

How To Start Your Own Janitorial Business

A janitorial service is a well paying, steady business that involves mostly night work on a contract basis. You agree (contract) to perform certain scheduled actions and the client pays you on a monthly basis.

Normal services are sweeping, dusting, emptying ashtrays, pencil sharpeners and wastebaskets, refilling soap and paper dispensers and buffing and/or vacuuming the floors. Waxing might be done every third night;stripping once a month.

These services are normally performed at night when the business is closed, which gives the janitorial crew a time span of 12 to 14 hours. If the jobs are relatively small, one crew might do several businesses a night.

A beginner can start with ordinary household tools (and buy more as they are needed), plus some cleaning supplies. To start, find a small store or business that needs cleaning at night and offer your services. Do all the work yourself for a while. Learn first hand how long it takes to do each job, which techniques work best, and the type and amount of supplies that are needed.

When you are just starting, it is a good idea to tell the client that you are learning, that you want to do a professional job, and that you might have to adjust your rates when you learn how much work and supplies are required. Be sure to ask them to advise you of anything they think you can do better -- and thank them when they do.

People love to give advice, and in this case it is not only free training, it will help you keep the contract while you are still learning.

On your first few jobs take notes of the workload and time it takes for each operation, so you will know what to consider when bidding on future jobs, and how long it should take your helpers.

Most janitorial contractors have checklists that they use when walking through the job with the prospective client, so they can find out (and record exactly what is wanted -- and bid accordingly. The objective is to bid the amount that will satisfy both you as a business person and the client.

Before making your final bid, check the outside of the building to see if there are additional chores that could or should be included, such as sweeping a parking lot, straightening the trash bin or washing the outside windows. Also check the general appearance (which will tell you the quality of work they expect), and see if there is someone that may be hard to please.

One contractor always looks for a behind the scenes person who has been there through the past five bank presidents, who will be the one that calls the service back to empty a missed ashtray. If he spots such a person, he adds 10% to the bid -- and everyone stays happy!

When hiring help, you will probably need to bond them (as well as yourself. Many businesses will not deal with janitorial companies

unless they are bonded, because they have access (often, a set of keys) to their buildings and offices when no one else is there.

A bonding service also helps protect you: if there is a question, the bonding agent arbitrates. Since most of the work is done after normal working hours, it is not difficult to find helpers. Many students and day workers are happy to "moonlight" to make a few extra dollars.

To locate professional janitorial supplies, look in the phone book or THOMAS REGISTER (a multi-volume reference book that lists all major manufacturing companies in the country).

Some janitorial contracts include refilling paper towel containers and the like, which add a minor amount to the contract price.. Other include periodic wax removal, special jobs like window or wall washing, carpet shampooing and even plant care. You can probably increase your profits by selling some of the suppliers, since you can buy in larger quantities than most of your clients.

Most suppliers do not wholesale to retail establishments or small businesses. If you find a good source for wholesale supplies, you may be able to offer the same supplies at or below the price they are currently paying -- and still make a profit.

Note if you do the work AND furnish the expendable supplies, your service contract will be a little more secure since the client depends on you for both the work and supplies.

As your business grows, you can add equipment that you have specific need for -- such as buffers, wax strippers and commercial vacuum cleaners, that will enable you to do more jobs and make more money. Keep an eye out for bargains in used janitorial equipment, but don't buy things you can't use; save your money for things that will help you make money.

Although most janitorial companies pay their employees by the hour, it is perfectly alright for a beginner (especially a single proprietorship) to pay by the job -- a set amount per night, per month, or an actual percentage of the contract. In the latter case, it may be legal to actually sub-contract individual accounts, so that you are not burdened with withholding taxes and the like.

For example, if you have a contract for \$250 a month, you can sub-contract it for \$200 per month, and pocket the difference. That is your pay for getting the contract and also for being responsible to find another sub-contractor if the need arises -- because the original contract is in your name.

Aside from obvious potential problems like theft or major breakage, the greatest possible problem is when you and the client disagree on what work is supposed to be done. It is very easy for this to happen unless everything is IN WRITING, and the results can be very unpleasant.

When you accept a job or submit a bid, every detail of what you are responsible must be spelled out (remember the checklist mentioned above). You can't just say clean and tidy the place -- this leaves too much open to interpretation. Put down the details

and make sure that both you and the client understand them the same way. This may take a little more effort at contract time, but it can save some big headaches.

Although there are a couple of schools listed under Business Sources, few people actually need to take a course -- especially if they start small or have any experience at all. The reason we have listed several schools and franchises under Business Sources is to afford you the opportunity to correspond with them. By checking their offers you might get a better idea of just what you want to do and how you should best go about it.

You will need to keep a current record of incoming and outgoing cash, and a file of your receipts and checks. Your financial records should be summarized monthly to let you know how you are doing and annually for income taxes.

Your contracts can be fancy, technical forms from a lawyers, or simple forms from a stationery store, or even a letter that you compose spelling out the details of the agreement and you both sign.

A contract needs only state that in exchange for a certain fee (paid monthly or?), you will perform the listed chores on a daily, weekly or whatever basis (separate them by when they are to be done).

Subcontractors are similar but with different names (they contract to do jobs for you). If you are in doubt about the contract wording, work up a draft and ask a lawyer to review it (he will ordinarily charge much less to review than to compose one,,, even though his secretary will probably copy most of it from existing forms).

Once you are satisfied with your contract form, have copies of it reproduced. To save money, you can have a word processing service make the master and then just make more copies as you need them. The advantage of this that the word processor can easily alter the form if there is a mistake or a change needed -- and you aren't stuck with 1,000 copies of outdated or worthless forms!

The janitorial business is not glamorous, but it is profitable because it is something that every business needs. The work is not complicated or difficult and it is relatively easy to get help. Business often prefer to deal with a service than to try and hire their own because they are not there to supervise and the service gives them some assurance of a professional job.

A neat looking area is very important businesses and stores and they are willing to pay well for good service. If you are willing to work learn and manage people, you can do well in the janitorial business.

BUSINESS SOURCES

WELCO MANUFACTURING, INC., P.O. Box D, Jackson, WY 83001. Sells propane fired steam cleaner (gets hot in one minute); uses liquid soap weighs 120 lbs.

BLACK MAGIC, 1472 Mountain Rd., Stowe, VT 05672, 800/334-3395. Information about high pressure washing business (for stoves and

duct work).

SUN-BELT STEAMEX, 4211 Winton Rd., Raleigh, NC 27604. Cleaning supplies for cleaners of upholstery, carpets, etc.

EVERGREEN CLEANING SYSTEMS,, 1598 Reed Industrial, West Trenton, NJ 08628, 800/3547336. Offers a business kit for home and rug cleaning (\$2300).

DOVER PUBLICATIONS, INC., 31 East 2nd St., Mineola, NY 11051. Discount books, clip art, stencils, etc.

QUILL CORPORATION, 100 Schelster Rd., Lincolnshire, IL 60917-4700, 312/634-4800. Office supplies.

NEBS, 500 Main St., Groton, MA 04171, 800/225-6380. Office supplies.

IVEY PRINTING, Box 761, Meridan, TX 76665. Letterhead: 400 sheets plus 200 envelopes - \$18.

SWEDCO, Box 29, Mooresville, NC 28115. 3 line rubber stamps - \$3; Business cards - \$13 per thousand.

ZPS, Box 581, Libertyville, IL 60048-2556. Business cards (raised print - \$11.50 per K) and letterhead stationery. Will print your copy ready logo or design, even whole card.

WALTER DRAKE, 4119 Drake Bldg., Colorado Springs, CO 80940. Short run business cards, stationery, etc, Good quality but little choice of style or color.