnosed him. So, 23 years ago, autism was relatively new in the world, something that was happening every single day. And the numbers kept saying "growing, growing, growing", and it's like, we don't know what's causing this. So having worked in this world for quite a while, and being a gentleman who started and being told you don't wear gloves, you don't wear safety glasses, you don't wear hearing protection, because you'll be considered less of a man and you'll be picked on. You know, because it's a macho thing. I knew I had been exposed to so many chemicals

over time. So, when knowing all of that we told the doctors like you should probably test my blood to find out if anything that I've been exposed to that's created the autism that my son has, well, again, because it was back then nobody knew they tested my blood and they come back and they said, well, there's good news, bad news. And like any parent, well, what's the good news? You didn't cause anything that got your son sick. So, it was a major relief for my ex-wife and myself. But what I was not ready for was the bad news, which was that I had more chemicals in my body than an embalmed person. Because the skin is the biggest is the biggest organ that we have. So, the skin is how we take in all the chemicals that are being used in reaching and a lot of the chemicals that were used that many years ago. Had bugles in them and the EPA has outlawed a lot of them because they are carcinogens. They were this they were that. I do have some damage to my lungs into my hands and feet, and the nerves because of some of the stuff that I've worked with over the years, but I also took the risk. And when I had the opportunity to start my own business, I'm like, there's got to be a better way, there's got to be a way to protect the frontline employee that's doing the work. There's got to be a way that you are protecting the people whose building it is that you're cleaning. Because if you use a product on their desktop, or whatever, I mean, now they're exposed to it. And there's got to be a way that you can clean a facility that makes it safe for everybody who enters it. So back in 2013, when I started Doc's Facility Solutions. I did it based on cleaning for health, when the rest of the industry was basing it on cleaning for appearance or as you probably have seen the Race to Zero for how little you do it because the marketplace for cleaning services was so sticky downwards, that everybody was undercutting everybody to get work. And then it was like okay, now I have the contract, what do I need to do the bare minimum to keep a contract and be profitable without doing everything that's in the contract? And we took the opposite direction and worried about doing it the right way. And cleaning and sanitizing properly and using the best chemistry the best materials, the best equipment, and doing it the right way.

Tim Clagg

You raise a point and I'm curious to kind of find out your thoughts if you found that out that you had more chemicals in your body than an embalmed person. How many other hundreds, if not 1000s, of people had been in the industry and have been in the industry, as long as you have been involved and have been affected over the duration of that timespan?

Joel Craddock

Probably millions of people. And I can remember when I decided to work in this industry as a career, I can remember my mother being you know, hesitant, about me going into the industry, because of the chemical exposures and things like that. So that was an early conversation that we had about me entering this industry. And when I decided to start my own company, my mother was like, "Well, don't you think that-" and I'm like "Mom, I'm going to do it differently I'm going to do it so that people are healthy, or healthier." The thing is, is that even the industries have been shifting since COVID. And they talk about, you know, green cleaning and all this type of stuff. And in some ways, it's a misnomer. Because people hear the word green, and they think it's safe, they are safer. With the emphasis on the ER the er, they're still chemicals. So, you still have to treat them like chemicals, you have to understand that there's safety that still needs to be involved. You have to wear your proper protective equipment and be guided and understand everything about that chemical before you use it so that you stay safe. But more importantly, all those that enter the space, say after you are safe.

Tim Clagg

How difficult, has it been trying to get your current clients and prospects to understand and get on board with cleaning for health? Because when you have a big operation, and you have a facility, now let's say let's just use an example 200-300 employees working there? Well, that is a lot of sick time for an individual in one year to possibly take if the building itself hasn't been fully cleaned, the vents, the air filtration, all those components that go into it. I mean, we saw the change with COVID. But how sustainable has that been for getting companies to understand the longevity of this?

