

**Everything You**

***MUST Know***

**Before Hiring a**

**Cleaning**

**Service**

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# Introduction

For many of us the prospect of constantly working to keep our homes clean and tidy is a very daunting process. It seems like sweeping, mopping, dusting, vacuuming and other household chores will take up every minute of your free time if you allow them to. If you are tired of the amount of time and effort you have to put into your home to keep it looking clean and neat, or if you just need a little extra help, you should consider hiring a cleaning service company. These companies specialize in helping people maintain a clean, neat and healthy household. A cleaning service company could help make your life a lot easier!

Whether you have a large event coming up and need a onetime cleaning service or if you would like to set up a weekly, biweekly or monthly cleaning schedule, a cleaning service company can help you out. These companies feature trained employees who don't mind putting in the elbow grease to get the job done. These people also have access to the latest cleaning products and cleaning equipment to make the job go faster and get it done better. They can also spend the time to do those cleaning projects that you have been putting off for months. This could include the standard cleaning practices such as vacuuming carpets, sanitizing kitchens, dusting, straightening up and cleaning windows. It can range to other services including carpet and upholstery cleaning, drapery cleaning, polishing wood work, cleaning light fixtures, floor waxing, garage and basement cleaning, laundry, ironing and much more.

In short, a professional cleaning services company can go a long way towards taking some of the stress out of your life. Once you have found a reputable, reliable and trustworthy cleaning service you may never want to give them up! A good cleaning service can be worth its weight in gold, as these people give you more time and reduce your stress levels. Not all cleaning companies are created equal however. Some are not as good or trustworthy as others. If you really want the best experience you need to make sure you hire a high quality company. Here is everything you **must** know before you hire a cleaning service company.

# Individual Maids or Cleaning Service Companies?

One of the first questions that most people face when they decide to hire some additional help with cleaning their house is whether they should go with a larger cleaning service business or should they just hire an individual maid? The answer to this question will depend largely on your personal situation. Both an individual maid and a cleaning service company can do a great job of cleaning your home for a decent price. There are some situations where a cleaning service may be the better option. Cleaning services have a few advantages over hiring a single person for the job. For example, a cleaning service will most likely be able to provide more stability and more resources. This is because they may have a more structured working and payment system than what a single person may have.

This isn't to say that an individual cleaning person could not provide the same level of service for the same price. An individual could certainly do a great job, but since you are starting from scratch reliability and structured contracts may be more helpful to you. A cleaning service company will have a service guarantee with steps already in place to resolve a dispute. This means that you will have a contract to refer to and a place to take your complaints if something goes wrong. This may not be the case with an individual maid. Cleaning service companies are also required to comply with state and federal business laws, which an individual cleaner may not have to do.

Another reason why you may wish to choose a cleaning service company over an individual has to do with training and education. Successful cleaning service companies will stay on top of the industry's latest cleaning methods and products. They also encourage their employees to take certification and continuing education courses to ensure they are as knowledgeable as possible. Cleaning service companies often have larger budgets for equipment and products as well, and may have equipment or products that will increase their efficiency. Companies may be better equipped to handle special cleaning requirements. In many cases a cleaning service company is going to be able to offer lesser prices than a typical individual maid will be able to.

If you are able to locate a trustworthy and skilled individual maid who can meet your requirements for the job, then by all means hire them. Finding a cleaning services company will probably be easier, less expensive and more reliable for you.

# Finding a Cleaning Service Company

Finding a cleaning service company is easy. There are most likely a few dozen cleaning service companies operating in your area. Before you choose one specific company it is a good idea for you to make a list of *at least* 3 prospective companies. Anywhere from 3 to 7 companies should be on this list. After you have created your list of potential businesses, you can begin the process of researching and interviewing each one in order to find out which is the best. Here are some easy ways to locate potential cleaning service companies for your list:

- **Ask for referrals-** Referrals are by far the best way to locate a decent cleaning services company in your area. Find someone who has used a cleaning service before and ask them their opinion. Ask if they were happy with the services the company provided. Ask if they thought the price was fair. Ask them if they experienced any problems with the cleaning service company and how they would rate their level of customer service. Finally, ask if this person would recommend a specific cleaning services company to you. Anyone whose opinion you can trust is a good place to look for referrals. This can mean friends, family members, neighbors, co-workers or just about anyone else you can trust. The Better Business Bureau, the local Chamber of Commerce and trade associations that operate in your region are also good places to look for referrals.
- **Perform an internet search-** The web makes it very easy to locate businesses that operate in your area. Major search engines such as Google, Yahoo and Bing will return several dozen results for businesses near your zip code. Internet searches also give you the opportunity to look at the company's website and review their products and services before you give them a call.
- **Check out advertising-** Local and national advertising campaigns can also help you locate cleaning service companies. This can include TV and print advertisements, radio ads, brochures, the Yellow Pages, flyers or anything else. Don't base your decision solely on advertising campaigns however. Make sure you do your research first!

# Researching Potential Companies

There are some things you will want to research regarding a potential cleaning service company **before** you decide to hire them. Performing your research on a business will save you a lot of trouble down the road. Here are some things to research about a potential company **before** you decide to hire them:

- **State licensing requirements.**

Every business is required to be licensed by the state. These business licensing requirements will vary from state to state. You can visit your state's local Chamber of Commerce or your state's Department of Revenue to determine what requirements your state has for cleaning service businesses. It is possible to hire a cleaning service which is not licensed. This is generally referred to as hiring company "under the table", but it is not recommended. An unlicensed cleaning service company could lead to a number of serious problems if something was to go wrong while they were on your property.

- **Is the company bonded and insured?**

It is a good idea to find out in advance if a company is bonded and insured before you agree to hire them. If a company is bonded it means that if an employee were to steal something from your home the company would be financially responsible for the loss to you. If a business is insured it means that any damage they may cause to your property will also be covered financially. It also means the worker's safety and your liability to them is covered. It is a good idea to hire a cleaning service company that is both bonded and insured.

- **Employees or subcontractors?**

Cleaning service companies can hire employees or subcontractors to complete their work for them. An employee is someone who the company has control over their work. A subcontractor doesn't actually work for the company and usually has different standards. For example, subcontractors are not trained by the company because they cannot legally train them. Also subcontractors are typically not covered by any liability insurance. Subcontractors are not covered

by any labor laws, so the company may be treating them unfairly. In general it is better to go with a company that hires employees over subcontractors.

- **OSHA training standards**

High quality cleaning service companies train their employees to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) standards. This ensures not only safety around your home, but it teaches the correct use and application of different types of cleaning products. If possible look for a company that follows OSHA standards.

- **Equipment considerations**

Different cleaning service companies will have different materials and equipment that they will use to clean your home. Some types of equipment and materials are better than others. In general cleaning equipment and products are designed to save the client time and money by doing the job in a more efficient manner. If you can determine in advance which cleaning companies offer the best equipment and materials options, then you will have a good idea of the type of job they will be able to do on your home. You can often locate information regarding a business's equipment and materials by checking out their website or by giving them a call.

- **Complaints or violations**

You can always check out a company's reputation before you decide to hire them. A good way to do this is to visit your local Better Business Bureau or Chamber of Commerce to find out if any complaints or violations have been lodged by other customers against the company. Since it is impossible to please every single customer, 1 or 2 complaints may not dissuade you from hiring a specific company. A long list of complaints against a single company should raise some red flags however. Also, avoid any companies with ethics violations. Consumer review websites like Angie's List are also a good place to find out information regarding a company's reputation.

