

## educating the industry

# Three-minute diagnostics

BY JACQUELINE TABBAH



A customer once called our stone restoration company, International Stoneworks, complaining about a dark stain on her white marble floor. When a customer complains about dark stains I usually assume it is due to oil or grease but this time, instead of jumping in, I asked her to elaborate. She said the dark stain was right next to her bedroom door but it was not always visible. She could only see the stain during certain times of the day. I then asked her to describe the shape of the stain. After walking over to her bedroom, she replied the stain was round.

I thought about it for a moment and asked her to move her bedroom door and let me know if the stain disappeared. Sure enough, it did. The "dark stain" she was having trouble with turned out to be the shadow from her bedroom doorknob.

Had I not taken the time to listen to the customer's description of the problem, I would have assumed it was a grease stain. I would have made an appointment to go see her marble floor but, as it turns out, she didn't need our services at all. The couple of minutes I spent with her on the phone ended up saving me a trip.

Our interaction with a potential customer usually begins with a phone call. This initial conversation is your chance to gather key information from the customer that will start your relationship off on the right foot.

First, find out what the customer needs. It sounds pretty basic but it is very important. It has always served me better when I allow potential customers to explain in their own words what they are looking for and what problems they would like to fix.

I ask questions that help me

figure out how big the project is, where the customer is located and, if necessary, I ask more questions about the issue the customer initially called about. Doing so allows me to first decide if our company can even resolve this particular issue. If the project sounds like something we can take care of, I try to gauge the cost of the job before I even set eyes on the stone surface.

Having this short, preliminary conversation saves time for both myself and the customer. It also gives me insight into the customer's personality. For example, does she get straight to the point or is she more talkative?

Also, let's not forget that at the end of the day, we are all in sales in one way or another. I always try to be honest and knowledgeable about our services and products. I certainly do not want to inflate or over promise what we can do. I also like to give potential customers a little background information about our stone restoration processes without getting too technical. I try to use terms that are easy to understand. For example, instead of "compound polishing" I would say "powder polishing" or "wet sanding." That way I can make sure we are all on the same page.

Regardless of which industry you are in, I think we can all agree that we would like to accomplish two main things: saving time and improving customer service. With a three-minute preliminary conversation you can achieve both goals.

To learn more, I will be presenting at The International Surface Event (TISE) in Las Vegas. The session, "The 3 Minute Diagnosis: Quickly Assess that Stone Restoration Problem!" will be held on Jan. 19 at 10:20 a.m. Visit [tisewest.com](http://tisewest.com) to register.



Jacqueline Tabbah joined International Stoneworks, her family's natural stone restoration and maintenance business, in 2009. Since then she has been learning about stone and tile restoration, maintenance and products. Additionally, she supervises every facet of the company's marketing and public relations.

## RETAILERS REACT

### In what ways do distributors help you become more successful



Flooring dealers count on distributors for many things including superior service and quick response times.

Service is key. I can order a product Wednesday afternoon and have it delivered to me on Thursday, and I am 300 miles away. Exclusivity is another. The last thing I need is to look over my shoulder and find a retailer down the block who offers the same products I do.

—Jim Morrell, Tovell's Carpetland  
Saratoga Springs, N.Y.

Immediate response is very important. Consumers don't want to wait because the big box stores have spoiled them, so having on-time delivery twice a week is crucial.

—Valery Doody,  
EBS Building Supplies  
Ellsworth, Maine

Product knowledge. When sales reps come around with the latest samples and can educate you on the features and benefits as well as how to install the products, that's huge.

—Tammy Lebel, Sherrin Arnold's  
Flooring & Kitchen  
Lewiston, Maine

Knowledge and service. I don't know everything about flooring so it is key to have someone you can count on. If I have a customer in the store who has a question that I don't know the answer to, I can pick up the phone and the order desk people with NRF will know the answer. And if they don't they'll find an inside person who does.

—Tobyn Olson, Floor Craft  
Wilmot, N.H.

Distributor programs are of great importance to independent dealers since distributors typically offer a much wider variety of products including supplies and sundries in smaller quantities. There's also additional credit availability, service and faster response times to typical everyday needs of the dealer.

—Bill Zeigler, Charles F. Zeigler & Sons  
Hanover, Pa.

## CALENDAR

**Nov. 2-5**  
The International Surface Event East  
Orange County Convention Center, Orlando. Contact: 866.550.6808; [tiseeast.com](http://tiseeast.com)

**Nov. 3-5**  
NAFCD + NBMDA  
Annual convention, Hilton Orlando Hotel, Orlando. Contact: NAFCD, 800.383.3094; [distributorconvention.org](http://distributorconvention.org)

**Nov. 11-13**  
NWFA training  
Installation/sand & finish certification, E. J. Welch Co., Elk Grove Village, Ill. Contact: 800.422.4556; [nwfa.org](http://nwfa.org)

**Nov. 12-14**  
CFI Annual Convention  
Marriott Grapevine, Grapevine, Texas. Contact: 816.231.4646; [cfiinstallers.org](http://cfiinstallers.org)

**Nov. 18-20**  
Greenbuild  
International Conference and Expo, Washington Convention Center, Washington, D.C. Contact: USGBC, 800.795.1747; [greenbuildexpo.com](http://greenbuildexpo.com)

**Dec. 8-9**  
CFI certification & training  
Dalton Carpet One, Lawrenceville, Ga. Contact: 816.231.4646; [cfiinstallers.com](http://cfiinstallers.com)

**Jan. 13-16**  
Atlanta International Area Rug Market  
AmericasMart, Atlanta. Contact: 800.285.6278; [americasmart.com](http://americasmart.com)

**Jan. 16-19**  
Domotex Hannover  
Hannover Exhibition Center, Hannover, Germany. Contact: +49.511.89.31020; [domotex.de/en](http://domotex.de/en)

**Jan. 19-22**  
The International Surface Event  
Mandalay Bay Convention Center, Las Vegas. Contact: 866.860.1975; [tisewest.com](http://tisewest.com)

## REMEMBER WHEN...

Networking has always been a big part of the North American Association of Floor Covering Distributors' (NAFCD) annual meeting. At the 1999 event, held in Washington, Congoleum's Dennis Jarosz, second from right, and his wife, Judith, spent time with Bob Weiss, far left, then vice president of operations for All Tile, and Hoy Lanning, then CEO of CMH Space Flooring Products. Today Weiss is CEO of All Tile and Lanning is senior vice president, CMH marketing and Haines purchasing.