Joel Craddock

In the early years, it was very difficult because I was competing against an industry standard. And when you're going against the flow, it's almost like you know the salmon trying to flow the opposite way in the river. It's very difficult, you know, and all the naysayers who were laughing at me in 2013 weren't laughing in 2021 when COVID hit. So, it was eye-opening to the customers that I had at the time that 2020 hit. And you know COVID had first made landfall out on the West Coast and my clients and being on the East Coast they were coming like what do we need to do? Tell me what we need to do to keep our people safe. This is why we hired you. One my one of my first clients that I had I mean he the very first year says What's different about your company? I don't understand what you meant about cleaning for health but all of our people always maxed out their sick time every single year. And the first year that you came in and cleaned, we went to the point that everybody had time left in their sick banks. And that's never happened. He said I've got the same people I've been managing for 30 years and the same facility. The only difference is you and your company. So that right there showed me and there's numbers that are out there about health and looking at, cleaning not as a as a cost center, but as a profit center. Because, the average person in the United States takes on average, 7.76 days, sick days per year. Well, a little over a week, yeah, a little bit better, almost eight full days of sick time per year, that costs employers over \$225.8 billion, not M, B as in boy billion dollars per year. So, when you clean properly, and you do it the right way, with the right equipment with the right training, you can reduce absenteeism. I have an HR company that I work with, he referred me to a client in the numbers in the study that I know is like you can reduce absenteeism by 46%. So that's a serious cut in at 225 plus billion dollars if you can reduce it by nearly 50%. And he works for a company. We reduce their absenteeism by more than 50%. And he's like, the only difference was you and the air that when we first started cleaning there, they were a manufacturing company, and you could smell all the lubricants in the air. After two months of us doing the cleaning, you didn't smell the lubricants in the air. And because we were getting the soil out of the building, we were cleaning properly. The people that were there were happier, they worked more productivity-wise, there was a higher output, there was less sick time, and they weren't having to pay overtime and double time to people to cover shifts. So, for them, that resulted right to the bottom line and saved them over \$125,000. The first year we were there. And we were doing the cleaning and that facility for far less than \$125,000 that they realized and additional profits. So, to me, cleaning as a profit center, add money to the bottom line by reducing sick days.

Tim Clagg

So now that we've been almost four years removed from COVID, are companies still kind of struggling to understand that what you're providing with cleaning for health is it's still a struggle to sell that and get them on board and fully committed not just for flu season, from, let's say, October through the spring, but year-round to be dedicated to cleaning for health.

Joel Craddock

Because COVID has become such a regular part of life anymore. And to talk to people I've heard "Oh I've caught this. Three times this year, I've had COVID", and things like that. Because when there was a return-to-work policy kind of went into effect. People started thinking that COVID was gone. And when the federal government said, oh, you know, we're stopping the pandemic, you know, it's no longer a pandemic anymore. So, people thought that they had to go back and we can have a normal life again. Well, as we said, during the pandemic, well, there's going to be a new normal. And we are living in the new normal, we can't do things the way that we used to. But yes, people are starting to feel that, oh, we do not have to clean as much we don't need to do this. And the unfortunate thing is kind of going back to what you stated earlier about the whole wipe situation. So many people do things the wrong way in life, that once you stop doing something that we know that works, you start seeing a steady decline. And whether it be profitability, you start seeing sick time creep back up, because you're not doing the things that were making you successful. Being a business owner and getting involved in social media, I can tell when I'm not doing social media the way I do because all of a sudden, I start losing the momentum I've built. They've caused me to be busy, and then trying to get the train back on the tracks is a lot more work than where it was going when everything was going well. And that's kind of where people are right now. Oh, well. We only have so many people that come into the office. Well, that's okay. Germs still grow at a rate. They do replicate themselves and double every 20 minutes in perfect condition. Does that happen? No, not in the real life. But the thing is, is that in a perfect world, they still mutate and duplicate themselves every 20 minutes. And it results in billions of organisms that are not seen by the human eye on desktops, on phones on handrails on call buttons on push bars on desks, I mean, on doors, and faucets in the restroom. So, you have to realize that it doesn't matter if you have one person or 1000 people in a facility that when something is touched, it becomes contaminated. And that's when the growth of germs starts.