# Potential Problems

A cleaning service company is offering you a service. This means that like any service-based company there can be potential problems. It's a good idea to be aware of these potential problems **before** you choose specific company because it will help you to pick the company that is most likely to prevent these problems from occurring. Here are some potential problems that could arise if you choose the wrong cleaning service company:

- **Damage or theft to your home.** When you hire a cleaning service you will be inviting the company's employees into your home. This means that these people will have access to your personal belongings, your family members, your home and your pets. If you do not choose a company that hires reputable employees then you might have to worry about them stealing things from your home or endangering the safety of your family members. You could also have to deal with damage to your personal property due to negligence or neglect.
- **Shoddy cleaning work.** Sometimes a less than reputable company will make certain claims and then not follow through with them. Other times the employees will simply perform shoddy work. You could pay for an entire cleaning team to come through your home yet still find dirty and dusty spots if the team didn't care enough to do a good job.
- **Disputes with the company.** If you did hire a company and they delivered work that you felt was not up to standard, then you would have to complain to the business and attempt to get them to resolve the situation. Most reputable companies will have a guarantee of their work. They will also have a dispute resolution plan in effect if something goes wrong with a customer. Unfortunately you may not be able to resolve a problem with a less than reputable company and you could be left hanging in the wind.

# Questions to Ask

Now that you know the risks that are associated with hiring a cleaning service company you can take the appropriate steps to avoid such problems. By this point you have located *at least* 3 cleaning service companies and have added them to your list. You have also gone through a little bit of research to find out some basic information about each company. This pre-research will help you eliminate any risky businesses before you reach the interviewing stage. Now you are ready to call up a few companies and begin asking some questions. You can conduct your interview over the phone or many companies will send a representative to your home to speak with you. One of the benefits of having a representative of the company come to your home is that they will be able to give you an accurate price estimate based on what they see. Here are some questions you should ask a cleaning service company **before** you hire them:

## 1. How long has your company been in business?

In general, businesses with poor customer service standards tend to go out of business after a short while. If a business has been operating in your area for a decent amount of time, then odds are they can deliver decent service. This isn't to say that a new cleaning services company won't do a good job either.

## 2. Do you have references I could check up on?

The answer to this question should be yes. A reputable company should be able to provide you with references from satisfied clients. Make sure to check this list! The longer the list- the better.

## 3. Do you have insurance?

Not all cleaning service companies will have insurance coverage. Insurance coverage will add to your cost, but it might be worth it in the long run. Insurance will cover any damage to your home that occurs when the company's employees are cleaning. Without insurance you could be financially liable for any accident or injury that occurs on your property. If the company does have insurance it is a good idea for you to know the dollar amount of their coverage.

#### **4. Are your employees bonded?**

Again, not all cleaning service companies require that their employees are bonded. Bonded employees help protect you financially in case of a theft of your property. While it is not required that a cleaning service's employees be bonded, it certainly helps.

#### **5. Do you perform background checks on your employees?**

Once you choose a specific cleaning service company they will be sending employees into your home. This means that it is a good idea to know a little about the people that will be around you and your family. Companies who perform background checks on their employees are taking an extra step to gain your trust.

#### **6. Do you check the legal status of your workers?**

It is important to ask this question to ensure that you are not breaking any tax laws by hiring a company. Every company should check the legal status of their workers and pay them what the law requires them to. The company is also legally required to offer their employees certain benefits, which they may not be getting if they are not legal to work in the United States.

#### **7. Do you offer any form of guarantee? What about dispute resolution?**

It is a good idea to know in advance how the company will handle it if you have a complaint or a problem. Always look for a guarantee and a dispute resolution program before you sign a contract with any company. Many cleaning service companies will also have a procedure for if an item disappears from your home. It is good to know what that procedure is.

**8. Can I review a sample contract before I make my decision?**

Reviewing a sample contract will allow you to read through the company's terms of service and review their guarantee information. Doing so will prevent any nasty surprises from appearing later on. It will also give you a chance to review the company's policies on different things so that you will know in advance.

**9. Who will be providing the cleaning supplies? Will you be using any special products for my home?**

Many cleaning service companies will have their own cleaning supplies and equipment. Others may require that you purchase the cleaning supplies that will be used in your home. You need to know in advance if you or the company will be in charge of supplies. You will also want to know how the purchasing of supplies will affect the final price and if the crew will be using any special products on your home.

