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## **New-Age Approach to Maintenance**

*Agreement Sales and Management*



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# Maintenance Agreements: Make Them Valuable to Your Customers



Mike Weil is editor-in-chief and director of communications and publications at National Comfort Institute, Inc. You can reach him at [MikeW@ncihvac.com](mailto:MikeW@ncihvac.com)

**T**here is no argument that providing bi-annual or annual HVAC system service/maintenance agreements can be vital to consumers' peace of mind as well as to a contracting firm looking to even out the seasonality of the business. And typically, April is the time when most contractors are looking to renew and sell these instruments.

However, there is one aspect of maintenance agreements that may be back-burnered by contractors: providing true value versus the cost. For some contractors it is a numbers game — bragging rights as to how many agreements they have and service. For others, they succumb to marketplace pressures where competitors and some “consumer media” tell customers that maintenance agreements are just a way for your company to squeeze more dollars from their pockets.

For those who are all about bragging rights, you are missing the point. On the other hand, if the number of agreements your company sells and services is vital to the continued success of your firm by bringing in additional revenue during shoulder seasons, then you are right on point. The intent isn't to rip off customers.

## TRUE VALUE

However, to avoid any misunderstandings you must show the true value of your maintenance agreements to customers.

First, pricing needs to be fair. Maintenance agreements shouldn't be so expensive that customers think it's a rip-off and may only consider buying one-off services when they need it. Still, pricing should be high enough to cover costs and provide you a fair margin.

Second, you should provide options — different types and/or levels of maintenance so your customers have choices.

## CREATE CLUB MEMBERSHIPS

Take, for example, the approach to maintenance agreements as a membership or VIP club. By providing points that equate to discounts for consumers on services, you can entice them to buy maintenance agreements from you.

A great example is how Rob Minnick and his team at Minnicks, Inc. do this very thing. Read all about it on page 13 of this issue. In fact, Rob takes it one step further — he offers customers three choices, one of which is a unique program called Smart Maintenance. With that, he can remotely monitor and manage customer systems without having to bring on more staff and more overhead.

## THE PERFORMANCE APPROACH

Furthermore, Rob creates value not only through programs like VIP memberships and smart maintenance, but his field service and installation teams also operate under the Performance-Based Contracting™ method where all maintenance tasks include static pressure/temperature testing as well as ductwork analysis and diagnoses. His customers receive value in comfort and energy efficiency. They have the peace of mind knowing Minnicks is watching out for them.

This is so important for three reasons: It differentiates Minnicks from its competitors, it brings in much needed revenues, and provides his customer base with value that flies in the face of negativity reported from sources like *Checkbook.org* ([ncilink.com/ChkBkBias](http://ncilink.com/ChkBkBias)) and *Angie's List* ([ncilink.com/AngiesList](http://ncilink.com/AngiesList)).

So the question is, are you more concerned with the number of agreements you sell or are you focused on providing true value to customers? What are some unique value propositions that your maintenance approach brings to the market?

Drop me a note at [MikeW@NCIhvac.com](mailto:MikeW@NCIhvac.com). 

## Written By HVAC Professionals for HVAC Professionals

### FIELD CONTROLS DOUBLE-ACTING BAROMETRIC DAMPERS

Most oil heating contractors are familiar with single-acting barometric dampers. They are used to control the overfire draft pressure of the burner. This pressure controls the amount of air entering the oil burner and maintains stable combustion. Controlling air on gas equipment should be just as important!

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The same holds true if the flue becomes restricted or blocked.

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For more information on the **Field Controls MG-1** or to order this double-acting barometric damper, visit the NCI store at [ncilink.com/MG-1](http://ncilink.com/MG-1).

— by Jim Davis, Senior Instructor, National Comfort Institute



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# Helping to Train HVAC Contractors with the Goodman Business Toolbox

**H**VAC contractors are blessed with the amount and type of training made available to them from every link in the industry's value chain – manufacturers, distributors, associations, franchise organizations, and independent consultants.

The amount of training is almost overwhelming, however, and there isn't a single source where contractors can go to set up training their personnel. One manufacturer is making a significant investment in doing this very thing.

Goodman Manufacturing Company, L.P. set out on this path in 2017 with the creation of its **Goodman Business Toolbox™** and **Amana Brand Business Academy™** programs. Under the direction of National Sales Training Manager Ben Middleton, the company began to build a business resource that would be available to the entire HVAC Industry.

Today both the Toolbox and Academy platforms are open and available to HVAC contractors, distributors, and their employees across the industry regardless of brand affiliation.

Middleton says, "We strongly encourage HVAC contractors, no matter what brand of equipment they sell, to attend the Goodman and/or Ama-

na training sessions. There are no user names or passwords. We have free learning videos that they can access in our libraries. Anyone can see our entire training calendar, all the upcoming training sessions.

"If they see a workshop they like, they can register for it and participate, whether they sell Goodman or Amana brand equipment or not."

## SOME HISTORY

Before 2017, Goodman offered high-efficiency sales training for their contractor customers. According to Middleton, that training was offered through a third-party company.

The company also had existing technical training. When Middleton joined the team, his mission was to take training to the next level.