Tim Clagg

We're talking with Joel Craddock, owner of Doc's Facility Solutions, Joel has over 40 years of experience in facilities management, you just touched on something I want you to kind of dig a little deeper and dive into for our listeners, cleaning is a profit center. Can you kind of elaborate a little bit further?

Joel Craddock

Yeah, like I was saying, just the fact that you have fewer people that are calling in sick and just not paying the overtime, not paying the double time, the loss of goodwill, because if you're not there, and your customer calls in and they get a voicemail, and it calls not returned timely that they're used to those results in loss, as well. You can increase your production rate within your company by about 2% to 8% by reducing your absenteeism by 46%. And that was a study that was done in 2006, way before the pandemic, by Kimberly Clark, in a building that had nearly 100 employees. By training the people in the building, as well as the cleaning staff on what they needed to do, and what they needed to pay attention to. They realized that 46% reduction in absenteeism, and it resulted in an 8% growth for that company, based on the reduction in absenteeism. That's where the whole profit center part comes, you don't have to grow your business, but you need to keep your people healthy, and you can grow. Because now if you're a manufacturer, you have parts that can be sent out. We work with one company

in the Rochester market where they're seeing their error rate decrease because we're keeping the dust particles out of the air. Because they work with things that are 1/4 the thickness of paper, a normal sheet of paper. So, any dust that gets on something that causes that product, which is electronic, to be found as an error and is going to be rejected and not for sale. So they're seeing already a waste reduction. So those products are available for sale and going out the door at a record rate for them.

Tim Clagg

During COVID, you experienced a life-changing experience. You were in the intensive care unit for over five weeks with COVID. Your company during that time, however, thrived and continued to run under the direction of the employees. Take us back to that moment when you first learned that your employees had kept the business running, and what emotions were you overcome with?

Joel Craddock

I'm still overcome with emotion. I caught COVID in January of 2022. And on the 19th of January, I flatlined and died. They resuscitated me with paddles, and I woke up in the intensive care unit on a ventilator. Number one the first person that reported to me was Sonia Wagga, she was an amazing woman. She had requested vacation back in late November that I had signed off on which was for February 1. And she took it upon herself to cancel her vacation and run the company while I was unable to do so. As a business owner, we often cling on to things we're afraid that if somebody else can do what we do we're replaceable or whatever but what it taught me was that I had trained my staff so well that the company could work virtually seamlessly. Were there some hiccups? There is any day even when I'm here, but there were very few hiccups. Since she had access to my calendar she saw when I had sales appointments coming up and it was way out of her comfort zone to run sales meetings or whatever, but I bring her on them. So she gets an idea because she's not only my HR manager, but my operations manager. So she knew enough to go out and ask some questions and get some basic information to, help with the bidding and estimating process. And the funniest thing out of all of it is she signed a contract on a napkin, that she just wrote a price down and said "This is your monthly fee. When Joel gets back from the hospital, he'll type up the contract", and the client signed the napkin. And she had that job started and staffed and running before I even came back to the office. And even when I came back to the office, I was on a walker, I was on oxygen tanks for almost nine months, and I was not working full days, I came in and it was like I did some of the financials and made sure that the invoicing got done and things like that. But she was running the show for nine months after I was even back. And it just showed me how important it is to train people the right way because you just never know. I often will tell my business colleagues that my ultimate goal is to build a business that can outlive me. And I know that this business could if something were to happen to me. That's the legacy, that the company can continue even without my involvement. I'm proud of that, I'm happy about it, and I'm happy for Sonia, most of all. She did something that was so far out of her work realm and comfort zone, almost like me at 23 years old. When I came back, she's like, "I'm so glad you're back, I do not want your job", but she did it, and she continued to do it, even though I was around because I just physically couldn't do the things that I could. I've got long-term COVID symptoms, and still, I've got memory loss and fogging, short-term memory is not so great, I have a lot of fatigue, still, I have restrictive lung disease, which my lungs will continue to get harder over time, and things like that. So, she's taken a very active role in the company. That's, I think the biggest thing I got out of it; I trained

everybody the right way, they can step up. It shows me that I've done the right things with the right people.