**10. What happens if the cleaning team misses an appointment or is late to an appointment?**

Again, it is very helpful to understand in advance what the policies and procedures of the company are. If you have a problem with late cleaners, or if you need to call and cancel an appointment, you need to know how to go about doing so. Some companies have a set period of time in which you must cancel an appointment in order to not be charged a late fee. You also need to know who to complain to if your cleaners are missing or late.

**11. Can you review your pricing structure to me?**

This is something you need to fully understand **before** you choose a specific company. Prices will differ according to the size of the job and the company, so you need to know in advance what you will be paying and what you will be getting for that price.

# Payment Information

The key to finding the right cleaning service company for the right price is to locate companies that are equally qualified and who offer comparative services. Some companies will be more expensive than others, but it is a good idea to ask where that extra money goes. For example, one company may be a bit more expensive than another, but this company is fully insured, bonded and provides all of the necessary cleaning products. In this case it may be better to pay a little bit more up front in order to save money down the road. It is also a good idea to discuss with the company if there is a specific price for your type of residence. Condos and apartments may be priced differently than a 5 bedroom house. Always discuss and agree upon prices **before** you choose to hire a specific company. Here are some more things to be aware of when considering a cleaning service company's prices:

- Remember that you will get what you pay for. Low quality cleaning services will often have very low prices.
- The cost should be less if you are in charge of providing the cleaning supplies.
- It is also a good idea to remember that these people are professionals with a job to do, so be prepared to pay them a fair price. It takes a lot of effort and time for a cleaning service company to locate, train and insure good employees. These people are also very often trained in specialized cleaning techniques and equipment. The cleaners have to make a living. A cleaning service company will have overhead expenses to consider when quoting you a price. These expenses may include taxes, supplies, equipment, training, marketing, administrative costs, insurance, workers compensation, traveling costs and more. This will be reflected in the price quote. **Don't** hire a company if you find their prices to be unfair or too much for your budget. When you are looking at prices be aware that you will be asked to pay a fair price.
- The least expensive option may not always be the best one. Review the different companies on your list in an apples to apples fashion to see who offers the best services at the best price.
- Many people wonder about tipping. Should you tip your cleaning services team after they have finished working? In general the answer is no as you have already paid their fee. Tipping around the holidays is encouraged however.

# Choosing a Cleaning Service Company

Once you have made your list, interviewed and researched each potential company and compared their services and prices you are ready to pick the company that you feel will do the best job. There is more to your decision than just price. You will be allowing employees of the company you choose to enter your home and be around your family, so it is also important that you choose a company that is as trustworthy as possible.

Choosing a company whose employees are insured, bonded and trained will help you maintain this level of trust. This will help you feel good about the health and safety of the employees as they will be covered by worker's compensation and insurance if anything happens to them while they are in your home. Bonded employees, company insurance and protection plans will also make you feel comfortable about your personal property. If something bad does happen, you will feel good knowing the company will make it right. This sense of security comes from choosing a reputable and hard working cleaning service company.

Peace of mind should be the most important factor you consider when deciding which cleaning service company you are going to go with. Price, level of training and the professionalism of the staff are other factors. Guarantees, customer service and the quality of the work performed will also be important to consider. The perfect cleaning service company is the one who blends together all of these factors to meet the needs of your individual situation.

# Before and After the Cleaning Service Comes

There are some steps that you can take both before and after your new cleaning services comes to your house to help ensure that the project will go as smoothly as possible. Good communication between you and your cleaning service company will be very important to a good working relationship. Here are some things to think about before and after your new cleaning service arrives:

- It is best for both parties if you have a clear definition of what cleaning tasks you want to be performed. Having these tasks written down makes it easy for cleaning service employees to remember them. After all, these people will probably be cleaning a number of houses during a given week, so written instructions should help out. Have clearly defined tasks on your list. If you don't want the cleaning service to clean a specific area of your home- then say so in advance.
- Communication is especially important if you have special requirements. For example, if your family has special allergy requirements and requires the use of eco-friendly cleaning products, then the cleaning staff needs to know about this in advance. Make sure your cleaning staff knows about any special considerations **before** they arrive.
- Create a detailed cleaning schedule for the crew to follow. You may not require their services every week, so make sure they understand when they are expected to come.
- Make sure the cleaning staff has space to work. You may not have to 'straighten up' before the crew arrives, but it is certainly helpful to have enough space for them to do their job without tripping over things. Move aside children's toys or other things that may get in the cleaning crew's way. It is also not a good idea to leave valuables such as jewelry or money lying out in the open. You should be able to trust your cleaning crew, but that doesn't mean you should leave valuables just lying around.