"Part of that was to provide some additional tools for our dealers to use – a toolbox if you will – which put more resources at the contractor's fingertips," he says. "The idea

was to expand our business horizons. So, we created this training toolbox working with various industry experts and trainers from all over the country.

"We work with organizations like National Comfort Institute (NCI); independent business consultants;



coaches like Tom Witman, Dennis Mondul, and Tom Piscitelli; and other industry partners like CI Web Group, EGIA Finance Clearinghouse, and so on."

Middleton says that back in 2017 he got together with four experts to hash out upgrades to the Goodman high-efficiency sales class. Part of this

upgrade was the inclusion of a new sales tool Goodman had just launched that was called **Perfect Pitch™** ([ncilink.com/perfectpitch](http://ncilink.com/perfectpitch)).

"Perfect Pitch was a sales process developed in partnership with Wrightsoft. We built an entire curriculum around this in-home selling system to help contractors sell more high-efficiency equipment," he explains.

The following year a group of nearly 30 people conferenced together and developed 15 more workshops. Middleton says during that session the team brainstormed and networked to make sure all the training they developed complemented each other and wasn't just a 'hodge-podge' of different workshops and classes.

"We wanted contractors to be able to take each of the different workshops and see how they all tie together through the entire HVAC

business cycle, which we also introduced that year."

The HVAC business cycle basically takes a contractor through all aspects of the customer engagement process. This includes:

■ **How customers can find a contractor** when they have a need or want. Middleton says they have specific workshops developed that help with this.

■ **How to turn that inquiry into an appointment.** There is a curriculum built around call conversion and setting the appointment.

■ **How to determine what problems there are.** "We have workshops covering problem identification and making sure contractors have the right tools and the right knowledge to be successful in finding the problems," says Middleton.

■ **How to present HVAC solutions to the customer** after the problem is identified. This must be done in a way that gives customers options and still puts them in control of the buying decision. The Toolbox has course work on this aspect that teaches techs how to work through the problem solution.

■ **How to get paid for the solution.** The Toolbox training has a compensation-for-services-rendered section. This includes providing a way for customers to pay in the way they want to pay. Middleton says that if the contractor has done everything right and created a great experience for their customer, they should have a customer for life.

■ The last step is **developing a marketing plan.**

Rather than being a linear training model, Middleton describes this as circular. "You can start at any one of those points in the circle and work your way around," he says. "You learn. You keep tightening up the processes around those key aspects of the HVAC business. You learn some more. *That is the heart of the entire Goodman Business Toolbox.*"

In 2019, the development group grew to 50 people and they took all the Goodman and Amana brand solutions vendors they worked with, married them up with Goodman and independent trainers, and refined the Toolbox workshops.

Middleton says, "Today we are up to more than 50 different workshops for both territory sales managers and our dealers. It is all mapped out. We have a complete roadmap that any HVAC contractor can go through."

He adds that the mission today is

one of refining and polishing. "We want to work on improving the overall experience. We are looking at all the different tools and ways people learn today versus how they have over the past 20 or 30 years. This includes how to better incorporate technology into the training.

"A big change now will come from how we incorporate and use these new teaching technologies."

## AGAIN: THIS TRAINING IS OPEN TO THE ENTIRE HVAC INDUSTRY

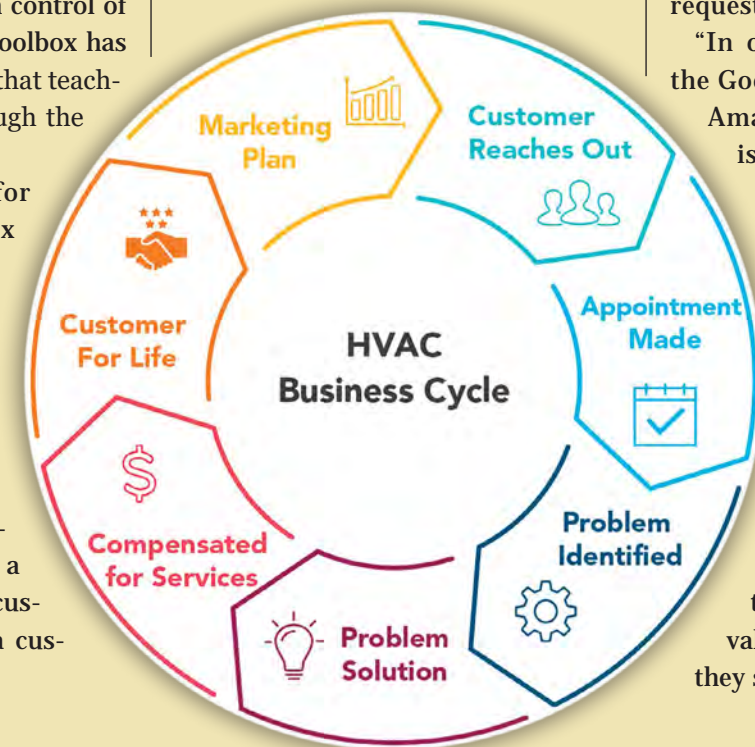
Middleton wants to emphasize that the toolbox training is available to any HVAC contractor in the industry, whether they sell Goodman or Amana brand HVAC products or not.

"In that light," he says, "we allow dealers to see our curriculum and look for a workshop in their area. If they don't see one, they can request it. When a distributor sees enough requests coming through, they can organize a workshop based on those requests.

