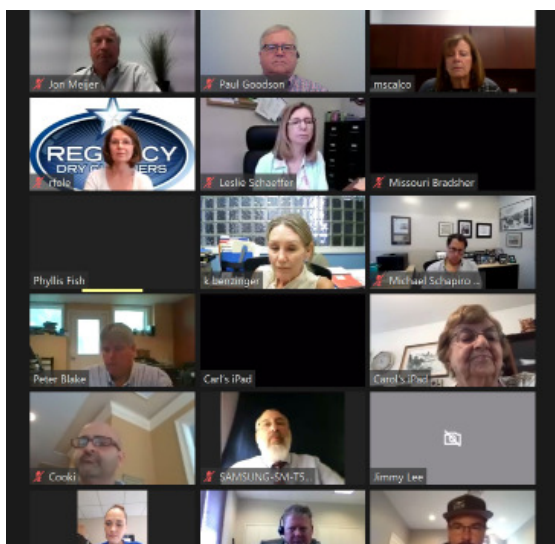




# THE Reclaimer

## Working Together to Overcome COVID Calamity

JULY/AUGUST, 2020  
VOLUME 19, NO. 3



EVERYTHING CHANGED AS SPRING WAS STARTING. THE NOVEL CORONAVIRUS EPIDEMIC BLOOMED INTO A FULL-BLOWN GLOBAL PANDEMIC AND THE ECONOMY STALLED.

Drycleaning sales across the U.S. and world dropped as much as 85% virtually overnight. The industry has since been in a long, slow recovery. This downturn is lasting longer than most drycleaning business owners first imagined.

From the start of the pandemic in mid-March, DLI and SEFA began an ongoing effort to offer a host of

COVID-19 updates and links to all professional cleaners DLI could reach, members or not. DLI quickly decided that COVID-related information was too important to the public health to restrict to members only and should be openly shared with the entire industry.

Almost immediately after regional shutdowns started, DLI worked with others and advocated to public officials that drycleaning and laundry services are essential and should not be closed as industry services help destroy viruses. Health and safety guidance on handling items for cleaning was quickly collected and shared through all of DLI's communications channels.

### CONTINUING EFFORT

Our efforts did not stop there. The associations moved to mobilize all available resources to create a constant flow of vetted and verified information and business assistance tools.

"This has been like no other time in our history," said Peter Blake, SEFA Executive Director. "The industry as a whole needed SEFA & DLI more than any other time I can remember. We understood right away that the only way to get through this is by pulling everyone together. Our mission is to help cleaners succeed and we're proud of what our team has accomplished in just a few short months."

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## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE...

# Lessons Learned During Global Pandemic

SLOWLY, MOST OF THE COUNTRY IS STARTING TO RE-OPEN AND BEGIN THE PROCESS OF RETURNING TO LIFE WITH MORE ROUTINE AND NORMALCY.

While each region and state may be doing things differently and with different timetables, people are trying to get back to business from restaurants, to stores, to entertainment venues – people are looking to revive their lifestyles. The goals of many small businesses, including drycleaners, are the same: cut through the noise, let customers know they are open for business, and develop practices that will bring the customers back. Are you ready to re-open? Have you made significant changes in your business and your brand?



*Peter Blake,  
SEFA Executive Director*

Throughout these challenging times we have learned some valuable lessons about how the world is going to move forward and through those lessons we can position ourselves for success. Here is my first lesson:

## #1: COMMUNICATION IS CRITICAL

This cannot be stressed enough. Update your digital presence and make sure you are in tune with your customers and your target market. As people return to work, to the community, and life – it is critical to communicate safety precautions and contactless options like drive-up service, free pick-up and delivery, and curbside service while creatively and strategically rolling out new services.

When making business choices or evaluating what companies to do business with consumers head right for their smart phones, apps, and computers. If you have not updated your information, claimed your Google location, and monitored the information on all your platforms, you are falling behind. You need to keep monitoring your info and your reputation. Update your website and social media platforms with the new policies and procedures you have implemented to help keep your staff and your customers safe. Make sure you have high-quality signs in your call offices. Make sure your customers can see you are committed to their safety.