Tim Clagg

Shows the respect and the culture that you guys have worked as a team, as a family, with a collective effort to continue to build with your employees. Your employees, you provide a lot of resources. And the biggest thing I noticed in our introductory call was you seem to really push your employees to improve their work, and life skills. Some of the things that we touched on- highlighted on not only Lunch and Learn real estate agents, mortgage bankers, real estate attorneys, those are some of the financial advising tools that you've offered your employees.

Joel Craddock

We even have a financial planner who comes in twice a year and offers financial assistance in the sense of education. We do have a 401 K program that's installed in the company. So, we have that as well with a match. But I noticed that a lot of my employees didn't even know how to balance a checkbook. And I've had some of them come over and ask me "Can you show me how to balance a checkbook", so I don't know what that says about our education system. I remember having to take classes in high school, to learn some base skills, and either they're not teaching it or they're not retaining it, one or the other. And it's important because I don't want to get to know my employees just in the sense that "Oh, bless, so and so and they work here". I want to know what their goals are in life and where they want to be within the company. And that's one of the things I found out about Sonia. So, when my business partner left, I brought her into the office because she said she wanted to learn how to do the back-office stuff in a cleaning company and understand that more. So, when that opportunity came, I knew who to go talk to first. We had a couple of people last year live some personal goals; they bought houses. That's where having these lunch and learns and what do they need to do to help rectify their credit? How much money do they need to start thinking about setting aside for closing and putting down payment on houses? What type of funds are out there for people for first-time home buyers, or if they buy within a certain zip code, are there additional grants? And I don't know all that stuff. But I bring in other experts that do so that the staff whose goal is to buy a house, say "Hey, I have a lunch and learn that's going to happen, these individuals are going to be here on this date, please come in if you are serious about wanting to achieve your goal". So, I get to see that. And what it's resulted in, is we have so many family members that work here. And they're all proud. So, we have mothers and sons and husbands and wives and mothers and daughters, and cousins and nieces and nephews. I mean, we have this great culture, and I always wanted it to be kind of like, a family. It's turned into almost like a family affair, so to say, even though I don't have any family that works here. But I've learned the cultures of the people that work here, I've learned how to cook, I've learned how to speak some Spanish so that I can converse. And I really do try. And I think that everybody appreciates the effort that I take to get to understand them, their cultures, their foods. I've even recently brought some food in that I made when I made some, and I was told that I'm 100% guaranteed Puerto Rican, authentic. For me, that was a huge compliment, because the last time I made it they were like "Phew!" so I refined my skills.

Tim Clagg

We discussed the hurdles that you've had, personally. But again, Doc's faced another situation during COVID, where you lost 90% of your customers, clients that were considered non-essential. You have a podcast as well, and that's when I noticed this particular topic, what are some things that nearly killed your business?

Joel Craddock

Yeah, that was a biggie, because living in New York State, everybody knows that our governor was on every single day, and had a daily program that he did. He literally was shutting the state down. All these businesses that had to close had to close had to close had to close...and after building the business back after my partner left, part of my vertical was working with architectural firms, working with companies that dealt in computer software, well all those companies can work from home. Some of them never came back to work. Some of the gyms that we were doing, some of the smaller businesses were doing it on, they just went out of business because they couldn't survive without any customers. And again, it was a very difficult time because we had lost so much work and the amount of income coming in wasn't even going to cover the rent on the facility that I have. So, I'll stop paying myself as well as having to lay off everybody except for Sonia at that time. And Sonia was working two days a week. She came in to process the payroll for her and me. Anything that had to be done, and we had to submit even if there was no payroll, we still had to submit it to make sure that the company stayed open, and that all the tax reporting and everything else. So, she kind of handled that part for me, while I spent my time trying to focus on "okay, what are the essential businesses out there? They probably have somebody, but if they're another cleaning company, and maybe that's the only business they have, maybe they're going under because they've had to lay off everybody, they might not be able to do it". So, I just started focusing on manufacturing, where they were building, respirators or cardboard, to package the respirators and things like that. So, we got into a lot of manufacturing facilities during COVID. A lot of assisted living and senior living facilities; independent and assisted, Because, again, those were essential. They had to be cleaned every day, and in their housekeeping departments, a lot of people got scared and didn't want to go to work. So, my staff was hungry enough that they wanted to work and they were willing to go into those facilities as long as we had them properly dressed for their own protection. We had bought face shields and a lot of other things to help keep them protected at that time. That's where our success came in and brought us back, and has continued to be a big part of our business, even rolling out of COVID is working with these assisted living and independent living facilities, apartment communities, school districts, private schools, things like that. Those have all become a big part of our new verticals that we've gone after, and have very successfully teamed and integrated with a lot of the companies that we work with.

