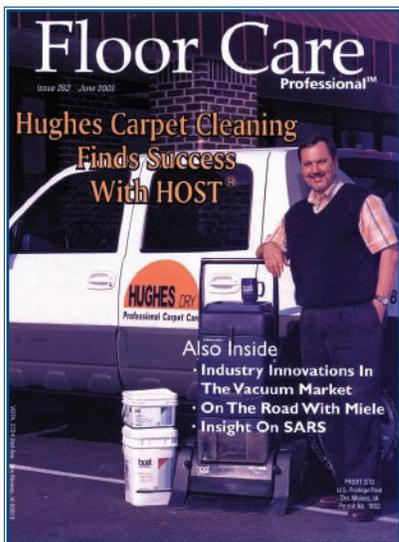


## **Hughes Dry Professional Carpet Cleaning Delivers Excellence Beyond What Customers Expect**

### **Hughes Finds Success with HOST<sup>®</sup>**

In a world of corporate downsizing and big company buyouts, small businesses can flourish in an environment of complete service to the customer with every job. Trust and loyalty are qualities that can be developed and fostered in small businesses. The customers will respond with glowing evaluations and the business will grow.

Today, with a team of five technicians and a fleet of six vehicles, Larry Hughes, owner of Hughes Dry Professional



*Hughes Dry Professional Carpet Cleaning's success makes the cover of Floor Care Magazine.*



*Larry Hughes, owner of Hughes Dry Professional Carpet Cleaning, believes in complete service to the customer.*

Carpet Cleaning, services the metropolitan Atlanta area. Hughes started out as a one-man operation with a single van using a circular dry foam system. Although he achieved great results, Hughes had some customers with special health concerns. "I always believed in customer service, always believed in making sure that every customer was fully satisfied before I left." This led him to the HOST<sup>®</sup> Dry Extraction Carpet Cleaning System. "I saw the benefits of HOST as far as the health end of things." To service this group of customers, Hughes

rented the HOST machine for awhile and dry cleaned their carpet. Soon he decided that HOST was the system for him. "HOST delivered consistent results for me. To this day, we still have many of those customers," explained Hughes.

### **HOST Consistently Delivers**

HOST Dry Carpet Cleaner contains a balanced blend of water, detergent and a small amount of safe-to-use solvent. Like a household sponge, HOST dissolves, absorbs and traps soil, spots and odors as it is brushed through the carpet. Then the soil-laden

cleaner is vacuumed up, and the clean carpet is ready for immediate use. With HOST, customers don't have to worry about walking on a saturated carpet or risking potential delamination of the carpet backing. With HOST, "People don't have to quarantine their kids, the dog or go out for a weekend retreat. And the smell is wonderful. It's a fresher environment for breathing."

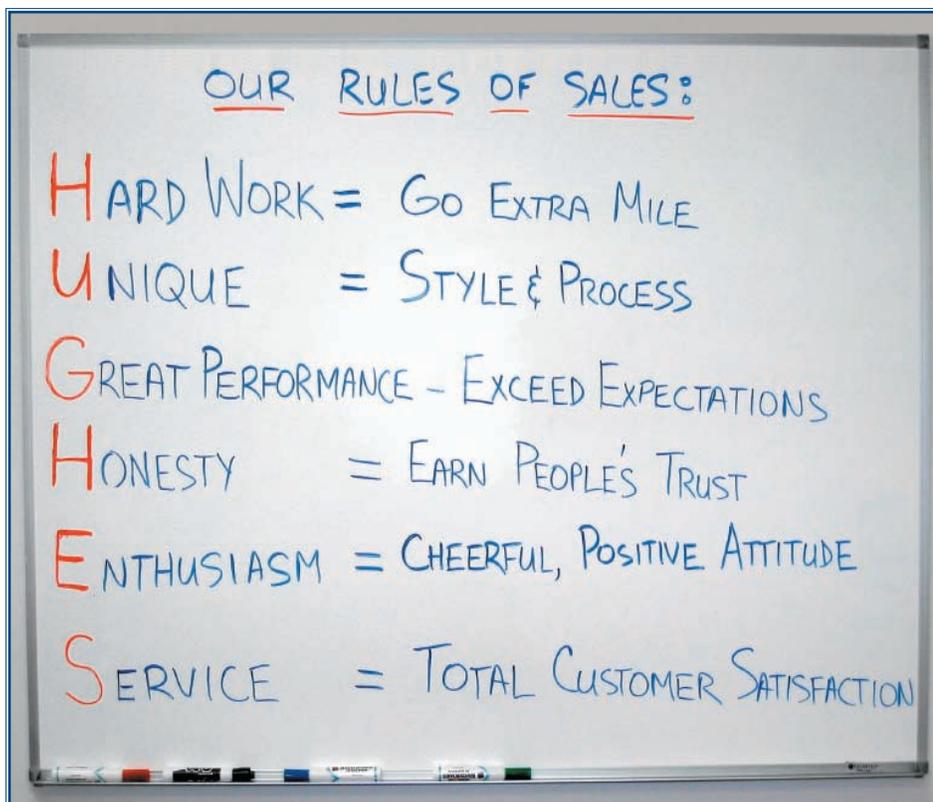
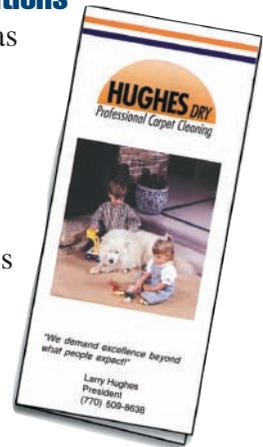
The HOST System helped Hughes maintain high satisfaction levels with his customers because of its ability to remove allergens from carpet while deep cleaning. And HOST gives customers a lasting clean because it doesn't leave sticky detergent residue behind to cause resoiling. As Hughes noted, "You can have the clean that lasts longer."

### Hughes Does Whatever it Takes

With confidence in the benefits of HOST Dry Carpet Cleaning, Hughes had built a reliable client base and was ready to expand. Hiring employees was the first step toward business growth. Hughes always made sure that his employees understood the goal of high quality by insisting on thorough training and follow-up calls. Then Hughes increased his marketing efforts and expanded his services. "All through that time our main emphasis was constant customer service, doing whatever it took to make that customer happy. Our real goal was not making money. The real goal was making sure our customer base was solid. You build from a solid foundation of satisfied and happy customers," noted Hughes. Hughes even uses his name in his "Rules of Sales" to reinforce his beliefs.

### Every Single Job Must Exceed Customer Expectations

Today, Hughes has generated repeat business through quality work. He delivers on the promise that is on the front of his sales brochure: "We demand excellence beyond what people expect!" Technicians get no extra points for getting the job done faster. "We get repeat business by doing quality work and making certain that each customer has a wonderful experience. Customers get their work done with fewer hassles, no gimmicks and no additional charges. Furthermore, after the job is complete, we make courtesy, follow-up calls, send handwritten thank you cards, and follow-up letters 4 months and 12 months later," says Hughes. "The goal is to create a cheerleader and a customer for life."



Hughes' Rules of Sales = total satisfaction for all his customers.

### His Target: The Residential Market

Although some of the Hughes business is commercial, most is residential, and Hughes has identified that niche for several key reasons. First, most residential business is loyal. "Once you develop a relationship with customers, they tend to come back to you." Also, most residential cleaning is done during the daytime hours Monday through Friday, unlike commercial cleaning which is done after hours or on weekends. Third, payment for residential jobs is immediate, and not 30, 60

or 90 days later because you are waiting for the check to be issued from corporate headquarters. Finally, houses are interesting. “With a residential job, there is interaction with pets and children, and there are knick-knacks and house styles. People are more interesting, unlike a commercial job which involves little interaction.” The feedback is also less glowing in a commercial job, because people feel more deeply about their homes.

### **Hughes Focuses on Specific Neighborhoods**

This focus on residential clients allows Hughes to identify and build relationships within neighborhoods. Hughes identified homes valued at \$250,000 or more in the northern metro area. “To give you an example, we have one neighborhood where there are 125 homes and we have 15 clients. So we have a good reputation in that neighborhood. A couple of owners have moved to a different area, and we do their homes there. Now we are starting to penetrate that new neighborhood.”

### **Maintenance Plan Assures Customer Satisfaction**

Hughes develops his existing customer base by returning to maintain the carpets he cleans on a regularly scheduled plan. Most carpet manufacturers recommend an ongoing carpet maintenance program to ensure the best performance and life of the carpet. With a regular regimen using the HOST System, “The carpets look so good,” said Hughes. He recommends the following tips to keep maintenance customers happy:

1. **Understand the job.** Maintenance jobs vary in terms of difficulty. Ink stains, rust stains, furniture moving and long standing stains can cause additional complications above and beyond a regular maintenance routine. Be ready to account for those differences in the quote.
2. **Consider using an hourly rate.** Consider developing an hourly plan, with time in the home varying from one to four hours. Provide a standard price for each hour. Whatever work needs to be done will be accomplished in that time. The rest will either wait for the next visit or be prorated into another hourly charge.
3. **Ask customers to develop a priority list of work to be completed.** Ask customers to decide ahead of time what portions of the home need attention, and in what priority. The technician cleans the carpet, removes stains, moves furniture or completes tasks in the order given. When the time is up, the technician either stops or continues and charges an additional amount, as the customer chooses.
4. **Promote health benefits.** Customers appreciate that the soil, oils and allergens are removed with each maintenance visit.
5. **Use prescheduled maintenance plans to level business fluctuations.** Most carpet cleaners are busy during the holidays, but with a maintenance plan, “instead of

seeing customers one time a year, we’re able to see them two other times, and it helps level out the business.”

6. **Use postcards to remind customers to schedule an appointment.** Maintenance plans stay on schedule when customers are notified. One of Hughes’ customers explained, “It’s just like clockwork.”
7. **Develop ongoing relationship between technician and customer.** Hughes says, “When we see clients over and over again, they get very comfortable with us, and they ask for the same technician. It’s something like a social kind of thing at times. We get involved with knowing their kids and their pets, and it’s wonderful.”



*One of Hughes’ technicians uses the HOST Freestyle® to clean a high traffic area as part of a maintenance plan.*

# Networking: Building a Business Through Relationships

Personal relationships are so important to Hughes that even his commercial jobs are generated through customer interaction. For instance, while buying his fourth vehicle, Larry noticed that the carpets at the car dealership needed help. He was told that management had tried several carpet cleaning companies but had been disappointed each time with the results. The dealership gave him the chance and, this time, was satisfied. “We gave them a price on it and began doing this dealership every month. Shortly thereafter we began doing another adjunct fleet dealership on a regular maintenance plan to keep those carpets looking good year ’round.”



*While purchasing one of his six company vehicles, Hughes put networking to work and was able to land the dealership as a carpet maintenance plan customer.*

With confidence in the benefits of the HOST Dry Extraction Carpet Cleaning System, Hughes began spreading the word about his company. He joined civic organizations and a networking club in order to develop connections and alignments with community leaders that could lead to new business. Larry built relationships with gatekeepers and still uses these approaches:

1. **Call on a related service group or business.** When Hughes first started, he called on maid services. “Usually people who have maid service have discretionary income, have people coming into the house on a weekly basis and have dirty carpet,” Hughes explained.

2. **Develop a service that compliments your area of expertise.** Hughes developed Hughes Roto-Clean duct cleaning because several clients had allergy concerns and respiratory problems. “We offered a new technology that further improved the indoor air quality environment. What we have tried to do through the years is HOST Dry Carpet Cleaning, but while we are there and while we developed these relationships in our customer base, we added other services like upholstery cleaning, duct cleaning, carpet repairs and spot dyeing.”

3. **Gather referrals from customers.** Hughes will provide a spotting

kit at the site if the customer wants to give the technician five names and phone numbers. If these referrals lead to further work, then Hughes pays for these leads either in 5% cash or 10% in credit toward future work.

4. **Be low key, low pressure with referrals.** Once Hughes has the referral names, he sends information about the HOST cleaning system and a letter mentioning who gave their name. Then there is follow up with a phone call to verify that they received the letter.

5. **Several months later follow up with a maintenance reminder.** Four months after completing



*The display in Hughes' office promotes the health benefits of his services, a key point in his maintenance plan for customer satisfaction.*

a job, Hughes generates a letter to tell the customer about maintenance. If there is no customer response, then another letter is sent at the one-year anniversary that offers them an extra incentive, like a bottle of HOST Spot Remover, to get the carpet cleaned.

6. Use products and service as incentives, not coupons and gimmicks. Because many people have had bad experiences with coupons, which are often bait and switch scams, Hughes rarely offers money discounts but instead offers a spotting kit or a gift certificate. With this approach, customers can try a new product or sample additional services with little risk.

7. Join a network club or a council that serves related businesses. Many clubs meet once a week

and members have their separate businesses and different clientele to provide leads for one another. Hughes joined the area Council of Realtors and attends their monthly meetings. He has built a relationship with the largest real estate company in the metro area and has the exclusivity on cleaning new listings.

8. Be systematic when pricing jobs. If it is too difficult to do individual estimates, consider developing a price list that takes into consideration the function of time and size of a job based on experience. When giving a quote, agree to be within 5% if everything is average in terms of size and soil level. By asking the right questions and gathering enough information by phone, the technician should know how much to charge.

9. Get your company into booklets or agencies that list professional services. If your community compiles an A+ list of highly recommended service businesses, explore ways to be mentioned in the list. Hughes Dry Professional Carpet Cleaning is listed in a Home Reports publication that includes only businesses with high satisfaction rates from recent customers.

Growing a customer base through maintenance plans and strategic networking will insure future business. "You invest in developing relationships with gatekeepers who will lead you to business; and be totally focused on your reputation. If you put in the effort, the business will be there," emphasized Hughes.



# *The Art of* **Hiring New Employees**

Given the growth of his business, Hughes needed to hire employees. Hughes “saw the benefits of having an employee,” but was concerned about maintaining the quality of the work. Given his insistence on complete customer satisfaction, how does Hughes hire employees who will strive to get the most from the HOST cleaning system?

- **Be selective.** “I would rather delay business than select the wrong person,” notes Hughes.
- **Use a three-day trial period.** Give future employees a complete look at residential jobs and provide an opportunity for them “to see results” with HOST.
- **Remember that it is easier to train a person than to untrain a person.** “Usually a person with tremendous experience has so many bad habits and so many ways they do things that teaching them the way we do things is much, much more challenging,” explains Hughes.
- **Choose a person with personality.** “Give me a person who is very willing to work and has the personality. To me, you can teach the techniques but you can’t teach people to like people. People skills are key in our residential cleaning business. We develop relationships with people that are very long-term,” Hughes admits.
- **Do an evaluation after every job.** “All my technicians know they have pressure on every job. We leave behind a packet that includes a customer satisfaction evaluation form and the customer is called,” acknowledges Hughes.
- **Compensate well.** “I pay very, very well but it’s absolute perfection and nothing less. Every single job, like our brochure says, must exceed customer expectations. There is no bonus for getting the job done more quickly. New business is generated when each technician does every job well,” says Hughes.

Hughes’ insistence on perfect customer satisfaction with every job has won him a solid business but even more, the trust and continued loyalty of an established clientele. Employee hiring and training, networking and thoroughly understanding his product has brought success. As Hughes says, “With HOST, we get bright results and what we are selling is not only clean carpets but we are selling health. It became very easy for me to sell it. When I made my decision to use the HOST Dry Extraction Carpet Cleaning System, I never looked back.”



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