There have been many diverse studies on the effectiveness of some of these safety measures, and there is a wide variety of what is required in different areas. I urge you however, to error on the side of caution. Demonstrate a commitment to safety. The safer and more serious you are taking these issues; the more apt customers are to feel comfortable entrusting you and your staff.

There is a hesitancy to push this information due to “information overload”, but it is critical you have policies and procedures listed to help demonstrate your commitment to your community’s safety. This leads me to Lesson number 2:

## #2: NO ONE IS ALONE: COMMUNITIES COMING TOGETHER

There has been an outpouring of support for buying local, and so small businesses like drycleaners and launderers need to embrace that trend and establish themselves as cornerstones of the community. We are just now beginning to understand that customers have an extraordinarily strong desire in doing businesses with local companies and brands that share their values and concerns. That statement is truer today than ever before.

Continued on page 6



# Lessons Learned From Global Pandemic

Continued from page 2

By shaping our messaging, signage, and our activities we can highlight just how invested we are in the success and safety of the communities we are a part of. I am deeply humbled as I hear the stories of Industry members coming to the aid of people and organizations that need help. From cleaning donated facemasks for local hospitals, to free cleaning of First Responders garments, free cleaning for local shelters, food donations – members of our industry have stepped up and continue to do so.

Years ago, Safety-Kleen had a promotion for the industry: “Caring for the Fabric of Life”. I do not think there is a more fitting motto for our industry. You all are in the business of keeping your communities safe and clean. Get involved, and your activities will translate to more support as things continue to re-open.

I am starting a new section of our websites dedicated to our members who are supporting their communities. I need to hear from you. Send me information on how you are participating and “Caring for the Fabric of Life” and I will add you and your services to the list. Now here is my third lesson.

### #3: THE POWER OF GRATITUDE

Sometimes it takes incredible hardship for us to realize how important people and services are to our everyday lives. Take this time to say thank you to your customers and your staff and show them that you care. A little gratitude goes a long way.

I am on weekly conference calls with our members hearing ideas and stories from across the country. One of the most consistent messages I hear is how powerful a simple thank you has been. A few companies have taken the time to handwrite a personal thank you message for their best customers expressing how much they care, and how much they thank them for their loyalty. Those messages more often than not have resulted in even higher sales the following weeks.

I have seen members hosting Customer Appreciation events like free lunches, hot dogs grilled in front of the store. I know some members who have assembled “welcome back gifts” for their customers that have included incentives and specials, lint rollers, facemasks, hand sanitizer, and a host of other small gifts.

Now is the time to stand out and make an impression. Use this time to reconnect on personal levels. Finally, here is my last lesson.

### #4: YOUR BIGGEST ASSET IS A STRONG TEAM

You are only as good as your personnel. You need to keep investing in their professional development and continue to foster their company pride. All of the things I have talked about in this article from communication, community involvement, and gratitude extends to your team as well. You need them to embrace these ideals and help you to reach out to your customer base.

Do not take them for granted, especially now. You need to show them you care for them as well. One way is to arrange employee appreciation events. That can range from buying lunches to just working in the trenches with them. An iced-down towel or a cold milk shake on a hot humid day can go a long way to showing your employees you understand their challenges. It does not have to be huge grand gestures, but small personal ways of saying thank

you, and small efforts to try and make their job as comfortable as possible will go a long way to helping keep morale high, and help your employees stay invested in your success.

When times get difficult, we often start taking it out on those closest to us. We often do not see their world and without even realizing it, we begin to take people for granted. Take time out of your day just to talk to your team. Listen to them, and you may find ways you can help each other.

I wish I could tell you this will all be ending soon. The great unknown is how long we will have to endure these hardships. It would be infinitely easier if we had a timetable, a date where we knew this would be behind us, but the truth of the matter is, we do not have that luxury. We need to keep adapting, planning, and being vigilant to keep up our guard and do the best we can to keep moving forward. All indications are that the industry is continuing the same slow steady climb back to prior success – but it is not going to be as quickly as we wish. It is a long road back to recovery.