Tim Clagg

If you could give me your top three pieces of advice that nearly killed your business to listeners that are new to the commercial cleaning industry as a whole, what are your top three things that you would tell them? "Hey, these are case in point, I've lived them!" That almost killed my business.

Joel Craddock

One is to be careful who you bring close to you. That means business partners, that means vendors, and even clients. Because if you put all your eggs in one basket as I did early on in my career, that person can then tell you, "You know what? Sorry, we're done doing business with you". So, you never

want to have too much of your business with one client ever. Same thing with vendors, they find out about your business enough, and they may end up using some of that information against you and start their own business. I guess the number two thing, which I talked to a lot of because I also own a consulting business, a lot of things I talk about with young upstart companies' is don't leave your full-time job and run them parallel. I ran out of unemployment, I started from the bootstraps, and I had no money to invest when I first started this company, so I had a much slower growth rate than a lot of other companies because I was still trying to pay bills at home. I didn't have a job that covered the bills. So, I have a client in Ohio, and I'm very proud of what they've been able to establish thus far. And it's a husband-and-wife team. And he's still working his full-time job. They have grown so much; they grew a lot going into December this past year. Already this year, they have outpaced what their growth rate was last year, and they're still both working their full-time jobs. They've structured the company properly, and I'm ecstatic to see that the advice I gave him early on, was, listened to because he's seen the success, I wish I had seen had I done it the right way. So, a lot of my podcasts are based on what I did, and much rather see people steer away from the holes that I found. You need to have, thirdly, a very strong faith. I don't care what it is, I'm not here to tell people to, enter religion, some people's faith is praying at home, or reading a Bible or Quran or whatever at home. You got to have faith, and that is something that I have realized several times throughout my career. I left my church and I lost my way, and I found my way back. Through every one of these big challenges and hurdles that I've had, my faith has helped me get through it, I pray to a higher power. I know that that individual has helped me and has helped clear my mind and has put the right people around me when I've needed it the most. That's probably the third thing, have faith in something, whatever it is because you need it. There are sometimes you just don't know where to turn and you know what, my brother owns a business, but he's just a solopreneur. I have employees, my sister says, why would you ever do that? Why didn't you take a job with you know, we're the you have the protection of a paycheck. My brother's like because of the headaches that you have with staff and when people call in sick or don't show up, or all these things that have almost derailed your company, why don't you just continue doing it yourself? Don't worry about the fact that there was nobody else they, just worry about you. So, when I come to these roadblocks, I don't have somebody necessarily to talk to. So only one person to talk to, and it's the guy upstairs. That has helped me through so much. And you have to just open your mind and you got to listen because sometimes the listening is somebody that happens to bump into you in life that you never even knew previously.

Tim Clagg

You've come out time and time again, better on the other side. There's been an outdated stigma on people in the cleaning industry, but some of it did go away in 2020. How can we continue to move forward in a positive manner and work to change the view as a whole for the industry?