- Make sure the company is aware of your pet and children situation. It can be helpful to put away your pets before the crew arrives, especially since some people are worried about large dogs or other pets. Make sure the crew knows about pet-related things too, such as not leaving the gate open.
- Make sure the cleaning crew has a place to park. Make some room in your driveway or explain to them the best place to park their vehicles if you live in a condo or apartment complex. During the winter months make sure your walkways are safe for the crew to walk on. Slipping on ice is a common accident and a preventable one.
- Determine how the cleaning crew will get inside of your house **before** they show up. If you are home to let them in then you are ready to go, but if you will not always be home you need to work something out in advance. It will be up to you to decide whether or not you want to give your cleaning crew a key to your home. This decision will have to be based on trust. It is not recommended that you leave a key under the mat or in another location around your home; as this could leave you open to strangers finding it. However you decide to go about it, just make sure the crew can get inside your home when they are scheduled to. If you have a security concern then call the company.
- Always treat your cleaning crew with respect. These people are professionals who know how to do their job, so you may want to stay out of their way while they are cleaning. If you have a problem or concern, speak up, but always approach them in a respectful manner. Common courtesy will go a long way to developing a trusting and long term relationship with your cleaning crew.
- Review the cleaners work after they have finished the job and report any problems, concerns or damages to the company right away. If the cleaning crew did a great job- then tell them so!

# Checklist for Hiring a Cleaning Service

1. Find *at least* 3 potential choices and make a list. The more companies you can add to your list the more choices you will have. Locate cleaning service companies for your list through referrals, by performing online searches or through traditional advertising.
2. Perform a little bit of research regarding each company's reputation. Check your local Chamber of Commerce and Better Business Bureau to see if the company has any complaints or violations. You can also look at a consumer review website like Angie's List.
3. Call up each company and request an interview. If the company will send a representative to your home to review the job in person, then they will have an obvious advantage.
4. Discuss your required cleaning tasks, desired cleaning schedule, any special considerations and budget requirements with the company **before** you decide to hire them.
5. Choose a cleaning service company that you feel is trustworthy, reliable and fairly priced.
6. Take some steps to get your home ready for the cleaning crew to arrive. This will make it easier for them to do their job. Review their work and report any problems right away.
7. Once you have located a cleaning service company that is reliable and trustworthy, continue to use them. You may also want to consider recommending the company to other people if you like their work.

# Conclusion

For many of us, the service of a good cleaning service company is something we wouldn't want to live without. Having a dependable and trustworthy cleaning services company work on our homes frees up our time and reduces the levels of stress we have to deal with on a daily basis. It is really wonderful to come home to a clean and tidy home. It may take a little bit of extra work from the start to locate, research and interview cleaning service companies before you hire one, but the work will be well worth it once you find a company who you can trust. A good cleaning service company can make a world of difference!

# Resources

**The Better Business Bureau (BBB)**

[www.bbb.org](http://www.bbb.org)

**Angie's List**

[www.angieslist.com](http://www.angieslist.com)

**The Cleaning Service Directory**

(A directory of services and general housecleaning information)

[www.house-cleaning-services.com](http://www.house-cleaning-services.com)

**The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)**

[www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov)

**The US Chamber of Commerce**

[www.uschamber.com](http://www.uschamber.com)

**The Association of Residential Cleaning Services International (ARCSI)**

[www.arcsi.org](http://www.arcsi.org)

**The House Cleaning Association**

[www.house-cleaning-association.com](http://www.house-cleaning-association.com)