I am here for you – and if I can help you strengthen your business in any way, please reach out. Let me know what steps you have taken to adapt your business, and please let me know how you are being active in your community. You may be featured on our new “Caring for the Fabric of Life” webpage! I wish you the best of luck as you begin a new chapter in your business.

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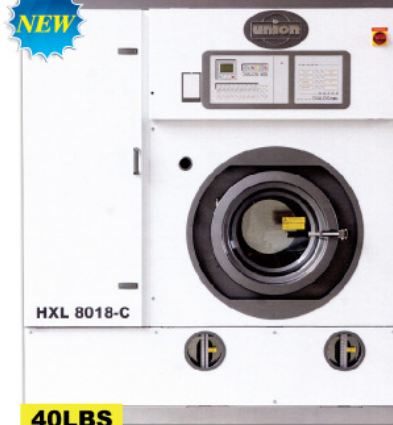
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# How to Keep Going When You Want It All To Go Away

Written By John Graham, Graham Communications



HOW LONG WILL THE DAMOCLES SWORD OF THE PANDEMIC HANG OVER OUR HEADS? AS THE DAYS DRAG ON, WILL IT THREATEN TO UPEND US INDEFINITELY?

Even though we try to avoid thinking about the troubling possibilities, they keep creeping into our minds, creating more stress, clouding our ability to stay focused, and leaving us irritable, angry, less effective—and tired.

It's not a pretty picture, not one we could possibly imagine ever facing. So, when we're confused and uncertain about the future, what are we to do? Here are some of my thoughts on the question:

## 1. DON'T LISTEN TO YOURSELF

Why does it always happen when we're trying to get to sleep at night? But that's the way it is. What's so upsetting is that the person who causes the anxiety and does the damage is the one who lives inside our head. We are never our own best friend in the middle of the night.

So, stop listening to yourself. It's time for a personal fact-checker, but neither Alexa nor Siri qualify. This is a job for someone you trust. "This is what's concerning me. Am I on track or off the rails?"

## 2. LOOK FOR NEW POSSIBILITIES

The good news is that life is not a matter of choosing the right fake Zoom background to convince ourselves (and others) that we're more than just OK. It amounts to more than that.

Recently, an editor sent me one of my sales articles. He had kept it until he found the right place for it. Recognizing that it had been around for about a year, he asked if I would look it over to see if it needed updating. Well, my first reaction was less than positive. But, swallowing my pride, I read it and was shocked at what I found! In a relatively short time, the world changed dramatically and the article needed updating to reflect what had transpired.

People are no different, so it may be time to ask yourself a tough question, "Am I dated?" Think about it. What can you do to "update" yourself? Sure, you may know your job "backwards and forwards," but that doesn't count anymore. Focus on figuring out to revise your performance. How can you make what you do more relevant? What can you do to enhance your value? Think about the possibilities.

## 3. GET BETTER ACQUAINTED WITH YOURSELF

If you really want to get to know yourself as you really are, you

might want to spend time in Wyoming. But be prepared, Wyomingites aren't subtle. They don't tip-toe around; they're not afraid to tell it like it is, no matter who you are. Having lived there, I speak from experience. For example, I recall the memorable words of a motorcycle-riding English professor from the UW: "If you can't write it, you don't know it." Got it!

Here's the point. If you want to get better acquainted with yourself, jot down life experiences from your early memories to what's happening now. Don't just remember them, get them on paper. Write them down as they come to mind. Ideas never come all at once. If you really want to know yourself, start writing. You may like what you discover.

## 4. BE READY FOR THE UNEXPECTED

How many times in the last six months have you heard someone say, perhaps wistfully, "I'll sure be glad when life gets back to the way it was." Even though we may not have said it out loud, most everyone has harbored the thought more than a few times. It's just too much to let ourselves think that going back is not an option.

If we've learned anything from the pandemic, it's that we should learn to keep an eye out for surprises and the unexpected, or, as the slang would have it, they come from "out of left field."