Joel Craddock

That's been my challenge since I joined LinkedIn back in 2006. How do you change a negative stigma? So basically, it's to walk the walk, talk to talk, and do the right things. A lot of people do not realize the education that goes into being a custodian, and the types of things that we need to know. The amount of math we have to do the understand chemistry and pH and use the right products for the right purpose so that we don't damage the surface. It's so much more than just emptying the trash cans, slinging a mop, and pushing the vacuum cleaner. Even with putting the vacuum cleaner, I just was in

Chicago, and I had said something and their HR manager said, "Oh, my gosh, I have to put this down in our new hire orientation package, because I did not realize that you don't push a vacuum cleaner like that". If we do it at home, like how we were taught, you don't that's called a fan. You don't do it like a fan, you have to walk laterally with it. If you have a backpack, you have to turn at the waist because it's the strongest part. So just little things like that. Going back again, to what you said, it's the little things that make a big difference. That's what I think is going to change the view of this industry is the little things.

Tim Clagg

You shared a great quote with me. You said, "Every night we clean, we're writing the prescription for the next day", and I think there is a huge opportunity, you alluded to it earlier, the education in this country, there are so many opportunities. When I was growing up, gotta go to college gotta go to college. Well, now, we are in a time where there is a lot of trade and skilled positions. This is a trade and skilled position that is going to have a lot of opportunity, I think, for the next generation that are deciding what they want to do with their life. First dive into the quote, and then kind of your thoughts on the industry as a trade and skill.

Joel Craddock

Okay. Diving into the quote about "we write the prescription every single night" we do. If we do our jobs well, people don't get sick. If we use the wrong chemical on a surface, it can make somebody sick. That goes back to one of the companies that I worked for one time somebody had sprayed a product on the inside of a microwave oven, and they forgot to wipe it out. The next day somebody came in the morning, and they put in either a bagel or a muffin, I don't remember what it was anymore. They warmed it up, they ate it, and their face swelled up because they were allergic to the chemical that had been in there. This was a time before cell phones when this happened. So, there was no way to get a hold of who had cleaned it, how, and what happened. It took the company, I work for many, many hours to figure out exactly what happened. It was a very toxic chemical that somebody put on the inside and just forgot to wipe out, and a person almost died because of it. So that's maybe an extreme thing, but that's what happens if you don't have people trained right? They use a product that should never have been used on that surface to begin with. So again, it comes back to training. What's the outlook for our industry? Our industry, I know that I've seen the job reports and the forecasts, and we are going to be one of the industries that continues to grow. I know that's hard to believe. We're also an industry where the average age of an individual who works in this is over the age of 55. I finally qualified for that. There are a lot of people who are in this industry way older than me, and they're going to be retiring. Yeah, it's not a glamorous job. Who wakes up one morning and says, "I'm going to be a custodian! I'm going to work in the environmental services world!". Not many people do, but what we've done as an industry is we're trying to attract the younger millennials and Gen Z, and we're doing that with robotics. So, there are robots that are used in cleaning, they use drones in cleaning and things like that. So, there's a lot of things that we're doing, where the older generation, even myself included at times, is like "oh my gosh, they're trying to take our jobs away". But that auto scrubber that's automated is going to clean the big open areas, but it can't do behind the planters and the doors and the edges. So, there's going to be a need for specialists, there's going to be a need for mechanics to work on this equipment. There's going to be a need because there's so much software in this industry to help in managing and doing internal audits and things like that, that we're going to need programmers. So, we are trying to get more people

from the younger generation to see this as a growth market and you can make enough money to support a family on it if you do it right. I think that's the wave of the future. There's, I think one company I know a few years ago, a father and son tried to build a 100% automated company with robotics and things like that. They realize it can't be 100%, but it can be a big part of it but the people that they had to bring in had a high have a higher level of skill. Understand, because the robot can't plug itself in, and can't do behind the doors maybe down the road that technology will exist, but right now it does not. And therefore, we have to do the things that can't be done by robots, because every building is different. I don't care if it's the same cleaning tasks. Yeah, every building is laid out differently you have different types of surfaces. So, there's different needs every company, there's no cookie-cutter. Every building is not built the same. It's not staffed the same way not everybody uses the space the same. One may be an architect, one may be a manufacturer, one may be a school, one may be a daycare, same square footage is all used differently and has different needs.

