The Complete Guide to Cleaner Retention
For Your Janitorial Company
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About this Guide

It's no secret that employee retention is one of the biggest challenges facing the janitorial industry. In fact, a 2016 survey by Cleaning and Maintenance Management revealed that 85% of BSC's said recruiting and retaining staff was their number one challenge. Other studies show that the average cleaner turnover rate is between 75% and 375% annually.

Many are quick to blame high cleaner turnover rates on the nature of the janitorial industry: physically demanding work that doesn't pay exceptionally well. Combine this with the fact that much of the work is done alone, late at night, and you've got what appears to be a perfect storm of undesirable job characteristics. While these characteristics certainly don't make it easy to retain employees, the fact that some companies are able to keep happy, loyal cleaners suggests that the root cause of turnover goes beyond the work and wages.

At Swept we believe that the key to employee retention is communication. In this guide we’ll look at how better communication allows cleaners to feel supported and appreciated, which in turn results in higher performance on site, and better quality of service for your clients. It's principles and ideas will apply whether you have one part-time cleaner or teams of people across your region. We believe it's entirely possible to achieve and maintain low turnover rates if you have the right mindset and processes in place.

We hope you find this guide helpful and would love to hear about your results!

Matt Cooper
Chief Operating Officer
Swept
What causes cleaner turnover?

In his book *The 3 Signs of a Miserable Job*, author Patrick Lencioni describes the primary factors that contribute to an employee becoming unhappy in their job: anonymity, irrelevance and immeasurement. Throughout this guide we’ll use Lencioni’s framework to identify the circumstances that lead to employee turnover in the janitorial industry.

If we look at employee turnover through the same lens as Lencioni, cleaners leave their jobs for the same reasons mechanics, accountants, and sales representatives leave theirs: because they feel anonymous within the organization, they don’t understand the impact their work has on other people, and they don’t know how to measure their own success on the job.

**WHAT CAUSES CLEANER TURNOVER?**

**Anonymity**
People cannot be fulfilled in their work if they are not known. All human beings need to be understood and appreciated for their unique qualities by someone in a position of authority.

**Irrelevance**
Everyone needs to know that their job matters, to someone. Anyone. Without seeing a connection between the work and the satisfaction of another person or group of people, an employee simply will not find lasting fulfillment.

**Immeasurement**
Employees need to be able to gauge their progress and level of contribution for themselves. They cannot be fulfilled in their work if their success depends on the opinions or whims of another person.

To help you understand what anonymity, irrelevance, and immeasurement commonly look like in the janitorial industry, we’re going to take you on a journey with Cleaner Joe, a hypothetical employee at a hypothetical commercial cleaning company. Cleaner Joe’s experience is meant to get you thinking about what it’s like to work in your cleaning company from a cleaner’s perspective. While you read Cleaner Joe’s Journey, look for examples of anonymity, irrelevance, and immeasurement.
Cleaner Joe’s Journey

Meet Joe. Joe just had an interview with the owner of ABC Cleaning and was hired to work as a part-time night shift cleaner.

The evening of his first shift, Joe isn’t sure what to expect. He arrives at the given address and meets Deborah, a manager with ABC Cleaning. Deborah gives Joe some paperwork to fill out at home, then begins to show him around the building — a location that he will be responsible for cleaning.

Deborah shows Joe how to get into the building, where to find things in the supply closet, and talks about the tasks he needs to complete before the end of each shift.

She shows him where to take the garbage when he empties the bins, where to find the logbook in case he runs into any problems, and then leaves him to get to work, saying she’ll check back in an hour to see how it’s going.

Joe doesn’t see Deborah again after his first shift. In fact, because Joe works nights, he doesn’t really see anyone except for the odd employee working late at the office building.

When Joe has questions, like what to do when the boardroom is locked, or whether or not he should clean the white boards, he texts Deborah. Sometimes she responds right away, but other times she is sleeping and it’s too late when she sees the message in the morning.