Even though we may not like to think that everything is up for grabs because of the pandemic, it is: the way we live, work, play, learn, shop, think, do business, and behave. It's all changing and will surely continue to evolve. Keeping an eye out for the unpredictable will make living easier and more rewarding.

## 5. CHANGE THE PICTURE OF YOURSELF

Add continuing uncertainty to the pervasive impact of COVID-19 and it's more than enough to distort our picture of ourselves and crush our self-confidence. It's too much to let ourselves think about what could possibly be coming next.

Perhaps not. How we happen to view ourselves is not a given or chiseled in stone, unless, we allow ourselves to look at it that way. In a wonderful essay, "Homo Sapiens: The Unfinished Animal," physicist George Stanciu, Ph.D., writes, "Nature gives human beings no specific way of life—no fixed occupation, no fitting dress, no appropriate emotional profile. It's as if nature grew tired when she fashioned Homo sapiens and left this one species unfinished."

And that's good news! In spite of everything, what we do with what we're given has not been written or handed to us. Our story is unfinished—and it's in our hands.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Graham of GrahamComm is a marketing and sales strategy consultant and business writer. He is the creator of "Magnet Marketing," and publishes a free monthly eBulletin, "No Nonsense Marketing & Sales Ideas." Contact him at [jgraham@grahamcomm.com](mailto:jgraham@grahamcomm.com), 617-774-9759 or [johnrgraham.com](http://johnrgraham.com).



## Take Action Need to Help SEFA/DLI Preserve the Care Label Rule



THE FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION (FTC) IS CONSIDERING REPEALING THE CARE LABELING RULE.

According to the notice published in the Federal Register, the FTC is considering repeal because manufacturers - even if not required

- would still provide care instructions, the definitions of care processes, i.e. drycleaning, may place limitations on innovations in cleaning technology, and repeal would give manufacturers more flexibility in providing care instructions which may be less confusing to consumers.

"Your assistance and attention to this is vital", warned Peter Blake, SEFA Executive Director, "and we need to make a strong deci-

sive demonstration of how important this rule is. Without the rule, manufacturers will have no requirement to test serviceability, or to provide consumers, and professionals, with instruction on cleaning. Regardless of solvent innovation, this rule is critical to help care for fabrics, and it is imperative we keep the rule viable."

Comments must be received by September 21, 2020. Comments can be submitted online at [www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov) website. Enter 2020-13919 in the search bar and that will take you directly to the comment section.

The main concern for the FTC is the economic impact of repeal of the care labeling rule. Sample comments can be found on our website. Please feel free to use these as a guideline. There is a 5,000 character limit for the comments. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact us. Thank you for your help.

It is important we let the FTC know that repeal of this regulation will have a significant and devastating economic impact not only on our industry but for consumers as well. To simplify the process, DLI has placed five different comments online at [DLIonline.org](http://DLIonline.org). You can use the sample comments and the link provided. Act Now!



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# DLI/SEFA Working to Help Cleaners Through Pandemic

Continued from page 1

## KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

By the end of March, when “normal” became a thing of the past, DLI launched a new initiative to help industry professionals share ideas. SEFA and DLI also started producing a stream of management and training videos, conference calls, employment guidance, video updates, and more.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, SEFA and DLI produced and archived the following resources:

- Over 60 member-to-member Zoom meetings for sharing ideas, challenges, and opportunities
- 57 ready-made social media and print marketing designs (three more added weekly)
- 25+ COVID related links and bulletins on DLionline.org
- 19 business development webinars ranging from marketing and branding to critical maintenance
- Developed an online Facebook Community connecting 850+ DLI members
- 16 webinars sifting through small business relief programs including PPP, EIDL Loans, Main Street Lending Program, Em-

ployee Retention Credits, and Workforce opportunity Credits

- 8 live technical training webinars on spotting and finishing
- 5 live stain removal trainings webinars in Spanish

Recordings of each DLI webinar are available on DLionline.org. Each week, DLI continues to produce and share more webinars and ready-made marketing materials. “Business is recovering slowly,” Scalco said. “DLI is focused on helping cleaners survive until we start seeing better days by banding together and sharing as much information as we can as quickly as we can. And as we move into those better days and they will come we will continue to be there for industry.”

## WHAT LIES AHEAD

SEFA and DLI are planning to provide weekly Zoom Conference calls, live technical training programs, and business development programs through the end of the year.

SEFA is also planning a major virtual conference to take the place of its popular Fall Fest Conference. This new program will expand the conference’s long standing tradition of educational excellence and will provide even more value to all participants. Look for more information coming shortly!



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## Celebrating a Dry Cleaning Pioneer: Gladys McNeal

GLADYS (DOWDA) MCNEAL IS A PIONEER IN EVERY SENSE OF THE WORD. HER AND HER FAMILY HAVE OWNED AND OPERATED ALADIN CLEANERS IN BIRMINGHAM, AL SINCE 1946. SHE RECENTLY CELEBRATED HER 102ND BIRTHDAY.

While she is now practically bed ridden and in a nursing home, her heart is still in the business and she is proud of all that she and her family have accomplished. Aladin Cleaners is still in the family and is now run by her Grandson, Tim Barr, the third generation to run the business.

She first purchased Aladin Cleaners with her then husband Charles Dowda just six months after he returned home from World War II. With only one storefront and three employees, they began their journey to realize the great potential they envisioned.

By 1950 they had two routes developed and had tripled their staff and the business was poised for tremendous growth. But fate had other plans, and the year was filled with tragedy instead. In January, a severe auto accident left Gladys severely injured. While she escaped with her life, doctors told her she would never work again. Then in August, her husband Arvel drowned in a fishing accident leaving her alone to once again take the reins.

Displaying her determination and drive -- fed by the need to provide for herself and her 13-year old daughter -- Gladys assumed the active management of the business again. She took on a manager and Vice President to assist her. Eventually, however, she would have to reclaim responsibility for the physical operation of the business despite her limitations from the accident.

Undaunted by the challenges, Gladys saw the expansion of Aladin through the years including one of the first ever, all air-conditioned plants in the US. While she was very proud of her expansion, she always felt her most important "expansion" was made in 1962 when she married Richard McNeal. He joined the Aladin organization the following year and strengthened the Aladin team.

Aladin Cleaners has gone through many changes over the years. The original plant on Woodlawn was torn down and rebuilt into a more efficient productive plant. Today they still operate two plants and have one drop store. One of the hallmarks of Aladin Cleaners is the longevity of the customers -- and the employees. Aladin Cleaners has always stressed community growth, and a commitment to professionalism. They are proud that many of their staff have over 35 years plus of service.

She was one of the first true female entrepreneurs and she had amazing success in the industry. She had to overcome many ob-



(From top left, clockwise) Gladys McNeal with Daughter Jean, Son-in-law Robert Barr, and Grandson Robert Jr.; Gladys' portrait; Gladys and Richard McNeal check figures for the days work; and a re-modeled Alladin Cleaners.



stacles in her development and met them all with grace and determination. She continued to be active in the business until well into her 80's, and then finally retired to get some much deserved rest.

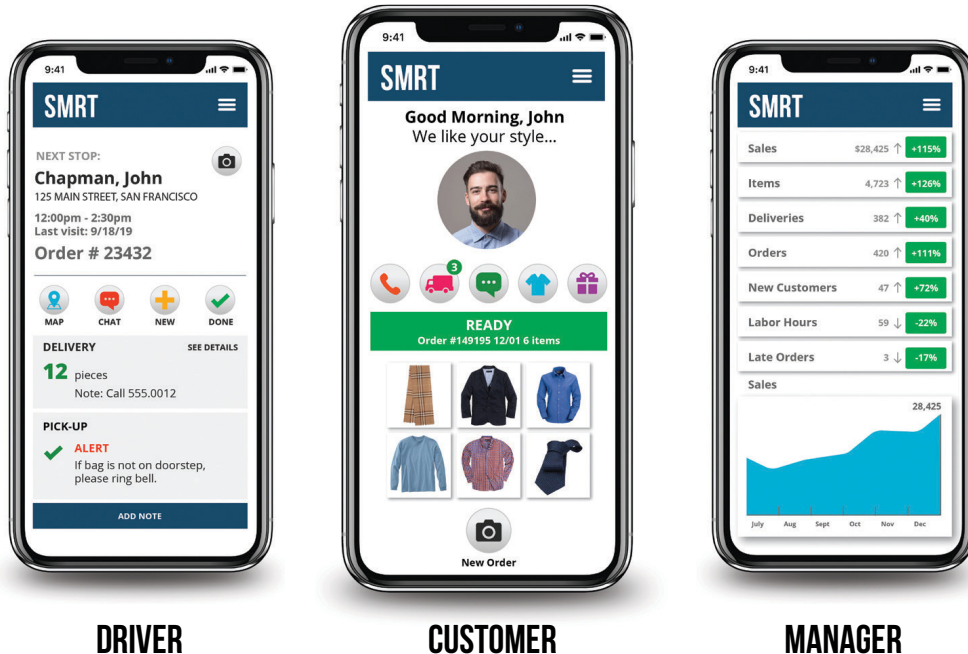
"She was a tough, well respected business owner," offered Mark Watkins of Marks Quality Cleaners also in Birmingham. "I used to get together with her for lunch just to pick her brain. She is a fountain of knowledge and the way she ran her business was amazing. She had a tremendous reputation in Birmingham as well as the entire industry."

Gladys has spent a lifetime seeing the changes in the industry and the world. She has guided the business through the evolution of automated equipment. She has been a leader in the continued use of routes. She embraced new technology and new ideas without fear. She continued her company's growth even as fashions and styles changed to polyester and casual wear. Each time a curveball was thrown -- she has been able to pivot, survive and prosper.

"I wish I could get to know her," observed Peter Blake, NEFA Executive Vice President. "She sounds like a tremendous person, and given all that we are going through in the world today, we can all learn from her. We need to take those obstacles in our path, work to overcome them, and take advantage of the opportunities that lie ahead. That is a lesson we can all learn from her. On behalf of the industry, I offer Gladys a heart-felt thank you for her story, her strength, and for her inspiration."



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## Seitz Names Frank Briercheck as National Director of Marketing and Development



ALEXANDER SEITZ, SEITZ PRESIDENT, RECENTLY WELCOMED FRANK BRIERCHECK AS ITS NEW NATIONAL DIRECTOR OF MARKETING AND DEVELOPMENT.

Briercheck brings nearly 30 years of industry experience to the table.

Briercheck owned and operated a Cleaners including Dry Stores, Routes, Restoration and Formal Wear Rental in north central Florida from 1991 to 2006 before accepting a position as Director of Marketing with then "Phenix Supply" and later promoted to Director of Sales and Marketing, a position held for nearly 12 years including time post acquisition of Phenix by FabriClean Supply. For the last 3 years, Frank has served as a Sales Rep for Laundry Pro of Florida building Coin Laundries, selling OPL equipment

and sales & training Wet Cleaning Systems for Poseidon Textile Care in the Southeast .

As Director of Marketing and Development, Frank will be tasked with the Growth of Solvent Products, Wet Cleaning, and New markets in the North America Region. "We are excited about this opportunity and the knowledge Frank brings to the table" says Kurt Wickiser, V.P. of Seitz North America. Briercheck additionally has been a motivational Speaker and has held both Private and public discussions on "Customer Service" and Brand Recognition".

He proudly has been serving as board member of SEFA since 2011. "I am proud of our industry and hope to be part of the direction it will evolve into", he commented "like it or not, Dry Cleaning changed in the 1970's with the polyester. It changed in the late 2000's with both the economic crash of 2009 and "Casual Wear" and it will absolutely change post "Covid-19". We will need to do things different... Much Different... in this era and for the next generation of customers. I see the evolution of "Easy-Fast- & Laundry" as the new frontier and we will be there with our customers all the way. As others pull back, Seitz will push forward and be better than ever!"

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