Tim Clagg

Plenty of opportunities available, especially as you mentioned, that you tied AI into it. Certifications that go into that using robotics AI, that it's going to open a whole other avenue. You can see in the background, your Buffalo Bills, helmet, you're a lifelong Buffalo Bills fan. You were at Miami for week 18, playoffs on the line their vision on the line. How much fun was that experience? And did you jump through a flaming table being part of the Bill's mafia?

Joel Craddock

I'm a little too old to be doing that anymore. In my younger days, I may have done something like that a time or two. At 44, not going to be jumping off an RV to go through a table. It was mind-blowing. A good friend of mine in this industry is Marcelo, who's the facilities manager for the Dolphins. I met him initially through LinkedIn, and then he and I met at a trade show out in Chicago, about six years ago. Our friendship has deepened over time. We always joked about how he would have me come down one time for a Dolphins VS Bills game, but it was amazing. I got to see the stadium like no fan would ever see it because I got to see the behind-the-scenes operation and what has to be done and seeing how they lay out their work schedules to get the stadium ready for the game. But also, what do they do after the game is over? And how does it get cleaned after the 65,000 fans leave? So, I got to see it from such a different perspective. That's probably the one thing I love about my industry is that you see every business differently because you get into pieces of a business that nobody else can. Somebody is cleaning the White House; somebody has to clean the Presidential restroom. How many people get to do that or experience that? I mean, no, I don't want to clean the President's restroom, but we get to see things that nobody else does. Plus, as custodial staff, Environmental Services staff, we have to be in every part of a building. So, we literally get to go into parts of buildings that nobody ever sees. To see it from that perspective, and the initiatives that the Dolphins and the Hard Rock Cafe stadium are doing in regards to a zero-carbon footprint, and the initiatives and how they're moving on those. Working with some companies about removing the pathogens that are in the air because nobody thinks about the air having to be clean now. But it is a thing to make sure that the air that we breathe is safe. Just seeing how all of this is coming together. It's amazing. He's got me coming back down there relatively soon to do some more training with his supervisory staff, because I made such a positive impact the first time and he wants to keep it going because they get an energy boost talking to somebody else who's passionate about the industry and sees them as MVPs. After all, we are. I think that nobody comes to

work to do a bad job and we get in again. Being a black guy in our industry a lot of clients see us as we're trying to get out of work. Really, in all the years I've worked in this industry, I've never seen a group of individuals work so hard, whether they're the entry-level new hire that day, right up to the presidents and CEOs of some very large companies. Nobody comes to work planning to do a bad job. They all are very proud of what they do.

Tim Clagg

It's very physical. It's very mental. Joel, we appreciate you taking the time to share your journey through the industry, educating our listeners on cleaning for health, and how you saved your business. Multiple times! How can people find you on social media? You're a big influencer on the LinkedIn community, how can they connect with you?

Joel Craddock

They can connect by finding me on LinkedIn. Joel Craddock and the last name is pronounced, Craddock spelled like haddock only with a C on the front, but yes, like the fish. So that's how they can find me or my business names are both Doc's Facilities Solutions and it's Doc's "D-O-C", apostrophe s, no K. And my other company have Doc's Facilities Consulting, and that is strictly the consulting. So I have two business pages on LinkedIn, and I have a podcast on YouTube that I do. And that can be found under my name Joel Craddock, or "Keep it Clean" as the actual name of the podcast. After the first two that we did, we realized we had some audio issues, so we fixed that. We also thought about the industry as a whole. And we keep those podcasts to about five minutes. So anybody who's looking to get into the industry and learn more, by all means, please subscribe, because that will make a big difference for all of us and I thought a lot about "how can you just give a lot of information in a short bit of time?" because so many business owners are so busy, they don't have hours to pour into having to listen so just five-minute segments that are posted once a week.

Tim Clagg

That will conclude this month's edition of the business of cleaning, be sure to subscribe to us on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, Amazon Podcast, or wherever you get your podcast from. Also, be sure to leave us a five-star review and your comments from everyone a janitorial manager, our guest Joel Craddock, I'm Tim Clagg, so long. Until next time!