A few weeks into the job, a manager Joe has never met before comes to inspect his work. The manager is relatively happy with Joe’s cleaning, but makes note of a few things Joe didn’t even know he was supposed to clean! He’s not sure if this new manager has different standards than Deborah, or if he’s forgetting something that Deborah told him during his first shift.

Joe is frustrated. What’s the point in trying his best if he’s not even sure what to clean? He doesn’t know who ask for help either — Deborah? The new manager? The person who hired him?

Over the next few weeks Joe completes most of his tasks during each shift, but sometimes he cuts corners if it’s taking longer than usual, or he wants to get home early.

Then one day, a friend calls Joe and tells him they just got hired by a cleaning company who pays above average wages. They think Joe should come work for that company instead, since it also happens to be in his neighborhood. Joe shrugs and thinks to himself, why not? ABC probably won’t even notice he’s gone!
What did you notice about Joe’s experience at ABC Cleaning? Firstly, communication between the management team and Joe is very minimal. Joe doesn't know what to expect when he shows up to his first shift, and Deborah doesn't take the time to get to know Joe before getting into cleaning. Weeks later Joe has barely spoken to anyone at ABC Cleaning and feels anonymous within the company.

Secondly, the training Joe received didn't go over how his role would impact the people who worked in that office. Because Joe's tasks weren't linked to the daily lives of other people, he begins to feel as though his performance is irrelevant.

Finally, Joe was never given a description of how ABC's quality assurance program worked and had no measure of what success looked like in his role. When a supervisor inspected Joe's work according to his own subjective observations, it was no wonder Joe became frustrated and discouraged.

While the story of Joe the Cleaner is hypothetical, it demonstrates how the nature of the janitorial industry has made all three of these factors common in commercial cleaning companies.

Because cleaners often work alone, or at least independent of the management team, it’s no wonder they begin to feel anonymous. Business owners and managers therefore need to take special measures to ensure employees feel they are known and appreciated as individuals in order to combat this feeling of anonymity.
Likewise, because many cleaners work evenings, nights, and weekends when no one else is on site at their assigned locations, it's easy for their work to feel irrelevant. Communicating to your team the importance and impact of their work can not only improve their performance, but help them feel a sense of purpose and pride in their jobs.

Communicating to your cleaners what success looks like in their role is the final piece of the puzzle. When a cleaner has objective criteria by which he or she can measure their performance on a daily basis it encourages them to perform at their best, and allows you to ensure your clients are receiving the quality of service you they deserve.

**Hiring the “Right” People**

We won’t spend too much time on hiring here, but this wouldn’t be a complete guide to retention if we didn’t recognize the role that hiring the right people plays in keeping employees.

When we talk about hiring the “right” people, we don’t mean the ones who are willing to work anytime, anywhere. Or even those who have worked at many other cleaning companies. In fact, both of those characteristics should be red flags when seeking the best candidates for a job!

The key to hiring cleaners who will stay long-term is to hire the best match for each of your positions. In other words, if you are filling a shift that requires someone to work nights on the west side of town, you should look for someone who wants to work nights and can easily access that area, either because they live nearby or they own their own vehicle. The more the job suits their schedule and lifestyle, the more likely they are to stay.

Check out our Hiring Guide for a sample job description that will help you find the best cleaners, as well as a free tool that will help you rank cleaner applications. You can find it at www.sweptworks.com/hiringguide.
Once you’ve hired a new employee, it’s important to set them up for success with your company by providing a comprehensive training program. This means going beyond just policies, procedures, and on the job training. By getting to know new employees and supporting them both at work and beyond, you’ll be much more likely to build a team of happy, loyal cleaners.

Here are the key components of a good training program:

**COMPANY OVERVIEW**
One of the first things you’ll want to communicate to new cleaners is your company’s mission and values. This will help them understand why your training program is designed the way it is, and set their expectations around working for your company. We also recommend talking about the company’s history, hierarchy, and clientele as part of your company overview.