"In other words, every aspect of the Goodman Business Toolbox and Amana Brand Business Academy is open to the entire industry," he adds.

Furthermore, he says this training is designed to work in conjunction with other training available in the industry.

"Our goal was never to compete with any training organizations, franchise groups, or associations that contractors belong to. I think they all have extremely high value to the group of contractors they serve. We want to be a few dif-



Ben Middleton



ferent things for the groups.”

**1)** To provide a solid foundation before contractors get involved with other HVAC Industry training groups/organizations. He says that means they want to help set contractors up for success, to be a source to help contractors lay that foundation.

**2)** To set up the workshops as supplemental training for every other organizations’ training programs. This way contractors have a lot of localized training through their distributor. Then, when they go to regional or national training events, they can build on the basic training Goodman provided.

This is a big investment for Goodman, and Middleton says the overriding factor is the value it provides con-

tractors. For existing Amana brand and Goodman dealers, they can be more profitable and be better qualified to sell more product. They also will be able to get their name out and be in front of more customers.

“On the other hand, if they aren’t selling Goodman and Amana brand products, we invite them to come in and try on our training, check out the distribution branch, and we would hope if they like what they see, maybe they will allow us to do some business with them as well.”

#### HOW’S IT GOING?

“Our mission is to drive more ‘attendance’ to the Goodman Business Toolbox and Amana Brand Business Academy websites,” he says.

“Today our approach is very targeted. We are working closely with specific groups – including the NCI membership. Eventually, you will see a more industrywide approach to our marketing and promotion.”

All of this is in-person live training conducted across the United States through Goodman distribution branches, both company-owned and independent.”

Part of the goal is to build out the digital content found on both the Goodman Business Toolbox and Amana Brand Business Academy websites. The idea is for a contractor to use this content for their own in-house training, or on their own time. Middleton says that includes building On-Demand training.

#### THE PERFORMANCE-BASED CONNECTION

“When we look at Performance-Based Contractors who look at HVAC systems inclusive with the air systems and who pay attention to airflow, sizing equipment correctly, as well as overall system design and performance, we see a group who make HVAC equipment work better,” Middleton explains.

“But we also want to give them the tools they need to be ‘found’ better (marketing) by potential customers, offer financing, improving their customer service, and so on.

“We can’t do all that ourselves. So, we partner with organizations like NCI. We host NCI training events that are conducted by NCI trainers.



By working together, we can provide bottom-to-top training around the country.”

Middleton thinks of the NCI courses as advanced technical training, while Goodman training focuses on basic technical and business training. He believes they work hand-in-hand and looks forward to building out more classes with the NCI trainers.

Middleton concludes by saying the Goodman Business Toolbox and Amana Brand Business Academy programs are here to unify training, to supplement other organizations’ programs,

and to change how HVAC contractors think about training their field service and installation teams.

“Change is good,” Middleton concludes. “Yes, it can be painful at times, but it helps us become better together — Goodman can provide better resources to our customers, and contractors can provide better service to their customers. This approach, I feel, is what will continue to differentiate us and our customers from the rest in the HVAC marketplace.

It is for these and many other reasons that **High-Performance HVAC Today** magazine shines its April Spotlight on the **Goodman Business Toolbox** and **Amana Brand Business Academy** programs. NCI

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# The Power of HVAC Contractor Networking

In the modern world, they say that your success is often dependent on the breadth and girth of your network. The “They” in this scenario are those successful business and marketing gurus who write books, put on seminars, and coach individuals to help them grow their careers successfully.

And they aren’t wrong. Think about it: your network of friends, family, customers, peers, team members, professional advisors, and vendors – everyone with whom you encounter in your daily and business life – have a huge impact on your ability to succeed.

Investing your time and effort to build and maintain a network of genuine personal and professional relationships creates an important asset that will support a higher level of success.

Networking is nothing more than building relationships. It is about connecting with people, listening to what they have to say, responding to it, and learning from it.

## LEARNING FROM YOUR PEERS

One of the key places where networking occurs is during gatherings – meetings, tradeshow, training sessions, and so on. Learning from your peers occurs naturally during such events.

For example, you might meet someone struggling with the same issue that is slowing down your forward momentum. By mentioning your challenge, you might find that missing idea, something that had not occurred to you.

You might talk to someone who has been where you are, who can give you the tip you need to get your business back on track. On the other hand,

you could share just the right magic insight to straighten out someone else’s business hurdle.

**Mike Greany of All Pro Plumbing, Heating, Air and Electrical** of Ontario, CA says that he confers with peers on an ongoing basis. “I network regularly,” he says. “We talk about a lot of things: business practices, hiring and firing, goal setting, tracking, and more. The biggest benefit I get is accountability. It forces me to be accountable to those peers for my own goals.”

That last part is worth repeating. *Networking holds Greany accountable for his own goals!!* It is like having a personal board of directors you can turn to for problem-solving, idea swapping, brainstorming, and imagining. In that environment, you want to do the right thing so your ‘board’ can see you grow. You become motivated and inspired by like-minded individuals.

Peers can also help each other reach out beyond their circles of support to broader exposure and brand identity building. For contractors like Greany, that has led to contacts and true relationships with other contractors across the country.

