



Guillaume Marchand. "Interestingly, domestic clients are happy to pay more for their cleaning. It's when they get to their office that they compromise on quality and ask for a cheaper price"

Procedurè-driven business

CLIENTS APPRECIATE A LA CARTE'S 'METICULEUSE' APPROACH

Bringing an almost academic approach to its contract cleaning operations, Sydney's A La Carte Cleaning implements rigorous but highly rewarding administrative and on-site systems. Principal Guillaume Marchand has employed the skills he learned in law and investment banking to create an efficient organisation that, seemingly, suffers none of the usual contracting heartaches.

"I have law degrees from France and Australia and five years' experience working in banking. But I didn't enjoy law," Marchand explains.

"I wanted a position where I could deal with people hands-on as well as be in control of my own business."

In 2004 Marchand established A La Carte as a concierge business, its services offered included pet minding and running errands. It was then he realised there was a big demand for cleaning - his style of cleaning.

"You see, I am a very pedantic type of person. I am all about attention to detail and clients really appreciate that," Marchand emphasises.

Some three years ago A La Carte began employing people to

carry out domestic cleaning services. Of course in time, largely through referrals, commercial contracts followed.

"Domestic cleaning is more demanding than commercial. It requires more attention to detail," Marchand observes.

Gradually, A La Carte's client mix changed with commercial contracting - mainly offices with some upmarket retail - becoming the engine room. "Of course we retained those domestic clients who are easy to work with," says Marchand.

Today the contractor employs some 20 casual cleaners under the award and AWAs with 'everything done by the book'.

"I am really looking forward to the new modern award. I have law degrees and yet even I sometimes have trouble understanding the present award. The cleaners certainly don't understand it."

'Meticuleuse': Eng meticulous

A La Carte conducts thorough pre-employment checks including the requirement for at least two references; visa checks; a criminal check; and a medical questionnaire.

Marchand goes the extra step by implementing a special 'test' so that A La Carte ends up with long-serving cleaners with the right attitude. "I ask potential employees to complete a simple application form that requires a little effort. If they can't be bothered doing it then I don't employ them," states Marchand.

The company's cleaners are a mix of students, mothers and others. "I find students can make the best cleaners - they may not have cleaned before but they are easily trained and industrious. Some experienced cleaners, on the other hand, are set in their ways and will not necessarily do the job to my standards.

"Many of the cleaners come to us referred to by their friends who are already at A La Carte. So they have similar, positive characteristics," Marchand points out.

A La Carte's happy band is IT-literate, which means less work for Marchand. Employees log-in to the company's net site, which gives them all their timesheets and employment details (leave etc); and their work rosters.

Reflecting his pedantic approach, Marchand trains his cleaners individually. He works with them on site, task by task. Products used include microfibre cloths and an environmentally-friendly chemical system, which includes sachet type dispensing.

Marchand's only real concern for his growing business is the prevalence of 'dodgy' operators. "Margins are already low and unfortunately there are many cleaning firms using illegal practices to cut prices even further."



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