**HR POLICIES & PROCEDURES**
Some of the first questions your cleaners will have are around pay. When and how will I get paid? Will I get paid for time spent driving? Be sure to answer these questions, as well as other common questions around things like sick days and vacation time, and explain any relevant procedures that go along with them. If possible, provide the answers to these questions in an employee handbook so they can reference them at a later date.

**PERSONAL & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**
When training new employees, remember that they are there for their own reasons, not yours. In other words, they are there because they are: a single mom working two jobs to pay the bills. A college student paying their way through school. An established professional saving up to buy a house. Or any other number of reasons, but chances are it’s not because they love to clean! Communicate to new employees that you’d like to help them achieve their goals.
PRODUCTS & EQUIPMENT TRAINING
Before diving into the topic of how to clean, some companies spend time going over why they use certain products over others, how to use the equipment, and how to troubleshoot common problems with the supplies and equipment. This can be a valuable investment as it can reduce the time your management team will spend helping cleaners troubleshoot these things later.

SAFETY TRAINING
Safety is an important part of any training program, but preparing this component doesn't have to take a lot of time. Many companies use pre-established safety certification programs developed by their state or region to deliver safety training. Not only can you be confident that these programs are comprehensive, but they will also give you the added benefit of displaying that certification to cleaners and clients, so long as you maintain it.

CLEANING TRAINING
While you may think cleaning is common sense, it's important to consider that everyone has different methods and standards when it comes to cleanliness and hygiene. For example, Swept CEO Mike Brown once discovered a cleaner using a toilet brush on the outside of the toilet! To ensure your team is following your standards, offer training for the individual cleaning tasks they'll be doing on site. You don't need to reinvent the wheel here, a quick search of YouTube will reveal many cleaner training videos, such as this series by AMRE Supply (www.youtu.be/P6HGlnSI7jo.)

ON THE JOB TRAINING
In addition to going through the motions of cleaning the site as they would on a scheduled shift, it's important to review on site policies and procedures with your cleaners during on site training. This should cover anything that is expected of your cleaners while they are on the job that isn't considered cleaning. For instance, how do they clock in and out? How do they request supplies? What should they do if they run into an issue?
INTERPERSONAL SKILLS
Another important but often overlooked component of a good training program is helping employees to develop their interpersonal skills. This includes the importance of your clients' happiness to your business (and therefore their jobs,) how to deliver excellent customer service, the importance of teamwork, how to be a good team player, leadership skills, etc.

COMMUNICATE WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE
Before you send a cleaner into the field on their own, be sure that at some point in your training process you have given them clear guidelines for measuring their own success. We recommend providing them with cleaning instructions for each location they clean (more on this later in the guide,) but a copy of the checklist or scorecard you use for inspections could also be helpful. This is also a great time to describe any opportunities there are for movement within your company if they are consistently successful in their current role.

TIPS FOR A GREAT TRAINING PROGRAM:
Training can be time consuming and costly. Save time and money on training by holding group training sessions whenever possible.

Provide cleaners a checklist of all the topics that must be covered before they have completed their training so they can keep track of their progress.

Document key components of your training program to create an employee handbook. This will help cleaners to feel supported and will reduce the number of questions cleaners have for the management team after they have been trained.

Use videos to tell stories throughout your training program. Not only is this a great way to have information “stick,” but if you are doing group training, you can have employees create skits that demonstrate both good and bad safety practices and record them for future training groups.

Use short quizzes at the end of each section of your training program to help identify which cleaners are ready to move on and which ones may need extra support.
Training Planning Checklist

When planning your training program, use this checklist to ensure you’re covering each topic and providing the resources needed to help employees be successful at your company.