He says he looks for opportunities to talk with this group – one-on-one, when attending industry events, and through programs like the *Trailblazer Coaching Live* online forum hosted by National Comfort Institute.

“Live conferences and meetings are the most important part of my network. I find it a must to meet people face-to-face. It makes it more of a personal connection making it easier to work together,” he adds.

**Vic Updike of Masterworks Mechanical** in Craig, CO agrees. “I network with other HVAC contractors I meet at the National Comfort Institute Summit. We talk about everything from how to implement CO testing in our businesses to what kind of software to consider for doing commercial project bidding and more.”

## THE NETWORKING SECRET

So how do you network? Does it happen on its own or does it require some thought and planning? The answer is both. The fact is, talking with and listening to many people helps you to formulate ideas, solutions, and the start of relationship building.

But, like the Boy Scout motto says, Be Prepared! Preparation makes it easier to get the most out of any networking experience.

The best way to prepare, especially if attending an event within your industry, is to think about what you want to accomplish. That often starts by knowing who is also attending the event. If there is an attendee list available beforehand, use it to make a list of those people you’d like to meet and chat with.

When you meet with them, establish rapport by finding out about them and their passions, both on a personal and professional level. For me, these are the easiest conversations to have. Sometimes it requires a bit of homework to get some preliminary talking points down to make the conversation go a bit easier.

See the chart, right, for 10 general tips to help you get the most from the time you spend at events or even in one-on-one meetings.

## DON’T BE INTIMIDATED

According to Mike Greany, the key is to not be intimidated to ask questions and for help from a peer.

“Without asking questions, you might not make a connection. During live events, such as NCI’s annual Summit meeting, I might not reach out to that contractor who I know can help me because of his or her experience.

“Why? Because I wouldn’t know him.

## TEN TIPS to get the most from networking

- 1 Be yourself.** It’s amazing how difficult this can be. People tend to wear their ‘game’ faces when in public. The truth is others can often see right through this. So, keep it simple – just be you.
- 2 Smile.** It is one thing to being a quiet person at an event, or to be off in a corner answering emails/texts on your phone. It’s quite another to look glum, uncomfortable, or frowning so much that you look angry. All these things make you unapproachable. During a networking event try to set that aside and smile. Make yourself engage with those around you and seek out meeting new people. It’s amazing how doing these things can change your mood and help draw people in.
- 3 Give first, then receive.** Many networking consultants and gurus will tell you this is a “Golden Rule.” Author Keith Ferrazzi says if you want to form a relationship with another person, you first need to show them how they’ll benefit. Ferrazzi’s book, *Never Eat Alone: And Other Secrets to Success, One Relationship at a Time* is often quoted on this subject. He explains that the gesture can be as simple as forwarding a relevant article or providing an introduction to someone who can further the person’s interests.
- 4 It’s not all about business cards.** Exchanging business cards is good, but it isn’t the mission. It’s about finding common ground by asking questions and listening to answers. It’s about sharing stories and creating a bond. This sets the stage for future communications that are mutually beneficial.
- 5 Keep an open mind.** Every connection you make has the potential to be valuable to you and/or your business. Be receptive to new ideas. Again, ask questions. If pertinent to an issue you or your company is struggling with, ask how they faced similar problems and be open to how they overcame them, or didn’t. Sometimes you learn more when someone talks about their failures rather than only their successes.
- 6 Be helpful.** In many networking situations, you can find yourself being asked questions. Answer them honestly, succinctly, and with the idea that you want to be helpful to that person. Share your experiences that are pertinent to the question. But it can go beyond this. Later, after the interaction, if you find content online or anywhere else that is germane to your conversation, send it to that person.
- 7 Show gratitude, follow-up, then follow-up again.** This is important to building any lasting relationship. If you met someone at a business conference, make sure you send a follow-up message or thank you note. It’s a great way to stay in touch and build upon what you started during the networking event.  
This simple act helps people to remember you. It just takes a few seconds to do and can go a very long way in creating an open line of communication that is the cornerstone of any relationship.  
Plus it opens the door for you to send information, articles, and other tidbits that you think they will find interesting and educational. This is the gift that keeps on giving!
- 8 Deepen your network pool.** It is human nature to attend an event or meeting and gravitate toward people you know. But to grow your network and broaden your knowledge base, seek out new people.  
You can also do this by asking people in your existing network who else you should talk to. Maybe they will make introductions for you. In other words, ask for referrals. And by the way, this is a two-way street.  
Offer to refer people to people you know too. This truly broadens your network.
- 9 Networking one-on-one.** By the way, not all networking needs to take place at events. If there is someone you’d like to meet or someone you’ve been introduced to but haven’t had a chance to talk with them, make a coffee or lunch date.  
This one-on-one kind of meeting is a great way to sharpen your listening skills and to make solid connections. It’s also a way to maintain and strengthen the relationships you have in your existing network.
- 10 Make connections, then return the favor.** This ties in with deepening your network pool, but it’s worth reiterating. Everything is a two-way communications experience, and this can help you focus on solving problems and creating value with your connections.



I don't like to share weaknesses with people I don't know. But if you have a face and eye-to-eye contact, it's easier and opens the door to where you get invited to ask questions."

