

A Fresh Start

by Margaret Pittelkow

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The freshness of spring has likely inspired a little sprucing up around many homes or offices this month. Paint and cleaning sales might well spike as people prepare to erase the last traces of winter. Perhaps you will flip through the pages of this magazine, paying special attention to the vehicle ads with your eye on a shiny new addition to the fleet. So while you are thinking of sheet metal colors and custom artwork, consider another angle that costs a whole lot less and can pay off with big dividends.

AAA member surveys have told us that an important key to a favorable impression of their road service experience lies with the appearance of the driver and his vehicle. Timeliness to the scene is still ranked as most important, but appearance is next. And the appearance of the driver is listed as more important than that of the service vehicle.

When was the last time you took a close look at your staff to be sure that their "look" properly represents the name proudly lettered on the side of your trucks? They say people size us up within the first few seconds of contact. So while you're crunching the numbers to see if you can replace a vehicle or two, don't forget what's in



them. Your people are your best asset every time they deal with the public, so consider spending a few minutes addressing the importance of their appearance.

Be sure your drivers get regular haircuts and encourage them to pay special attention to their clothing and hand grooming. Hang a mirror in your dispatch area to provide the opportunity for a quick check on their way out the door. One tow business owner we encountered had printed a sign that hangs over a full-length mirror in his office. It said, "Would you let this person tow for your grandmother?" That sign captures the reason this business had been selected as a training video site, and we'll never forget this tow bosses' attention to detail. I'll bet customers of this business will not forget THEM the next time they need a tow.

Consider uniforms. It's no accident the most successful service companies require their personnel to dress in professional-looking clothing. In addition to enhancing your company's image in the community,

proper uniforms make individuals feel a part of the team and instill a sense of pride in their work. Customers can see, feel and respond to this.

If expense is an issue, consider at the very least uniform shirts and caps. Options and rates vary greatly, so shop around. Does a group direct-purchase make sense, where everyone takes care of their own laundering? Perhaps a rental program that provides weekly pickup and laundering is more appropriate for your business. Ask about additional fees as they vary greatly. If you are affiliated with a repair or towing network, ask if you are entitled to discounts or special pricing. For example, AAA affiliates enjoy exclusive pricing with Cintas Uniforms. Ask your motor club representative if they can save you money in this way. A well-designed program can provide another return on your commitment.

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