- Company Overview (mission, values, history, hierarchy, clientele, etc.)
- HR policies (payroll, vacation time, sick days, etc.)
- Paperwork & Documentation (criminal record check, employment authorization document, etc.)
- Personal & Professional development (their goals & your role in helping achieve them)
- Safety Training (use state/regional safety certification program if available)
- Products & Equipment Training (basic use, maintenance)
- Cleaning Training (use pre-existing videos found online)
- Interpersonal Skill Building (customer service, teamwork, leadership, etc.)
- On The Job Training
  - Provide cleaning instructions in their native language
  - Policies & procedures (problem reporting, inspections, technology, etc.)
  - Practice cleaning the space

Materials to Create

- Create a short quiz for each section of your training program
- Create a checklist that lists all components of your training program
- Create an employee handbook with answers to frequently asked questions
Supporting Cleaners with Cleaning Instructions

Just because the training phase is over doesn’t mean your cleaner won’t have questions about what is expected of them at a location. Providing them with clear instructions will not only make them feel more supported, but it will reduce the demand on your management team. Cleaning instructions are particularly important when one employee fills in for another at a location they are not used to cleaning. Here are our recommendations for making your cleaning instructions really effective:

USE TECHNOLOGY TO KEEP THEM ACCESSIBLE & UP TO DATE
One of the biggest reasons managers fail to provide written cleaning instructions is the challenge of keeping them on-site, yet up to date. When cleaning instructions live online in a cloud-based software like Swept, cleaners can access them from anywhere using their phones, and you can update them from anywhere too.

CONSIDER LANGUAGE BARRIERS
If your instructions exist only in English, they may not be helpful to all of your cleaners. To get the most out of your time spent creating cleaning instructions, go the extra mile and use a service like Google Translate to put instructions into the native language of each of your cleaners. For Swept customers, the enhanced translation feature will allow users to translate cleaning instructions into their language of choice with the click of a button.

INCLUDE PHOTOS
This one isn’t just for the cleaners — nothing impresses a client more than seeing that you not only provide your cleaners with detailed instructions, but that they’ll actually have photos of their space with notes of high-priority tasks. Use a program such as Skitch (www.evernote.com/products/skitch) to add arrows and notes to your photos when you’d like to highlight a particular area of the site.

GO BEYOND CLEANING
Take the time to put yourself in the shoes of a cleaner who is at a site for the first time. What questions will they have? Include information such as which entrance of the building to use, where to find key codes for the doors, what order to complete tasks in, etc.
Sample Cleaning Instructions

BEFORE YOUR ARRIVAL:

• Use parking spots furthest away from building
• Get keys from the Security desk in the lobby (If no one is there you can get them by entering the lockbox code at the main door. The code is under “Security” in Swept)
• Log your cleaning times by signing in/out to your location in Swept

WHILE ON SITE:

• Lock all doors before starting and keep your keys on you at all times
• Post any info for other cleaners/supervisors that clean same locations
• Report anything unusual / notify supervisors when supplies are running low using Swept

AREAS TO BE CLEANED:

Elevator, All Hallways, All washrooms, Kitchen, and Conference Room A & B. Pay extra attention to the back room — be sure to clear the tables

EQUIPMENT/SUPPLIES (IN DOWNSTAIRS JANITOR’S ROOM):

Water Bucket, Cleaning kit, Rags, Industrial Mop Bucket (yellow) and Mop Handle, Broom and Dustpan, 24” Dry Mop, Toilet Paper, Paper Towel, Soap, All Cleaning Product, All Collection Bags, 1st Aid Kit # 14, Door Stops, Box Cutter, Wet Floor Sign, Vacuum and Attachments 1.25”, Feather Duster, Burnisher, Cart

GARBAGE/RECYCLING PROCEDURES:

• Garbage: (Clear Bag) Collect all garbage on both floors from desks and common areas, change any soiled bags. Place in outside dumpster
• Paper: (Blue Bags) No paper collection from any desks. No shredded paper collection. Collect only from common areas or holding bins Place in outside dumpster.
• Recycling/Cardboard: (Blue Bags) Collect all from both floors except for refundable bottles
EVERYDAY DUTIES:

- Collect garbage as outlined above from all areas.
- Clean all washrooms replenishing any supplies that are low
- Tidy all kitchen and kitchenette areas (wipe stove top, tables, sink, etc.)
- Check all high dusting at desks (tops of partitions, bookcases, hutches)
- No cleaning of workspace areas on any desks. Dust all other common areas like window sills, baseboards, ledges, filing cabinets, etc on a rotating basis
- Vacuum all high traffic areas (mats and floor) each night.
- Spot vacuum floor space and upholstery where needed. Vacuum all other areas on a rotation basis so that a complete vacuum is done once weekly
- Mop all bathroom, high traffic and kitchen floors nightly.
- Spot mop any other floor space that's needed and rotate other floor space so that it's had a complete mop once weekly

MONDAY-FRIDAY (SUGGESTED ROUTINE):

1. 1st Floor: Hallways, Washrooms. Move upstairs using elevator
2. 2nd Floor: Continue with cart, kit and clean rags throughout the whole top floor and collect all garbage from desks and holding bins (sort garbage). Dust while you work through the building, clean high traffic glass as you go, and check ceiling vents, window sills, high and low dusting, etc. Do these tasks on a rotation basis nightly or as needed
3. Stairwells can be checked/cleaned on this floor or the lower. Once all the above is done make mop water and vacuum/dry mop and wet mop all high traffic areas and spot mop/vacuum any other areas as needed. Once completed put mop bucket and floor tools away. Turn off lights in all areas and move to lower floor.
4. 1st Floor: You can drop full bags of garbage here to start fresh for downstairs. Vacuum and mop your high traffic areas, washroom floors and any other floor space that is needed. Take garbage/compost out. Tidy up janitor’s room and return onsite keys.

ONCE A WEEK:

- Check for cobwebs (high and low).
- Dust window/door sills, baseboards, etc.
- Check Vacuum Bag and empty if needed

ONCE A MONTH:

- Check garbage cans and clean if needed
- Check ceiling vents/security lights, etc.
- Clean the conference room (do not touch contents on the tables)
Giving Constructive Feedback

No matter how awesome your team, there will be times when you have to have tough conversations with your cleaners. Whether it’s around attendance, performance, or customer service, talking to them about the behavior you’d like to see is the best way to make it happen.

When approaching these conversations keep in mind that cleaners work for your company for their own reasons — not yours. Use that information to keep them focused on their goals. This will allow you to hold them accountable without seeming too authoritative.

BEST PRACTICES FOR GIVING CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK

Get all the facts — Your cleaners will evaluate whether your feedback is fair or not based on the actions of other cleaners and the feedback you gave to them. To be fair, give feedback only based on facts, and avoid making assumptions or generalizations.

Do more listening than talking — It may seem counterintuitive, but next time you need to give feedback, have your staff do most of the talking. Your goal by addressing the issue is to find out what your employee is struggling with and see how you can help them with it.

Frame it as advice — Relating personally to the task at hand makes giving feedback sound more like advice from a trusted friend. From a supervisor to a cleaner this might sound like, “When I was in your shoes I struggled with that too. Next time you might want to try this, I found it helped me.”
**Give feedback monthly** — Giving feedback is one of the most cost-effective ways to boost productivity and lower the risk of employee turnover. In fact, research by Feedback Academy shows that 65% of employees surveyed said they wanted more feedback! However, too much feedback can overwhelm people. Unless there is an urgent issue you need to address, sit down with each cleaner once a month to discuss both the good and the bad.

**Always follow-up** — Corrective feedback is a powerful tool to engage and retain your staff, but it can lose impact if you fail to follow-up. At the end of your first feedback conversation with a cleaner, ask them if it’s okay for you to check back in a week to see how things are going. It may sound something like: “I will check back with you next week to see how things are going. Would that help keep you on track?”
Recognizing Employees Regularly

When cleaners feel connected to their job beyond just a paycheck, they’ll be more inspired to go above and beyond. This is why employee recognition should an central part of your retention strategy; it leads your employees to a greater sense of satisfaction in their job and loyalty to your company.

And while employee recognition can come in many forms — gifts, cash bonuses, awards, etc., a survey by Badgeville found that 83% of employees said recognition for their contributions was more fulfilling than rewards and gifts, and 71% said that the most meaningful recognition they have received had no dollar value.

