

TALES FROM THE ROAD

Being “Out There” as a Commercial Restorer

Greetings from Atlanta! No, this isn't the road. This is home base for me for the past 5 years. Working with Reliable Restoration here in Atlanta has enabled me to relocate and enjoy all that the Southeast has to offer. After over five decades in the New York metropolitan area, this has been a welcome change.

I haven't spent much time in Atlanta, though, over the past couple of years. As a consultant for Reliable and a Co-Founder of The CREST Network, I have found myself “out there” more so recently than in the past. My wife and I, after more than thirty-two years of marriage, find ourselves dating again (HINT- it seems to be working!!!). The road has always been a source of great

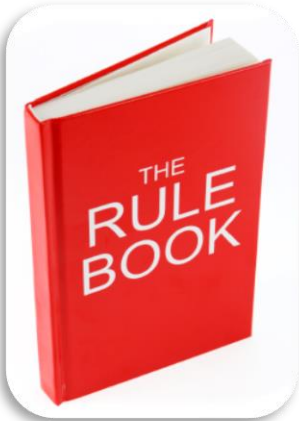


enjoyment for me. Having never travelled for work in my previous life (I was a Wall Street trader for over 25 years), I have enjoyed working with companies out in the field. My input can help a restorer navigate the difficult field of disaster restoration and ease their tensions, not to mention improve the bottom line.

In the past two years, I have been assisting clients on commercial projects and on their businesses in locations like Topsail Beach NC, El Paso TX, Panama City FL, Tulsa, OK Cleveland, OH and Augusta GA, (just to name a few cities). Strip malls, housing developments, hotels and churches have all been part of the work. Small owner-operators or large multi-facility companies have also been part of the travel. Each project so unique, the needs of each property so diverse, and the execution of each plan so markedly different that it is almost not right to group them all together as the same- restoration consulting.

At each stop, the only constant was the fact that our clients needed help, but they didn't know much of anything about the process. They understood deductibles, and little else. They know about invoicing but have little idea about margins or budgets. For every member, not only did we have to develop and execute a plan, we found ourselves having to hold their hand and help educate their staffs and their clients on many other matters not directly relating to our tasks. For one member, we had to educate them on the aspect of “business interruption” coverage and assist them in guiding their restoration clients on how to help them get reimbursed for that loss expense. Yet another restoration client had difficulty understanding that, in order for our CREST member to extract the water, remove all of the wet materials and dry the structure, they would have to close the store, remove all of the inventory, and allow us the time needed to do the work.

This reminds me of a loss that we had a while back here in the Atlanta area. The owner of a beauty business had a fire in the next-door business (a Chinese restaurant) that breached the wall between the two businesses, flooding her salon with smoke, soot, and sprinkler discharge. In addition, the fire had damaged her portion of the roof and compromised her electric service. All of this happened on a Friday. Our client informed us that she was willing to do whatever we told her, since we were the “experts” at this sort of thing. The only request she had was for us to try to get her back open by Monday! Mind you, the damage we assessed in the first hour told us that she would be out of business for several weeks, if not months, and here she was pushing for a two-day turnaround. Talk about “the customer is always right!” Not in this case.



Out there, you will find every kind of client, and you need to be able to adapt to every situation. Sometimes, your internal “rulebook” needs to be tossed aside to make the project run better. Things you might never think about doing at home, like partnering with a rival restorer or suggesting a public adjuster for your client, might be the best course of action for your commercial work.

In some of my coaching classes, I talk about the different personality types of a restorer. Generally, restorers fall into one of a few categories, which I have compiled into the “-IST” list. **The restorer is either an OPTIMIST, a SCIENTIST, an ECONOMIST, or a PRAGMATIST.** He is either always looking at the bright side, always working on the field science of drying, always worried about the bottom line, or always searching for reality on every loss. A commercial restorer needs to be ALL FOUR! Keep the focus on the best outcome for the client AND for your company; be alert for the best way to perform your services; keep vigilant about the financial aspects of the project; and always try to be real about the status of the project.

Finally, don’t ever think that walking away from a project is a sign of weakness or defeat. Our egos and determination can sometimes get the best of us. If this particular commercial project does not fit, or if it entails things that you are uncomfortable with, then make the tough decision and walk away. Here at Reliable, we have dabbled in some hospital work in the past few years. Through this process, we have been able to determine that we are not comfortable doing this kind of work, so we will not accept them anymore. We do not market for them, and we will graciously decline them if called. Sometimes, the best job is the one that you do not do.



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