### THE VIRTUAL NETWORK

Having said that, let's not forget about the importance of your social media network. In the 21st Century, this is the way of the world and you need to have skills for developing, maintaining, and growing a strong online network as well.

Make the most of social media to stay abreast of trends in the industry. Keep track of influencers who you may want to build a relationship with. Stay in touch with people already in your network including business acquaintanc-

es, school alumni, supply chain executives, trainers, and so on.

Also, don't forget about the various trade associations and their websites. They have many discussion threads you can participate in.

"One of the biggest benefits I get out networking is process improvement," says Updike. "In the past our processes were weak. Sometimes I reach out to see how others are doing things and sometimes I try to reverse engineer them the way I want them to work. Then I run it past the guys to see if they can pick it apart or add to it to make it better."

"Networking has had a definite impact on my business and my personal life," Greany adds.

"On the business side, having this

group of peers I can rely on when I need help has made me and my team better craftsmen. It's helped us to manage better and increase profits. I can honestly say the advice I get from networking has helped me to more than triple the size of the company's HVAC division in just five years!

He adds that on a personal level, networking is an antidote to his stress.

"I have made invaluable friendships with people I can vent with and share with and they can do the same with me. It has helped make all of us better contractors, business people, and leaders."

So are you involved with a network of your peers? Are you taking advantage of the power of networking? If not, what's stopping you? **NCI**

# A New-Age Approach to Maintenance Agreements



In 1954, my grandfather started his own HVAC contracting company in his garage in Burtonsville, MD. Minnick's Inc. started during the very early days of air conditioning when it was more of an option than a necessity. His focus was on oil, gas, and electric heating. New construction was king in the HVAC industry. My grandfather eventually grew the business to a multi-million dollar firm with more than 200 employees.

### A QUICK HISTORY

For our company, new construction and service went hand-in-hand. My grandfather serviced every system he installed (or tried to), but the bulk of the income was derived from new construction work in building track homes and housing developments.

So, you can say service and service agreements have been in my family's business DNA from the very beginning.

Like all companies in the new construction arena, we found the rug pulled out from beneath us when the new construction markets crashed in both the early 1990s and in 2008. I am amazed our business survived. I often ask my dad how he did it and his answer is always the same, "By doing whatever needed to be done."

That included reducing personnel from around 200 to only six of us! Four of the six were Minnicks: my dad, myself, and my two brothers. The other two were a secretary and a financial person.

We started rebuilding and refocusing. It was in the mid-1990s that we were introduced to and got involved with National Comfort Institute (NCI).

### CHANGING OF THE GUARD

I took over as president in 2006. As I was learning how to run the business (before that I spent most of my time in the field), I realized I need-

ed help in getting things in place and figuring out how to manage. In that light, in 2009 we began working with consultants Al Levi and Ellen Rohr.

Rohr introduced us to the concept of VIP Maintenance, which is a pay-as-you-go program. This helped us keep our customers' costs down, enabled us to create a reward point system, and create a free membership program for preferred service and discounts (requires customers to share their first name and email address).

Talk about a change! Our VIP program helped us to build up our service base because customers liked getting discounts. By just providing their name and email address they earn 25 reward points, become members of our VIP program, and receive discounts.



In our VIP program, every point is worth a dollar toward any service we provide. For example, we reward customers for referrals with 100 pts. Another example is driving social media 'likes' to our Facebook page. If they 'like' us, they earn another 25 points. These are things you can create instantly.

This changed our approach to maintenance agreements.

However, with any type of loyalty program, if you aren't tracking, you can't manage it. You won't know how many points a customer has, or what they've used, and that leads to your program falling apart very quickly.

## TSI AND ALNOR PRODUCTS OFFERED WITH ISO 17025 ACCREDITATION

TSI is excited to announce the addition of ISO 17025:2017 accreditation for select TSI and Alnor® branded ventilation test instruments.

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### OTHER LOYALTY PROGRAMS WORK. SO WHY CAN'T OURS?

I knew there had to be a way to keep track of everything and began looking at other industry loyalty programs like those used by airlines, car rental agencies, hotels, and others. That led me to a national company called LuxCode that tracked rewards programs for restaurants.

Over the years we changed vendors several times looking for better systems that were easy for both our customers and our administrators to use. Eventually we settled on Service Titan, which has a loyalty program that is much easier to use, to track customers and points, and to manage our overall VIP maintenance.

As a result of this approach, we have

been able to slowly convert away from a new construction standing and are now 95% focused on residential service and replacement, and 5% on light commercial. We have 25 employees and are stronger than ever. Last year our company generated \$2.3 million in gross sales.

### HOW DOES PERFORMANCE PLAY INTO THIS?

For my team, the other key factor in our success is the incorporation of performance into our company and our culture. Since the very early days when I first encountered NCI, we regularly train and certify our team. Static pressure testing, duct system analysis, diagnosis, repairs, and much more are built into our VIP programs, installation practices, and overall service approach.

In other words, we look at the entire house as a system and do home and HVAC Performance testing in and testing out on all the homes we work on.

Very few of our competitors understand or do Performance-Based Contracting™. Our guys always run into customers wanting to know why it takes them so much longer to do maintenance than other HVAC firms in the area.

