

MY TURN

By Keith Robinson, BCE | PMP Contributor



Capitalize on your technicians' strengths

Over the past three decades, I have tried several times to build the perfect technician, one who could perform every service our company offered. In my mind, especially in rural areas, it just seemed a no-brainer that I could put everything on a single truck and get one person who was able to perform all types of services — whether residential or commercial. After all, wasn't that our model in the beginning, when we had no other employees?

Early in my career, I realized I preferred certain types of services. My confidence in my ability grew in the services I really enjoyed, and I was able to excel in my field. Meanwhile, I continued to struggle with the services I didn't enjoy.

You would think we would remember experiences like this moving forward, but most of us soon forget them as we add team members. Like most, I thought I could fix this problem of inconsistent performance in different types of services with more training, a few new tools, a new service vehicle design, and even a new job title.

I quickly learned my technicians were as bad at performing multiple lines of service as I was. Expecting technicians to be great at everything is a recipe for making your company average, at best.

WHO GOES WHERE?

There are always situations in which you simply can't separate residential and commercial service lines, but when and if you can, you will see

marked improvement in your service capabilities. Consider the following traits when looking to hire your next technician — or when you have a great employee who just may not be a good fit for that route:

Residential

- **Customer service skills** — The ideal residential technician quickly builds customer relationships, and can get customers to share their requirements and expectations.
- **Patience** — Because the technician has to work in the customer's home, he or she is at the mercy of the customer to help uncover conducive conditions that may be causing the pest issue.
- **Flexibility** — Realizing that all of us have busy schedules, and your customer isn't any different, residential technicians need to be flexible if they intend to be a given account's service provider for a long time.
- **Verbal communication skills** — Residential technicians should be able to explain what they did, how the customer can help, and what they plan to do on their next service call.

Commercial

- **Knowledge** — It's not uncommon for commercial clients to test your knowledge a little in the beginning of the relationship. They want to feel like they made the right choice. The best commercial technicians know their stuff, especially if they are servicing a large food account.
- **Confidence** — A technician's customer-service skills can be lacking, but the commercial client doesn't have

to like the technician to be confident that he or she can handle the account. If the client loses confidence in your technician, it's over.

- **Strong sense of urgency** — Commercial clients expect areas of concern to be resolved as quickly as possible. Their brand is at stake, and they can't take any risks.
- **Attention to detail and structure** — The ideal commercial technician is a creature of habit. They love structure and are organized. They don't get sidetracked; they complete each service in the same manner each week. This is critical in a large facility, where you must manage your time and look for issues while you systematically service all the devices associated with the account. A quality commercial technician refuses to leave until everything is done and checked.
- **Written communication skills** — When commercial technicians are performing their service, the main point of contact usually isn't there. As a result, they must be masters at documenting the service record. The best commercial technicians complete any and all services with the goal of answering what they found, where they found it, how they corrected it, and when they will follow up to close the loop. They understand that the information they write likely will be shared by many different audiences throughout the company, so they need to be as descriptive as possible. **PMP**

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