TO BE EFFECTIVE, THE RECOGNITION MUST BE:

Specific: Cleaners need to know exactly what they did to receive recognition;

Inclusive: It shouldn’t only come from the management team — employees should be encouraged to recognize one another too;

Visible: Offering praise publicly magnifies the impact and offers colleagues the opportunity to join in;

Timely: Recognition has more impact if it is immediate. If an employee does something good, try to recognize it as soon as possible;

Habitual: To create cultural change like this within your company, you’ll need to do it regularly until it becomes a habit. improve your operations)
Technology that Supports the Cleaner

When used to support rather than simply track or manage cleaners, janitorial software can be a great way to set your company apart from the competition in the eyes of your employees. We developed Swept software for ourselves when we ran a cleaning company, and by drastically improving team communication, this technology allowed us to maintain cleaner retention rates well above industry norms. Here are some of the ways Swept is designed to help you support and retain your cleaners:

**KNOW HOW CLEANERS ARE FEELING**

Knowing how a cleaner is feeling can give you crucial insights into why they might be showing up late for shifts, missing shifts altogether, or not performing at their best. Perhaps they are going through some personal struggles that are impacting their ability to focus on the job. Or maybe the person responsible for scheduling has accidentally assigned them to the wrong site three days in a row.

Once a week at the end of a shift, the Swept app prompts cleaners to record how they are feeling, and adds their response to a mood history report. These reports will allow you to proactively talk to cleaners who regularly report poor moods before they leave your company, and approach tough conversations with more information than ever before.
REPORTING ISSUES ON SITE
When a cleaner runs into an issue on site, for instance their vacuum not working or a large stain on the carpet, it doesn’t just impact their experience — it impacts customer satisfaction. By providing them an easy way to report problems on site your cleaners will feel more supported, and you will be able to use this information to proactively reach out to clients and assure them you are aware of the issue and working to resolve it.

EASY ACCESS TO MANAGEMENT
No matter how well you’ve trained your cleaners, it’s normal for them to have questions now and then. Swept’s location-based message boards allow anyone on your team who is assigned to the same location to easily communicate with one another. Not only will your cleaners know how to reach you, but they’ll begin to help one another solve problems without needing to involve the management team, and you’ll stay more organized by having all your messages sorted by location.
SUPPORT IN THEIR NATIVE LANGUAGE
A common challenge for cleaning companies is having a language barrier between their cleaners and the team members who supervise and support them. We designed Swept's enhanced translation feature to solve just that. Enhanced translation allows cleaners to view cleaning instructions, messages, and problem reports in their language of choice.

SCHEDULES ON THE GO
Cleaners should never have to wonder where or when they are expected to work. The Swept mobile app, available to all Swept customers, gives cleaners access to their schedules on their phones. As you make changes to shifts the app will generate the updates in real-time, so cleaners can be confident their schedules are always up to date.
Conducting Exit Interviews

Conducting exit interviews with employees who are leaving can help you prevent the same issues from arising in the future. In some cases, they can even result in conversations that allow you to retain the employee.

**EXIT INTERVIEW SCRIPT**

Why have you decided to leave our company?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Have you shared these concerns with anyone in the company prior to deciding to leave?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Did anyone in this company discriminate against you, harass you, or cause hostile working conditions? (If yes, it's important to follow up)

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

What did you like most about this company?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

What did you like least about this company?

________________________________________________________________________
Did your job duties turn out to be as you expected?

Did any of our policies or procedures make your job more difficult?

Do you feel you had the resources and support needed to do your job? If not, what was missing?

How was your relationship with your manager? What could your manager do to improve his/her management style or skill?

Did you have clear goals and know what was expected of you on site?

Did you receive enough training to do your job effectively?

Did you receive enough feedback about your performance day-to-day?

Have you accepted a new job elsewhere? If yes, what does your new company offer that encouraged you to leave this company? If no, can we do anything to encourage you to stay?