

## ADDED VALUE OF GOOD FLOORING INSTALLERS

When I hear hype that calls out a lack of high-quality flooring installers as a crisis, I feel compelled to add that this “crisis” is not new, it’s been around for years. I don’t see it so much as a crisis but as a culture of low bid gets the job.



Flooring trade magazines are talking a lot these days about a lack of qualified flooring installation labor as an industry-wide problem. Floor Covering Installer Magazine has posted on Facebook about the “Installation Crisis” with a poll they put out on Dec 6th and subsequent articles in FCI magazine. In the spirit of full disclosure, it is only fair that I remind everyone that I only



*Quality Installation Team*

write articles when I have first-hand experience and a great deal of passion about a topic. Having worked in my family’s retail flooring business in the 1970s and run my own retail flooring company from 1995-2007, qualified flooring installation is a topic on which I have a lot to say.

In order for flooring installers to install a floor correctly, they need to charge more, not less, per square foot of flooring. I like to say, “Good work is not cheap and cheap work is not good.” It’s hard to keep a quality

workforce when the quality of the labor is not valued so many floor covering installers do piece work and perform as independent contractors, trying to get jobs done fast so they can move on to the next job in hopes of turning a profit. Tom Jennings said it well in his article, Poorly Trained Installers Affect Everyone’s Income,

*“While comparable product is available at all stores, when the consumer is spending their paycheck, they will willingly spend more for services when you show them the value of a quality (flooring) installation compared to substandard offerings.” (July/August 2016 edition, Premier Flooring Retailer publication)*



I learned this about 45 years ago when I worked in my family’s business in Sulphur Springs, Texas. In our family-owned flooring store, we gave customers a one-year guarantee on labor when they bought a new sheet vinyl or vinyl tile floor from us. In reality we provided a lifetime guarantee because regardless of when we installed a floor, we always responded to a complaint



Hill's Custom Floors & Tops, 1321 Shannon Road, offers custom molding, cabinets, cabinet material, millwork, carpet, wallpaper and other products to spruce up the decor of any home. Pictured is Reggie Hill.

### Hill's Custom Floors provides top workmanship

The Hill's Custom Floors & Tops business began some 25 years ago when R.E. Hill saw a need for a floor covering store. Hill's primary concern then, and now, was for absolute perfection. This desire eventually led him to expand his operation. acres was recently purchased to make room for expansion of cabinets and millwork. "Our idea is that when a customer comes to our showroom they should have the luxury of seeing the finest products offered for the business."

Reggie Hill – 1979

no matter how long it had been since we laid the floor. One day a flooring sales representative came into our store and wanted us to start selling a unique flooring product with a high price tag. During the course of our conversation, he pointed out that customers will pay for quality that goes above and beyond the norm. He likened his top quality product to our store’s excellent reputation for quality flooring installations and our unofficial Lifetime guarantee. He asked why we only charged for a 1-year warranty when we provided our customers with much more. I didn’t have a good answer – and those of you who know me, know that doesn’t happen often. As time went on, we found out that this salesman was right. We increased our mark on labor and found that our

customers would pay for it because they saw value in the workmanship of our labor force.

Since that day, I have never considered being “market price” for labor. When I was in the retail flooring business, my labor estimates were two to four times higher than market labor prices. I had my own installation crew that were paid an hourly rate and had benefits like vacation time, installation training and overtime pay. My rate of callbacks to completed flooring jobs was always minimal because the job was done right the first time.

So into September 2016 the “crisis” of poorly trained flooring installers continues to be a topic in flooring industry publications. FCI magazine did a sit down for their Industry Q & A column by Michael Chmielecki. He sat down with Jon Namaba, FCI editorial director and industry veteran. Jon hit the nail on the head when he said,

*“We need to create a future for these (flooring) installers, whether they go on to become a subcontractor or an employee—they need to have a career path.”*

Now we are talking! I whole-heartedly agree with Jon. To create a successful business in flooring

sales and installation it's important to develop and nurture a strong team. Here are some points that I believe are critical in building and maintaining a workforce that takes pride in excellent workmanship in order to take your business to the next level.



*Provide ongoing installation training to flooring Installer team.*



*Clean, organized work vehicle streamlines efficiency on the job.*

1. First, define your target market, what they want and what you need to do as a company to succeed in your chosen market. If your flooring market segment will value good installation services, keep reading the following steps.
2. Hire full-time employees to install the flooring your company sells and treat them well. This allows you to retain control over the finished, installed floor and best ensure quality workmanship. If hiring your own installation staff isn't possible, apply the same type of rules for subcontractors to follow when they install resilient and other types of flooring for you.
  - Set standards for your flooring installation team including neatness of personal appearance, cleanliness of on-the-job vehicles, positive attitude, polite manners, exemplary skill set, good condition of tools and participation in ongoing training.
  - Pay your field employees, who install floors in customers' homes and businesses, by the hour just as you would for any in-house staff and don't pressure them to rush when they are putting in a customer's floor but emphasize the goal of getting the job done right.
  - Compensate individual workers according to skill level. Pay well up and down the scale from helper to craftsman.
  - Provide training for flooring technicians at the company's expense so the team's skills stay fresh. Pay installation technicians while they are at training and for their travel time & expenses.
  - Set goals and incentives for excellence in job performance and for putting new skills to

work. Create a standard for Excellence in workmanship and do not compromise.

- Make installers accountable for their work.
- Provide employment benefits such as health care, vacation, overtime, bonuses and 401K. Teach staff how to make the most of their benefits. Treating good employees well will come back to you in fewer installation claims and increased revenue.
- Listen to your installation staff. Address issues they encounter in the field during installation and relating to vehicle organization or work schedules. Take and, when appropriate, implement employee suggestions for how to improve job-related routines.
- Create a culture of family by recognizing birthdays, anniversaries and include families with an annual company party or picnic.



*Involve families for Company picnic or party to promote a friendly work environment.*

3. Continuously streamline installation crew routines to maximize time on jobs by standardizing vehicle organization, job site protocols and how store and care for tools so they are always accessible and ready for use.
4. Plan to spend at least half of the company's sales income for installation training, and maintenance or purchase of uniforms, vehicles, tools.
5. Price jobs to make a profit. That's why you're in business. When providing price quotes to a customer for a new installed floor, calculate labor charges at 2x your labor expenses, including employee benefits. This will ensure a profit.

This recipe will soon not only solve your company's "installation crisis" but will bring new recruits to you via your current staff when they are happy in their job. When a respected employee suggests someone to join your company, the candidate is likely qualified for the job and in search of a career path.

In closing, my response to the poll conducted by [www.fcimag.com](http://www.fcimag.com) regarding the installation crisis is number 3. *Not enough value being placed on qualified installers.*