

CFR The Commercial Flooring Report

For the Commercial Floor Covering Industry

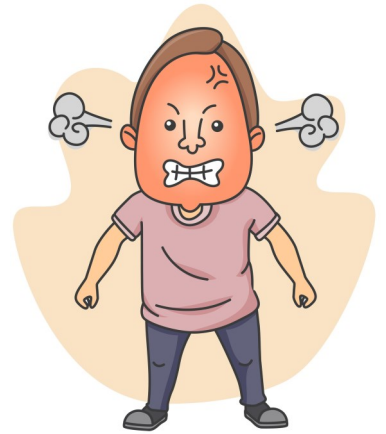
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Cheating the Installer

I'm going to share an article with you that I wrote in 2001 from my Claims File Column in Floor Covering News as to why we had and have an installer crisis. I'll interject some new information and comments. You'll see one of the biggest reasons why we are where we are today with the installer crisis. This article was focused on the retail dealer but anyone hiring or using and abusing a flooring installer would be responsible.

I had a call from an installer recently and he was upset. It seems he had been doing some commercial carpet installation for a large dealer in the evenings. When he ran into a problem taking up the old carpet, he called the dealer for whom he was working. He told the dealer he needed to rent a machine to strip the carpet from the floor. He also told the dealer he had priced out the rental use charges of the equipment and it would be \$300.00. The dealer said go ahead, he actually told him to do whatever was necessary because this was an important job and client and they wanted everything right. The installer was told he would be reimbursed for the expenses. When the job was completed, satisfactorily I might add, and the installer was paid, he was cheated out of the \$300.00 he was told he'd get. The dealer said the installer had to pay because he rented the machine. This same dealer cheated the installer out of additional monies for other work the following week.



This installer is a standup guy and I know the firm for whom he is working and they're one of the biggest retailers in their state. They normally conduct themselves in a very professional manner and take care of their customers. It's obvious they don't feel the same way about the people who install the products they sell. This installer actually does the work the way it's supposed to be done and has the tools to do so. The carpets are power stretched, seams are sealed, he's neat, well spoken, has a good personality, has a good vehicle, he's conscientious, on time and dedicated to his profession but he's frustrated as well. He has a right to be because what he's experienced is tantamount to stealing. Money he's owed has been kept from him, after he paid for the tools to do the job which he was told to do by the dealer. The dealer agreed to pay, in fact the dealer told him to do whatever he had to do because of the importance of the job. It's not like the installer took it upon himself to commit the dealer to the expense of getting the stripping tool. He called the dealer first, explained the situation and was told to go ahead. When he did, he was stiffed by the dealer.

Stuff like this really ticks me off. The retailer is always griping about how bad the installers are but when you get a good one, and there are lots of them, you deny him the right to make a proper living. You deduct wages from him for any discrepancy you deem fitting to shave a few bucks from the job. Is that few bucks going to make you rich? Do you have a rule about this that you tell the installers before they go to work for you? Few, if any of you, discuss your business philosophy relative to installation with the most important people on the team, the guys who install what you sell. You categorize installers as losers, drunks, misfits, and ne'er-do-wells. A few of them may be but most of them are not. I know lots of installers around the country and the vast majority of them are hardworking, honest, and conscientious. Most often you attract the caliber of individual that most closely resembles yourself. So, if you're attracting installers who you think are losers, you must be one too.

How is it that there are perpetually complaints about installers, yet nobody seriously wants to do anything about it. You won't make them part of the team, you won't pay them what they're worth, you won't ensure that you get good quality so that you can get the value for your investment. You just complain. And it's not just the retailer who's at fault, the manufacturer is as much to blame. Some of them used to have installation training, very few do today. We as an industry created this mess and now, we have to fix it as everyone scrambles to find a solution. The pandemic accelerated and exposed the installer situation, but the problem started a long time ago, particularly at the retail level.

Why should any installer invest his own time and money to upgrade himself, invest in the proper tools only to be paid the same wage as the "hammer and hatchet" guy? Does it make sense to you? Would you invest in your business if you didn't think you'd get a positive return? Why should the installer do it? The better someone is at whatever they do, the more they're worth and paying them what they're worth is the right thing to do. And helping them to make a better living because they make you one is the industry's responsibility.

When is this going to change, and when are you going to realize it has to, when there's no one left to install the flooring you sell? Flooring installers are aging out or defecting to other business interests, even owning their own store, and installing what they sell so they can control their destiny and make a better living. Installers who have mad skills to do exacting and intricate work can demand more compensation for their skills, and they're worth it and will get what they ask for because of what they can do.



THE COMMERCIAL FLOORING REPORT

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Page Layout By: Anita S. Drennon

The pandemic taught us many things but particularly is how amazed flooring dealers, mostly at retail, were that they could get so much for the products they sell and for the installation and that consumers were willing to wait to get what they wanted. This is called good business. I've preached this all my life. I've been in business all my life, even as kid, providing services in the neighborhood I grew up in and charging a higher price for better service. I sold doilies and knitted place mats door to door that my grandmother made and set the prices and got them. I live by many mantras but one of the most important is that if you don't ask, you don't get. For the flooring industry the time to ask for saving the installers is now. The products you sell have no value unless they're installed and they're not going to install themselves regardless of how easy and unique an installation process or technology may be.

This example of the installer being cheated is only one of the many occurrences like this that takes place every day. One of these days you'll actually learn how to do business and that includes not being paranoid about getting a dime more a yard for the flooring you sell, not beating the manufacturer up for a penny a yard on the flooring you buy and not cheating the installer out of his just wages. Keep doing these types of things and you deserve all the problems they'll get you. If you create the environment, you reap the consequences, good or bad. Welcome to the flooring industry, where we have met the enemy and he is us.

Now we're in scramble mode due to necessity and the mess we've made of the installation community. I applaud the efforts by everyone now working diligently to reverse the installer crisis, and they'll all be effective but it's going to take time and a concerted effort by the industry as a whole to reverse the problem we've created. One of the most ambitious initiatives is by individual dealers and flooring contractors who have started their own installer recruitment and training programs in house. Many are having good success. What is even more amazing, and not surprising, is those flooring contractors and dealers who have always respected their installers, paid them well, treated them fairly, made them a part of the team, and a member of the family, are not having issues.

I'll leave you with a couple of ideas shared at a recent convention I attended of flooring contractors. Let the salespeople and the flooring installers swap positions so that each learns what the other does and how difficult each one's job is. Let everyone see how much



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"WHEN NO ONE ELSE HAS ANSWERS, WE DO"

effort it takes to install flooring. I think it's one of the hardest trades there is, wrestling with heavy materials, dealing with tight schedules, having other trades and materials in the way of your work, getting blamed for failures and being asked to do more than what is reasonable to get the flooring installed. Let everyone know something about every position in the business so that you have the team all moving toward the same objectives, goals, and end results. Have a monthly meeting with food for the installers and other members of the team so they can all get to know each other. Let the installers know the types of flooring you sell and get their opinions on the products since they're the ones who have to install and work with the stuff. Ask them how they think you can avoid problems, complaints, call backs, punch list items and anything else they think will help them get the job done better – get them involved. And lastly, bring in suppliers of the flooring products, underlayment materials, adhesives, and installation tools, get their opinions and expose them to the what's new and different since they're the ones who have to work with these items. And one more thing, make them human. Market them. Show the installation teams on your website. I'm a marketing guy and there's a saying in marketing that I live by, "if they can see it, you can sell it." Don't just tell the client or customer about what you offer, show them. Show that your firm is a place installers want to work for, be with and grow with. Create elite flooring installation teams, like the Navy Seals and see how this changes your installation woes and your business. You can do it, I have faith in the industry and I'll do whatever I can to help.

Remember, when you have questions, concerns or a flooring failure on any flooring material including concrete and underlayments, call LGM, we have the answers and the experts that can help you.

Think about this saying.

"Science is intangible. It is the process whereby humans obtain reliable information about reality." We can use a dose of this in the industry.

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