Our techs explain how they're being thorough by checking everything necessary to assure the HVAC and air system will work as promised. It will now deliver all the comfort they will need.

The key to them being able to do this is in training. Our goal for 2020 is for each of our employees to receive 150 hours of training. I want to double those hours by the end of 2021.

### A NEW AGE OF MAINTENANCE

I am also looking for new ways to take performance to a new level and four years ago I was introduced to a remote monitoring/service program using a product called Sensi from Emerson. I have since incorporated this "Smart Maintenance" into my Service Titan VIP maintenance loyalty program and have been going gangbusters with it ever since.

Today's homeowners are savvy and want smart devices. This product is a perfect fit. It documents how the system is operating, plus identifies issues. Sensi is a Bluetooth-based sensor system that monitors and analyzes HVAC systems 24/7.

We dispatch our techs when the sensors detect an impending problem.



Each month the homeowner gets a 1-page report that shows all the alarms, when

they occurred, as well as electricity usage by their HVAC equipment, and other information on the overall health and operation of the system.

One other point that makes this easier to sell to customers: Reports are also available online in a customer/contractor portal where they can be accessed at any time.


We can also log into the portal to see the equipment readings to determine issues and our course of action.

### THE KEY IS OFFERING CHOICES

The success of our approach to maintenance is offering consumers choices and rewards. In our case, we offer them

three choices: our basic loyalty program, our Plus VIP program, and now our Smart Maintenance.

Has it all been easy? Not at all. It has taken time to get our technicians up to speed and to overcome their fear of change. But we are working through that.

The choices we made not only helped to turn our company around but also helped pave the way to our becoming a preferred provider in our area. 

**Rob Minnick** is president and CEO of Minnick's Inc., in Laurel, MD. He has been in the HVAC Industry for 39 years, holds many state and national certifications, and is active in a number of industry trade associations. If you are interested in learning more about his VIP and Smart Maintenance programs, contact him at [rob@minnicks.com](mailto:rob@minnicks.com).

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# Create the Most Profitable Service Department ...

... While having the highest paid techs in your market ...

“OUR MISSION HERE IS TO DRIVE PAYROLL OF THE SERVICE DEPARTMENT UP AS HIGH AS POSSIBLE, BECAUSE THIS MAY BE THE ONLY WAY TO MAXIMIZE CONSISTENT PROFITABILITY.”

**Y**ou may be thinking, this guy is nuts. Well, he is not. To set the stage let’s review some basic metrics. We know that, in a residential retail operation, service labor should be something below 22% of service revenue. If this is not being tracked and used as a leadership tool, this may be a good first step in managing labor costs. Before we begin to plan for methods to drive profitability in the service department, it may be helpful to assess the realities of the technicians’ world in the 21st Century.

THE TECHNICIAN

- Reality 1:** Many senior technicians see a lack of accountability to be one of the perks even though their revenue per hour may not be the best.
- Reality 2:** As demand for service work slows, the clock gets milked.
- Reality 3:** Many techs feel that after a season of working 10 to 14 hours a day, they deserve to be able to work at a slower pace. Any corrective efforts are met with resentment.
- Reality 4:** Regardless of the inefficiencies and lack of effectiveness, employees continue to receive their paychecks. This lavishly rewards, and sometimes cements, unproductive behavior.
- Reality 5:** Technicians often view their role as “customer protector” from the boss’s prices.

For instance, \$225 for replacing a capacitor (an \$11 part), might seem unfair. This is easy to address, which we can discuss another time. Hopefully this doesn’t create too bleak of a landscape because all these issues can be positively impacted with the plan we are about to review.

THE MATH

**Warning:** Do not have a meeting about a new compensation system for techs. It is absolutely necessary to walk through a Transition Management process, that may take as long as six months, before rolling out this plan. Good contractors have squandered a great opportunity by skipping the necessary transitioning steps. From here we will walk through the fundamentals of **Revenue per Hour (R/H)** and **Revenue Sharing (R/S)**, and then we will walk through a sample of how contractors can handle the transition management well.

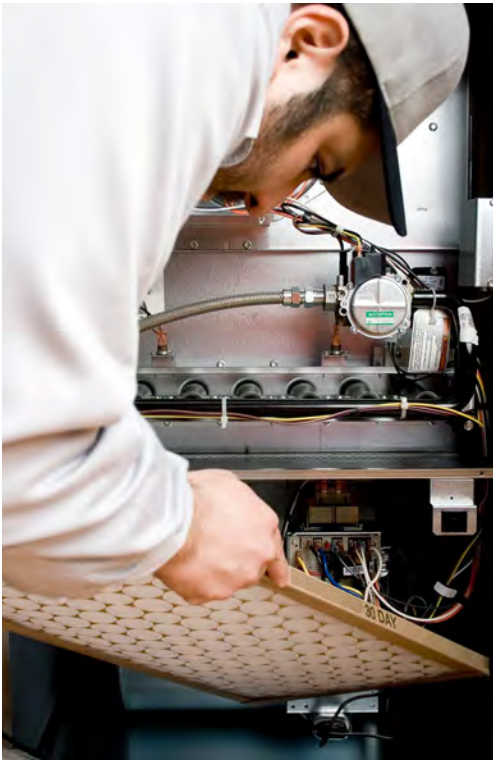
**Revenue per Hour** – Historically, base labor costs should be under 22% of service revenue. This labor rate presumes a slow but competent technician. And we know that many competent technicians can complete the communication requirements and mechanical tasks more quickly without rushing. This is one area where you can reward productivity and make the service department more profitable. For many companies, when the R/H is \$110.00, labor is around 22% of Service Revenue. Here’s the idea illustrated presuming a 40-hour work-week and what a \$20 increase in R/H means for profitability. Let’s call the labor that is attributable to the

technician’s overproduction a monthly **Revenue Share**. This is not a bonus, but it is less than 20% of revenue. This is already budgeted in the flat rate labor calculations. It could be viewed as just paying the technician what he earned with his overproduction.

An interesting variation of this plan that has generated interesting results is to pay 15% of the overproduction to the technicians. Take the other 5% and add that together in a pool to reward the inside team for the extra support they contribute to the technicians’ success.

Also remember, for every \$1.00 that is paid in R/S, the company keeps \$4.00. So, the more we pay out in R/S, the more profitable the service department becomes.

In fact, during the busy season it is not unusual for the service department **Gross Profit** to cover the company’s entire **overhead**!



Payroll Hrs./Month		Revenue/Hour on Payroll		Revenue (for Month)	
KPI	160	x	\$110.00	=	\$17,600.00
	160	x	\$130.00	=	\$20,800.00
Additional Revenue					\$3,200.00
Labor for the overproduction (20%)					\$640.00
Additional Gross Profit from 1 Tech (80%)					\$2,560.00

Remember, this is NOT something to share with your service department without a well-thought-out transition management plan. Here’s why:

- Most technicians generate between \$50.00 and \$70.00 per hour prior to implementation.
- We need to set up performance criteria for a technician to qualify for R/S. This is not owed to anybody. This is a way to compensate for what I will call, ‘Craftsmanship Pay.’

Criteria for R/S may include the tech achieving a 95% first time fix rate, achieving a successful maintenance agreement conversion rate (you determine what that is), and no customer complaints for the month.

Keep in mind, if any of the criteria you set for R/S is perceived as unobtainable, nobody will even try. There is a way to build up capabilities before the R/S is made available.

Another item that will make this plan work better is if your company consistently builds its maintenance agreement customer base. More on this later.

TRANSITION MANAGEMENT

Have you ever announced a simple process change to technicians? After the meeting, you notice a meeting in the parking lot about the meeting you just had. Then a week later no one is doing the process you requested. Then you wonder, who’s really making policy in my company?

The solution: invite those parking lot influencers into the decision-making process. Give them a chance to give input and feedback, and often they can

become the primary endorsers of the new process or policy.

And it works. We have smart people working with us and it shows by the great ideas they contribute to making good ideas work even better.

COMMON STEPS FOR TRANSITION MANAGEMENT

Perspective Moment – Studies indicate that employees often view different factors as components of compensation, and the top five include having a boss who:

- Shows appreciation
- Cares about employees and their families
- Makes the employee an insider/ contributor to the company
- Gives affirmation
- Pays a competitive wage.

Of these top five factors, pay rarely seems to rise above number five for employees.

To add to our employees’ work experience and bring a sense of ownership to new processes, we have the opportunity with a transition management process. Here are some steps used in that process:

- 1 Without making any announcements, **begin collecting data** and do the calculations to determine a baseline performance
- 2 Be sure to have **informal conversations with a service department influencer**. For example, you can pull the influencer aside and say, “I’ve been thinking, I’d like to make our techs the best paid in our market. I have some ideas and I’d like



to get your thoughts on some of this stuff. I've tasked Gail (the dispatcher) to schedule your first call between 10 am and noon tomorrow so we can go to breakfast. Where do you want to go?"

**3** At breakfast **review the math** showing your influencer how the extra pay for production is better than the labor rates for a slow tech.

**4** **Ask the tech his thoughts** on what kind of safeguards should be in place. At the end of the first conversation, ask him to keep it quiet because nothing is in place and it maybe six months or longer before anything can be implemented.

**5** **Take the ideas from the influencer** and mix them with the basic elements of R/S. Then have a second meeting and review a more defined plan and get his feedback. Strongly suggest that he challenge the plan. Share ideas that can "break the program."

**6** Without sharing the revenue/hour (R/H), **let the service techs and dispatchers know that the KPI** for R/H is \$110.00/hour. Define what that means and that

all they need to do is move in a timely manner (never hurry) and aim to have no call-backs. Oh, and make sure they charge properly for all the work they do.

**7** You will find that just about all your **capable techs will rise** to a range of \$85.00 to \$100.00/hour. This, combined with no call-backs, is a pretty good indicator that a tech is capable of performing over the KPI of \$110.00.


**8** **Finally, have a roll-out meeting.** Be sure to give the influencer much of the credit for putting the program together. During the roll-out, establish that this is a program intended to reward craftsmanship, anyone can earn it, but it is owed to no one. Include a printout of all the ground rules necessary for a tech to qualify for R/S.

#### FOUR UNINTENDED BENEFITS:

■ During the slow seasons technicians would rather protect their R/H numbers rather than slow down and milk the clock. Generally speaking, they feel they will make more in fewer hours and earning R/S, as opposed to turning 28 hours of work into 35 hours on payroll.

■ In an effort to keep R/H up, preemptive service work will be done during prepaid tune-ups. Selling spiffs can continue, but many techs would prefer to clean blower wheels, test capacitance under load, and replace weak caps now rather than fan motors at 7:00 in the evening in July and August. As a result, prepaid tune-ups seem to increase in value in the minds of customers and employees.

■ Callbacks almost disappear. There is a compelling reason for a tech to pay attention to details. After all, at the end of the month there is the possibility to earn an extra week's pay when callbacks are eliminated.

■ Pride in being the best-paid techs in the marketplace. When base pay, spiffs, and R/S are added up and divided by the number of hours in the month, it is probable that word at the supply houses will sound something like this, "they get \$38.00 an hour over there." This is with a tech whose base hourly pay maybe \$23.00 an hour. But the total hourly compensation is truly much more. 



**Dennis Mondul** from HVAC Contractor Solutions (HCS), has been doing consulting and training for HVAC contractors in North America since 1992. The HCS mission is to show contractors how other contractors increase the quality of life for their families, employees' families, and deliver a better-quality service to their customers. For answers to any questions regarding this article, contact Dennis at 561/202-4371. You can also reach him at [dennism@hvaccslc.com](mailto:dennism@hvaccslc.com) or submit a question at [hvaccslc.com](http://hvaccslc.com).

## BREAKING NEWS: NCI Summit 2020 Has Moved

National Comfort Institute's **2020 High-Performance HVAC Summit** ([gotosummit.com](http://gotosummit.com)) will now be held September 1, 2020. We all understand how meetings across the U.S. are canceling due to the fast spreading of the Coronavirus. In fact, travel in general, is being discouraged. So, after much consideration, NCI has decided to get ahead of the situation and postpone the annual meeting.

With that in mind, Summit will be held just six months later at the same location – the We-Ko-Pa Resort in Scottsdale, AZ – from September 1-2, 2020. By moving to these new dates, we can be sure attendees, partners, and staff all have a more successful and safer experience. The hotel management has agreed to move our group to these new dates at the same rates.

If you have made reservations at We-Ko-Pa for April, they have been canceled. The new dates are already available on our reservations page, please **CLICK** [ncilink.com/Summit2020Hotel](http://ncilink.com/Summit2020Hotel) to reserve your rooms.

If you are already registered for Summit, your NCI team will move your registrations to the new dates and send you an updated confirmation. You do not need to re-register. If you haven't registered, you can register **HERE:** [ncilink.com/Summit2020Reg](http://ncilink.com/Summit2020Reg), at our Early Bird rate.



As a special thank-you, if you register by April 15th, NCI is offering four months of our online **Trailblazers Coaching Live** program at [ncilink.com/TrailBlazeCoaching](http://ncilink.com/TrailBlazeCoaching) (a \$400 value) with your Summit registration at no additional cost! The four-month coaching program starts on the first Friday in May.

Just register before April 15th and call us at 800-633-7058. Ask for your customer care representative and let him know that you have registered for NCI Summit 2020 and want to take advantage of this special offer.

See you in September!

## Check Out the April 2020 PowerPack

One of the great things about your Power Pack is that each one includes items curated to help you as you grow your High-Performance HVAC business.

Let's drill down on what's included in the April 2020 Power Pack!

- ▲ **Advanced Temperature Diagnostics** (Webinar)
- ▲ **Master HVAC Pressure Diagnostics With NCI Static Pressure Budgets** (Webinar)
- ▲ **Essential Tasks in Every HVAC System Renovation** (Webinar)
- ▲ **Do you know how External Filter**



**Racks Impact Total External Static Pressure?** (Article)

▲ **The Biggest Assumption made when Charging an HVAC System** (Article).

Be sure to share your April PowerPack with your entire team! So get started today.

If you have any questions, or if you are unable to access any of the tools in this program, please contact your Customer Care team at 800-633-7058.

## HIGH-PERFORMANCE PROJECT AWARD Entry Deadline Extended



In the February issue of **High-Performance HVAC Today**, we announced the inaugural recognition program for High-Performance project excellence. We call this our **High-Performance HVAC Project Award**. The idea is to recognize contractors who do it all – test, measure, diagnose, and resolve residential customer comfort and efficiency issues using the Performance-Based Contracting™ methods taught by NCI.

Read the **High-Performance HVAC Today** Editor-in-Chief's February *Today's Word* editorial for more details. Go to <http://ncilink.com/0220TodaysWord>.

Full contest details can be found here: [ncilink.com/HPPADetails](http://ncilink.com/HPPADetails).

The original deadline for submissions was March 16th. **We've decided that isn't enough time and so extended the deadline to June 1, 2020.**

So please take advantage of this opportunity and enter your project. If interested in participating, please [click here \(ncilink.com/projectawards\)](http://ncilink.com/projectawards) and fill out a brief survey. Once done, we will reach out to you so you can take the next step.

We look forward to seeing some amazing entries. If you have any questions, please contact Mike Weil at [mikew@nci-hvac.com](mailto:mikew@nci-hvac.com).





“The Squirrel was Cold”

— Dawn Mroczek, GV’s Heating & