



## **How Covid-19 Created Opportunity For Many Cleaning Businesses!**

Tuesday, November 17, 2020 | 1:30 – 2:30 pm CTL

The pandemic has had a huge impact on the cleaning industry and has caused many businesses to not only lose customers, but lose employees, as well. It's been a struggle for cleaning business owners to find new staff, while trying to keep everyone safe and follow new PPE guidelines provided by Federal, State and Local authorities.

Overall, 2020 has been extremely challenging and the future remains uncertain. Cleaning Business Owners all over the country wonder when their customers and employees will return and most importantly...when will life resume normal?

The good news is that even amid a crisis, several cleaning business owners have carved a new path and have pioneered a new way of doing business.

Such leadership has allowed these businesses to refocus their efforts on current needs of their customers, most notably “disinfection” and an all-hands-on-deck approach to keeping employees and customers safe!

We are excited to share with you the strategies that have been deployed by several ARCSI business owners. These business owners not only provide us hope, but they also offer “proof” that there is a better way!

Get ready to learn a new way of growing your business, even during a pandemic!

Most importantly, learn what you can do to strategically position yourself if another crisis occurs!

### **Carrie Knight, Moderator, The Cleaning Boss**



Carrie Knight is the owner of Maid Brigade of Tampa Bay. Carrie nearly lost everything when she decided to make the entrepreneurial leap back in 2007 and become her own boss. Carrie started her company at the beginning of an economic recession and after a series of down-hill events, found herself completely broke and unhappy. In 2009, she was forced to empty her personal 401k just to make payroll. It was at rock-bottom where Carrie rediscovered herself and learned how grow her cleaning business. Today her business does over \$1.2 million in revenue and is still growing. In 2016, Carrie was able to retire her husband from Corporate America and now they work together as co-owners. If you want to take your business to the next level, and want to short-cut your path to success, Carrie can show you how!

### **Gosia Baran, Helping Hands Cleaning Services**



After working in the corporate world for a few years, I got laid off a few months after 9/11. Having a 4-month-old son, I chose not to go back to the corporate world but to open my own business. I had the desire of helping people; in the corporate world helping others was not the priority. In November 2001, Helping Hands was born. Today, Helping Hands is stronger than ever, employing 45 cleaning technicians and office staff. We service residential and commercial clients in the Chicagoland area.

### **Elena Ledoux, Superb Maids**



Elena is an attorney, mom, and a serial entrepreneur. She had immigrated from Uzbekistan and went on to have a successful career as a litigator in Honolulu before retiring to take a two-year European sabbatical with her family. Upon return, she had launched a residential cleaning company to help a friend who could not find a job. Within a year, Superb Maids had won the Best of Las Vegas award and dominated every platform in the city. After two years they bought their own office building, generated millions in revenue, and employed 40 people. Elena had won the SBA's 2019 Small Business Person of the Year Nevada and is a finalist for Entrepreneur of the Year award by the National Association of Women Business Owners. In her spare time, Elena is building Superb Maids into a national franchise. And growing her natural energy brands - Mommy GO and Matcha GO. She supports the Healthy Sunrise Foundation providing life-saving care for pregnant women and babies around the world. Finally, she writes on Quora where she was read by over 61 million people. Her mission in life is to help other people to achieve their American Dream.

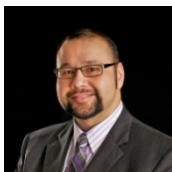
### **RJ Patel, pct Clean**



RJ and his wife Asha have owned PCT Clean for over 16 years. Prior to that, RJ's family owned a hotel and were responsible for the day-to-day business, including guest services, housekeeping, and grounds keeping.

RJ was the first chair of the ISSA Residential Cleaning Council, tasked with leading the association through the first two years of its merger with ISSA. RJ continues to serve on the Residential Cleaning Council as the past chair.

### **Dan Smith, Home Maid Better**



From Corporate America to Residential Cleaning, Dan brings a fresh perspective to our industry.

Since starting Home Maid Better in 2016; he attributes both personal and professional growth to building relationships within the ARCSI community coupled with a splash of never-ending determination.

# Q&A WITH GOSIA BARAN

**Gosia Baran**

**President, Helping Hands Maid Services**



**Q: Back in the spring as the pandemic began, was there something specific that happened that made you think that the coronavirus was going to be so much bigger than anything we have experienced before?**

A: The main thing that stood out to me in watching the news, reading the paper, and tracking what was happening in China was that it was inevitable that it would happen here. There was no way we could avoid this. I was shocked in January that we hadn't stopped travel from China. When I saw shipments were stopped from China, I knew

there would be a problem because a lot of our products come from China. I started stocking up – buying supplies and gloves. I was putting them in storage so that I could be prepared. I was very afraid that we would run out of supplies.

**Q: You own a residential cleaning company. Once the virus began to spread and the quarantine began, what were your priorities for your business?**

A: My main priority was to obviously stay open. Illinois shut down businesses on March 19. Our main concern for me was to keep my employees working. At that time, we had no clue about PPP or help from the government. My biggest fear was how will my employees – my people! – survive. I have over 40 people to feed. Many of my employees are single parents – single moms. It became critical to figure out how to keep the paychecks coming for my employees who have no other income coming in.

**Q: What steps did you take to keep your business going? Did you see any unique opportunities because of the quarantine?**

A: Going back to mid-March, we started getting calls about disinfecting. We started getting calls from people getting sick, especially in Chicago. We were just a couple of weeks behind New York. Luckily, I had the supplies and the disinfectant. I bought hundreds of gallons of Purell sanitizer, so we started offering our clients additional disinfecting services.

We were trying to keep our clients healthy and bring them peace of mind. We sent our clients a newsletter weekly to let them know what we are doing to keep them healthy, to keep our employees healthy, and what are new processes and procedures are. I got a lot of good feedback from our clients.

There was such an unknown surrounding the virus and so many of our clients were fearful of leaving their homes, we started offering additional services. We started offering shopping services, car cleaning, and errand services.

Of course, we started disinfecting services. In March, I bought 10 foggers and we put them to work. That's what helped us stay in business. We were doing on average 20-40 jobs a week. We boosted advertising and we put money into Google ad words, as well as into disinfecting. We changed our website and our marketing plan to get disinfecting jobs.

We had over 600 clients and the majority put us on hold during the first two weeks of March. However, we were able to sustain and keep our employees working because of the disinfecting service.

Commercial business also picked up – companies that are essential businesses. Downtown Chicago is still deserted. However, there are many essential businesses that are still open. We have 13 chains for a restaurant that were still open for carryout.

We also started to get calls from our residential clients that had the virus. We were getting calls from families who had become infected – and even had deaths in the family – and they were terrified. They wanted us to sanitize their homes. New opportunities opened for home cleaning and for disinfecting for essential businesses.

That was our main message – we are here to bring you peace of mind.

**Q: Looking at where you are now, is there anything you would have done differently at the onset of the pandemic?**

A: I honestly feel that there isn't anything I would have done anything differently. I had the supplies. I had the Tyvek suits. We were prepared. Perhaps, if anything, I would have put more money into advertising what we were doing. We had a 25% growth this year in revenue.

My staff was working. The only employees that couldn't work were the ones that didn't have access to childcare.

I very consciously stayed positive – never showing fear. I reinforced the point with my employees that we were essential, and the world needs us.

**Q: We have seen many residential cleaning companies lose as much as 50% of their business. What has your experience been?**

A: Frankly, we lost over 80% of our recurring residential clients. We still have a large number clients that have not come back that are either still afraid or have lost their jobs. But we are picking up new business – new residential business, plus lots of new move-ins and move-outs.

An advantage we have today is that we are a professional company. We can go to our clients and bring the knowledge that we have to them about what is the right thing for their home and their business. Losing clients hurt. But educating ourselves and our new clients has what has helped us to grow.

We learned to be versatile. Don't be tied to one field. If we had just residential clients, we would not have the commercial experience. It was critical for us to be very versatile.

**Q: There is no guarantee that this pandemic will come to a close in the near future, which means for the time being, we are all operating under a new normal. What is your outlook for your company?**

A: Our new normal is definitely different. With the additional services we are providing, we have the electrostatic sprayers and by using the newest technology to provide peace of mind for our clients, I really feel that there are huge opportunities. If we have employees to work, we have the jobs. This virus isn't going away. I see growth for our business as long as we stay on top of our marketing, our training, and keep healthy employees.

I launched a new company with RJ and Asha Patel that would never have happened without the spread of the coronavirus. We opened a disinfecting company: PCT Disinfecting. RJ and Asha were at my home at an event as the virus was beginning to spread. We have known each other for 12 years and we started talking. We have the same mindset and the same goals, so we decided to start this new venture to clean and disinfect large facilities. We recently just disinfected a resort in Wisconsin that is 275,000 square feet, including rooms, restaurants, and meeting rooms.

**Q: What processes or procedures have you or will you put in place in the anticipation of another crisis?**

A: I would definitely recommend having the equipment and supplies ready. Without the resources, you cannot operate. You must have your teams properly trained.

Also, it's important to stay in constant communication with your employees and your customers.

I have found that it's very important for your employees to have your support. For example, every Friday, we had dinner and wine with my office staff. We would celebrate the week, discussing what we have learned, and what we would do differently the next week.

It's so important that your team feels your support and they understand their mission. I always reminded them that the world needs us. We are not cleaning for appearance now. We are cleaning for health. That helped them to understand and to build their confidence. We needed them to know that they are essential workers.

**Q: What advice would you give to other residential cleaning companies to help them prepare and equip their businesses to survive a future crisis?**

A: I would definitely recommend educating yourself. Watch the news. Talk to your colleagues. I talk to people in my industry all the time. When the virus started to spread, 10 of us created a group and jumped on a call weekly to exchange ideas to share, help, and support each other.

I also have a business coach. As the leader of the company, I must be educated, I have to have that confidence and pass that on to my employees. Having a trusted business coach is important.

It's also critical to stay connected with the industry and be on top of what is happening. I earned new certifications. Look at where are your opportunities to learn.

With the pandemic, everything has changed. Even our competition has changed. We are no longer competing with other residential cleaning companies for business. Our competition is now roofing companies that were offering disinfecting services. Getting the right education and the right certifications are key to survival.

**Q: Knowing what you know now, what would be your plan if something like this would happen again?**

A: First and foremost, communicate with your employees and don't panic. When all of this started, I told my employees that they are the most important thing. I told them they need to stay healthy and we would get through this.

Encourage your team to have the same vision as you do.

Marketing. You need to invest in advertising to stay in business.

Communication. Education. Marketing.

**Q: Finally, what is your advice on how to change your mindset and stay positive during a potential future crisis?**

A: We are here to help the world because we are essential workers. I translate this to nurses and doctors. What if they said they are scared and can't come to work? That's not an option. We are here to help and to give our customers peace of mind – what we do is very important. It's essential.

# Q&A WITH ELENA LEDOUX

**Elena Ledoux**  
**Owner, Superb Maids**



**Q: Back in the spring as the pandemic began, was there something specific that happened that made you think that the coronavirus was going to be so much bigger than anything we have experienced before?**

A: Seeing the toilet paper raids in the gave me flashbacks. I grew up in the Soviet Union and when it collapsed, the whole society collapsed. They had toilet paper raids, as well as flour and sugar raids. They had grocery store runs. Living here in the United States, I thought this could never happen here – not in the land of

abundance. In my wildest dreams, I thought this would never happen in the U.S. Here in Vegas, you can buy anything, anywhere. Seeing all of that made me think that this could be worse than anything we have experienced before.

**Q: You own a residential cleaning company. Once the virus began to spread and the quarantine began, what were your priorities for your business?**

A: My number one priority was to make decisions. There was so much chaos and conflicting information. There were also many decisions that had to be made for our employees, our clients, the communications. I had to create an environment for myself – like an empty space – so I could think about all the factors, the repercussions, and the possible scenarios. What are we looking at? What are we medically looking at? What will happen to our society?

All these factors and my number one priority was to stop, pause and think. I spent a lot of time thinking and researching before making my decisions.

**Q: What steps did you take to keep your business going? Did you see any unique opportunities because of the quarantine?**

A: What I realized early on was that an informational war was going on. There was a lot of noise and that noise was killing us. Some of it was justified and some of it was not. We have seen cancellations and a

lot of fear. One of the first steps we did was to come up with our own messaging, that was positive and coupled with our procedures.

For our business, we already deal with chemicals, so we had the equipment – the gloves, the masks, the booties. We put our safety processes up front and center on our website and promoted that to our customers. We also focused our messaging on educating the public on sanitizing their home.

There were unique opportunities. One thing we started doing was grocery delivering. Some of our customers that were cancelling were scared to leave their homes and they needed help. Our customers were telling us that they not only needed their homes cleaned but they couldn't get out to get groceries. I realized I had staff that was willing and able to work and they were young, healthy, and smart and they had protection. Their job is to kill viruses, so we rolled out grocery and essential delivery. We got a lot of business, plus we got a lot of press because of it. We did get a spotlight on us. It's wasn't necessarily a huge commercial success, but it definitely helped to keep us going.

We are still offering the fogging services. We are not working in active COVID-19 cases. We are helping to be preventative and more proactive.

We also did a lot of community support. We reached out to a safe house for foster kids to see what they needed. They told us what they needed. Our customers generously donated lots of items and we delivered all the items to the safe house. We also cleaned a safe house for first responders that were self-isolating. We ended up with the spotlight on us because it was finally some good news.

Fortunately, with the grocery delivery, the fogging, and the community projects, we stayed pretty busy.

**Q: Looking at where you are now, is there anything you would have done differently at the onset of the pandemic?**

A: I think a lot of our decisions were very rational and well thought out.

We spoke a lot about safety issues. It was all very verbal. A few weeks into it, we wrote everything out. I wish I had put everything in writing and created a policy for it sooner. Next time anything like this happens, I would write a policy sooner. I want to have everything written down, so everyone is on the same page.

**Q: We have seen many residential cleaning companies lose as much as 50% of their business. What has your experience been?**

A: Our experience was that a lot of clients just said they were going to put us on a pause. We hardly had any cancellations. We did not lose anything close to 50%.

At the same time, we started to control our costs, so we ended up being more profitable. Less volume, but more profit.



**Q: There is no guarantee that this pandemic will come to a close in the near future, which means for the time being, we are all operating under a new normal. What is your outlook for your company?**

A: I think there is a very localized effect to the virus. What I was afraid of is that there would be a huge impact to our hospitality industry. We were afraid to lose a great deal of business based on loss of income. That is a large part of our business. We only lost a couple of clients in that arena.

Our biggest constraint right now is hiring. We tend to hire women with families and now, they are facing fear and childcare concerns. We have been struggling and facing a bottleneck.

Our outlook is positive. I would say we are cautiously optimistic.

**Q: What processes or procedures have you or will you put in place in the anticipation of another crisis?**

A few things that we have been doing are:

- We put in the CDC guidelines for safety procedures in place.
- We text our customers the day before their appointment to verify that no one is infected in their home.
- We have our staff tested every other week. It gives our employees their own peace of mind as well.
- We have also thought through our business processes so we can limit person-to-person contact.

My partner and I have always been very disciplined about money and costs. Now we are being even more diligent.

**Q: What advice would you give to other residential cleaning companies to help them prepare and equip their businesses to survive a future crisis?**

A: To prepare, I would suggest you have a one-sheet write-up of potential scenarios – from more likely to catastrophic. That way you can prepare for all scenarios. Think through what you want to have happen at your business, the associated expenses, the communications needed, who needs to be notified. It's like you are building an emergency plan. All of these ideas that we have ever thought about and now you actually need it.

You won't get that emotional punch in the gut if you are prepared and have considered the things that could happen.

It will vary from business to business and area to area. Outline what are you going to do and be ready to do it. That way you can minimize anxiety and fear – channel those feelings into preparation.

I have also told all my clients if you have money, hoard it! Stash it and wait. Money covers a multitude of sins. Having money in the bank is a really nice safety blanket.

**Q: Knowing what you know now, what would be your plan if something like this would happen again?**

Here is what I would do for the first four weeks.

**Week 1: Research and Planning.**

The first thing I would do is pause, breathe, and think. The first week is thinking and decision-making. Give yourself space to stop and think about it. Do the research. Stay on top of the legislation and regulation – take the time to learn what the laws mean and how they apply to your business.

**Week 2: Implementation and Team Communication.**

Start putting out the written processes to protect your company and your clients.

Because of the pandemic, I began to record videos for my staff. You need to keep them posted on what is happening and what they need to know. It is very disconcerting not to hear from your leadership. You want them to make them feel better. They feel better when they know what's going on.

**Week 3: Client Communication.**

Now it's time to inform your clients what you are doing and what are your procedures. Be proactive in communicating with your clients and assess their needs. We created templates for the messaging, so everything was crisp and clearly communicated. This definitely needs to be in place in the first 30 days.

**Week 4: Budget and Finance Analysis.**

By week 4, you need to have a thorough understanding of your finances, your profits and losses. Know your cash flow and what your expenses. You should always have your financials in order. So many of the decisions you need to make are based on your finances. You need to know the math to make the decisions.

For example, we wanted to give our team bonuses during the earliest days of the pandemic. However, the timing wasn't right with our finances. After we got to a better cash flow, we were then able to offer back bonuses.

**Q: Finally, what is your advice on how to change your mindset and stay positive during a potential future crisis?**

I always go back to the buffalo. There is a Native American saying that when thunder strikes, cows run away from it and buffalos run towards it. Every morning when I wake up, I ask myself, "Are you are a buffalo or a cow?" A lot of times, I feel like a cow. But I want to have a buffalo outcome.

Make an agreement with yourself that you are going to act with courage and clarity and not fear. You can make a promise to yourself that you are going to stay positive and not let the fear consume me.

In the midst of this disaster, I felt like a tiny cow running against a huge storm. Even if I went down with the storm, that's ok because I am very proud of what we accomplished.

It was hard to watch a lot of my friends locally that were business owners and they had to shut down their businesses. They were in complete shock. As a human, we suffer with our friends and it was compounded.

What has happened in the cleaning industry that is amazing is we started signing on to Zoom together. We were in our pajamas and crying – but the wonderful thing is the emotional support carried us through. We talked about what was working and what wasn't. Peer support is very important. Outside of the industry, people were devastated. They went into hiding. In the residential cleaning industry, we are survivors. We supported each other and it feel really good. It helped me to keep a positive mindset and not lose my head. During this pandemic, I worked harder on my company than I have in years. It brought a lot of things in focus and clearer.

# Q&A WITH RJ PATEL

**RJ Patel**  
**President, PCT Clean**



**Q: Back in the spring as the pandemic began, was there something specific that happened that made you think that the coronavirus was going to be so much bigger than anything we have experienced before?**

**A:** I don't have a crystal ball, but what I do have that gut intuition. I also have good sources that I depend on, take very seriously and trust. Those sources were saying that because this was a global impact, and seeing how other countries were shutting down, I knew there was an increased level of seriousness attached to it.

A very scary element of the pandemic was that they didn't know how to tackle this from a medical

standpoint. They didn't know how to handle the medical impact. If you tested positive, it didn't mean you were going to die. However, that was what people were initially led to believe and that was a scary thought.

For me, listening to the right sources and understanding that this was a serious concern for those that had additional health concerns, cleaning was a solution. It wasn't the solution, but it could be part of the solution.

We became essential and that was the key. I called our congressman and we talked for 18 minutes. Do not take cleaning for granted or what someone in the public knows about cleaning. In that conversation, he asked me what exactly we do. I explained and I felt like I educated him. When we got off the phone, he said he did not realize what residential cleaners do. He also said that he would call the governor of Georgia and let him know that cleaning should be labeled as essential. Within an hour, our governor spoke, and he labeled us as an essential business.

The reason he listened to me is because I have been involved in the community in many different ways. I have developed a name and a reputation. You must get out there and always have to be in front of people to let them know who you are, that you are essential and that you do matter.

**Q: You own a residential cleaning company. Once the virus began to spread and the quarantine began, what were your priorities for your business?**

A: One of the things that Asha and I decided to do was to assure our staff that they would not go without a paycheck. We didn't even apply for the PPP funds until our banker gave us a nudge and we applied. Our goal was to make sure our staff was taken care of.

There were many homes that decided that they didn't want to have their homes cleaned. It was very mentally torturing because we felt like we were diseased.

One of the great things is that we were diversified in what we clean. And when one side of our business went down, the other side went up. One of our clients was a manufacturing plant – we had workers on two shifts. They decided they wanted to have cleaning 24-7-365 cleaning. When one side of our business went down, the other side skyrocketed. It was an amazing turn. We have a total of 20 people working there around the clock. For us that was a saving grace. We continued to pay our people and made sure everyone was taken care of. Our being diversified made it so we didn't have to rely on one side of the business.

**Q: What steps did you take to keep your business going? Did you see any unique opportunities because of the quarantine?**

A: We took a stance that we would operate on faith, not fear. Though this is serious, what was being created in the media was a huge sense of fear. I chose to actually practice that motto. By doing that, my mind clear to see what the community wanted. We were able to step in and help those who had actually experienced positive cases of the virus. I told them I obviously don't have a cure for COVID, but I have a solution, a way to combat it. I am talking about restaurants, small businesses, and some larger businesses.

Another step was on social media. We would allow the businesses that we were working for and disinfecting to take pictures of us and the cleanings we were doing for them. They then shared those photos on social media to let their customers to know it was safe to come to their place of business.

In Georgia, our governor was very proactive. He did not want businesses to close and to suffer. He opened up a lot of businesses, and when that happened, we were able to work with businesses that were facing positive cases.

This also led us to a new concept that we had developed with Gosia Baran – a new company, pct Disinfecting. Through her contacts, Gosia knew of someone who had product to disinfect. Through pct Disinfecting, we have now completed over two million square feet of protecting and disinfecting.

Having someone in my network like Gosia, someone I have known for 12 years through ARCSI, made this so much easier to accomplish together than if we would have tried to do this alone. Our partnership was a key to our quick turnaround and our success.

Everything that we have faced through this pandemic is completely new, so we had to learn. We were able to depend on ISSA, ARCSI, and GBAC to learn. We took the GBAC Fundamentals Online program as soon as it was available. We also found courses surrounding fogging online.

**Q: Looking at where you are now, is there anything you would have done differently at the onset of the pandemic?**

A: I live with the mindset of no regrets. But from business strategic standpoint, I would have hired someone in marketing sooner rather than later. I feel like we have really made great progress. We are happy where we are. We are not ecstatic, but we are taking the steps to get there.

**Q: We have seen many residential cleaning companies lose as much as 50% of their business. What has your experience been?**

A: Yes, of course. When certain businesses had their staff working from home, offices didn't need to be cleaned and we were placed on hold. With the home scenario, many families didn't want people from the outside coming in. Fortunately for our company in Georgia, it was short-lived because our governor opened businesses sooner than many states did. It was very aggressive to allow businesses to open, but we all know what kind of a hit this has been on our economy. Opening our state has been a really good idea. And while we are not back to normal yet, I think we are getting closer.

**Q: There is no guarantee that this pandemic will come to a close in the near future, which means for the time being, we are all operating under a new normal. What is your outlook for your company?**

A: In December 2019, we adopted a theme for our company that we are a good company, but we want to be a great company. We have been working on what do we need to do in each area to go from good to great. We began that process with an introspect looking at every process, every system, everything – everything got revamped. I believe we will be able to leverage that in 2021. We invested in four new cars this year, and we paid for all four in cash. Every renovation has all been paid for. Our company is debt free. That is how I like to operate. I like peace of mind. I don't like to panic.

The future looks great. Your future should look great as long as you are internally doing things to be a better company. Make sure you front line workers are receiving the training, the education, and the compensation they deserve.

We can invest in material things, but you should also invest in your people. Something I have learned in our partnership with Gosia is how heavily she invests in her people. I thought I was, but I could clearly see what a grand job she is doing. Invest in your front-line people.

**Q: What processes or procedures have you or will you put in place in the anticipation of another crisis?**

A: Let's say it's something virus-related and its consequences are similar to COVID-19, I would say I would be better prepared. I would protect my people first and be sure they would have a paycheck.

On the flip side, here in Georgia, we recently had a hurricane come through. A virus is not the only disaster you may have to incur. I didn't have electricity for 27 hours at my home. If that happened at my

business, I wouldn't have been prepared. These things are making me think of the many types of disasters and how they can cripple your business.

**Q: What advice would you give to other residential cleaning companies to help them prepare and equip their businesses to survive a future crisis?**

A: Be diversified in what you clean. If you just want to do homes, that's fine. But I would recommend if you are in the cleaning business, have some diversity. We do office cleaning, manufacturing, and home cleaning. It's that diversification that got us through the disaster.

**Q: Knowing what you know now, what would be your plan if something like this would happen again?**

A: Be prepared with PPE.

Communicate with your staff. I don't think you can overcommunicate with them. Communicate with your clientele. Keep everyone aware of what's going on. I learned through this process that when we communicated, people appreciated it. They knew that the products that we were using are products that work, our techniques, our processes. We had to talk about all of these things in our newsletters to our clients. We needed our staff to be trained and prepared for what they were doing.

We need to be prepared to understand our clients' needs and address them. Make your teams feel safe so you can avoid a mass exodus. As a leader, you must show faith, not fear.

**Q: Finally, what is your advice on how to change your mindset and stay positive during a potential future crisis?**

A: Pick and choose who your sources are that you listen to because they drive your decisions every day. So, when another virus or disaster comes up, your mindset will remain positive. You can't just be positive in the good times. If you can smile during the bad times, it will change your mindset.

I want to emphasize to educate yourself. Lean on ISSA and ARCSI. You get better by being informed; the results will come.

# Q&A WITH DAN SMITH

**Dan Smith**

**Owner, Home Maid Better**



**Q: Back in the spring as the pandemic began, was there something specific that happened that made you think that the coronavirus was going to be so much bigger than anything we have experienced before?**

**A:** On the front end, my mind went immediately to how is this going to impact my business. We are very much a small business – and this was the only income factor for many families. What if this crisis wasn't as brief as we all initially hoped it would be? I thought it was amusing when someone said recently, "Remember back in April when we said when

this is all over with ..."

Immediately I went to the business side and how are we going to keep things moving? How do we keep things afloat? Frankly, giving up was never an option. Shutting down was never an option. At the time, we talked about higher unemployment rates than the Great Depression era. I also knew that now is not the time to be looking for a new job or a new endeavor. We decided to dig our heels into this business. It was really a matter of necessity, more than it was confident hope.

**Q: You own a residential cleaning company. Once the virus began to spread and the quarantine began, what were your priorities for your business?**

**A:** My first priority was protecting the team I had at that moment. One of the things I shared publicly was it takes far less energy to keep, nurture, and grow a fantastic team than it does to build a new one. Without any doubt, I focused on what do I do to ensure I can keep the people I had on the team – it was valuable to have them remain.

How can I get creative? How can I promote my company when people were starting to cancel or put us on hold? Coming from the highest point of leadership that I could muster I ensured my team that we would get through this together and I prepped them for what that might look like.



I am happy to share that everyone that was on the team that day is still on our team today. We didn't have to lay anyone off. That has paid dividends in the long run and in the relationship growth with the team present day.

**Q: What steps did you take to keep your business going? Did you see any unique opportunities because of the quarantine?**

A: In our area, I realize geographically everyone had different encounters. In our area, we were slow to react. From a state standpoint, we were slower to react than the east coast or the west coast. Immediately I wanted to start thinking what it was that could differentiate us at this time when I knew the inevitable was coming from what was happening on each of the coast.

My wife and I quite literally and faced the problem at hand – what were we going to do to keep our employees working? One point my wife was fixated on was giving back and helping others. She felt that we had an opportunity to give back to the community.

Ultimately, what we decided to do a “cleaning for heroes” initiative. We offered special services, special rates to first responders, medical staff, EMTs, and paramedics. That was genuinely was a game-changer for our business. In the end, that created more work for our team. For a good month and a half, the team was kept busy by existing customers and eh gap filled by the first-responder community.

It positioned us in community from a different perspective. From a team retention perspective, there was a sense of comfort and comfortability in the moment of unknown knowing that they had a full schedule.

We also reached out to our existing client base. We shared with them that we appreciate serving them. We let them know that if they wanted to support their cleaning techs, they had an opportunity to do so. The net result of that was the ability to present \$400 grocery gift cards to each team member. That helped to bring a little more relief during the unknown.

We also did a disinfectant giveaway at a time when it was very difficult to find the items on the shelves. Our goal was to get disinfectant into the hands of as many as we could. We were not prepared for the outcome. We had the most amazing outcome. We had somewhere between 750-1000 cars come through for our giveaway. The police arrived on site to direct traffic because it was there was traffic all the way the street and wrapped around the corner.

Later, a complete stranger shared a video he took from a drone. He edited it and put the video together. We ended up with three different news stations come out, we had live interviews and a write up on another channel.

Watch the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GV2Ou8syIYg>

This turned out to be a phenomenal event. It was wildly successful. Finding ways to give back to the community during this time can pay dividends. Pouring into the cup is never time wasted.

**Q: Looking at where you are now, is there anything you would have done differently at the onset of the pandemic?**

A: I would have been quicker in reacting to the fogging or spraying space. It was not a place that we jumped right into. I didn't believe that the pandemic was going to be over quickly, but I was not prepared for how quick people were going to jump into the disinfection and sanitation realm. I would have moved in that direction sooner and that could have helped our clients and community in a different way.

**Q: We have seen many residential cleaning companies lose as much as 50% of their business. What has your experience been?**

A: I am very grateful for the state I live in. I believe there is more room for us to be forward-thinking in virus space for the sake of the community. We were slow to cancel and slow to dip compared to those in bigger markets.

We saw about a 40% decline between April and May. But then we have seen month over month growth since June. We are in a really good place right now. We know there is no promise of tomorrow, but we have seen growth since June with our client base and our revenue. Some of that can be attributed to being in Oklahoma rather than other states that were more aggressive in their pandemic efforts.

**Q: There is no guarantee that this pandemic will come to a close in the near future, which means for the time being, we are all operating under a new normal. What is your outlook for your company?**

A: We are using this time to rebuild from the inside. There was an element of business as usual before the pandemic, but now the future is undefined. I am very aware of the growth we have encountered the past few months is not indicative of guaranteed growth in the future. We are taking an opportunity to redevelop who we are from training perspective, who we are from a process and procedure perspective, what our message is on the sales side, and what our go to market strategy in this present state of pandemic. We don't know if a shutdown is going to force a decline in business or in revenue, so the decisions made today are always in the context of what if things are not as great tomorrow.

My takeaway is operating the business in a way that is inherently different way than I had before and that is in preparation for the unknown. The pandemic is the most recent example of the value of being prepared for the unknown.

**Q: What processes or procedures have you or will you put in place in the anticipation of another crisis?**

A: We have taken a step forward like so many other businesses to commit to ensuring we are cleaning appropriately and being responsible in the process. That begins with training appropriately and investing in the team we have today.

We also want to keep updated with CDC guidelines, which change on occasion and bend and twist on a moment's notice. Ultimately, it's a matter of providing comfort to our customers as it relevant to the current events. I feel the biggest lesson we can learn is that we must be as flexible as we hope our clients can be during this time.

**Q: What advice would you give to other residential cleaning companies to help them prepare and equip their businesses to survive a future crisis?**

A: The advice I would give is to invest in your team as much as they are committed to serving their clients. Without our cleaning team, we can't compete in this marketplace. For companies that haven't taken initiatives to prepare for another lengthy shutdown, I think communication with your team is a priority, ensuring that they trust and know you are there for them. Letting them know that you have their backs is invaluable.

The second layer is to be cautious in approaching things from a disinfection expert viewpoint unless you are prepared to do the proper training and equipment. You have to balance what is traditionally known as house cleaning with what is responsible cleaning and healthy cleaning and ensuring we do so in a way that doesn't cause more harm.

Investing in your team and your message will better position you in the marketplace against those who are not as forward thinking in those areas.

**Q: Knowing what you know now, what would be your plan if something like this would happen again?**

A: Here is how I would prioritize:

Week 1: Ensure that my communication lines were clear and active with employees, client base, and prospective clients, and, last but not least, prospective employees.

Week 2: Creating a strategy plan that begins with education. How are you going to address the challenge, and do you have enough information to make a decision? Regardless of what type of crisis you are facing, you need to determine what it is, how it impacts your clients and your employees, and what it might mean for your business as a whole. Educate yourself to the fullest extent.

Week 3: Engaging yourself deep in your community. One of the most beautiful things about our industry is the existence of a community in which we enjoy helping each other and seeing others succeed. I find great value connecting with my community and other business owners who are all facing the same situation, but all come from different backgrounds and experiences. The collective value of that community far exceeded anything I could have navigated through on my own.

Week 4: Focus on commitment and positive follow-through. During this pandemic, there were times when I was concerned about the "what ifs." On more than one occasion, I wasted time and energy on the "what ifs." I need to invest that energy where I am needed on the team, where I am needed with my

clients. There really is no simple answer on how to do this. Believe you can get through this no matter what. Focus energy on positive things rather than letting it drain you on the negative side.

**Q: Finally, what is your advice on how to change your mindset and stay positive during a potential future crisis?**

A: I would say if you are lacking community in our industry that is the best place to start. There is a lot of work to be done on an individual basis. But if we are talking about mindset, there is a lot of value to be gained when you are in a community of others that have the same determination, concerns and fears.

We are stronger together. If you are part of ARCSI or attending the show, but are still doing things on your own, my biggest contribution to this conversation is to say to surround yourself with other people who you find are thinking positive and thinking forward. Be intentional by not surrounding yourself by those who are communicating the doom and gloom, worrying, perpetuating fear. Surround yourself with the right people.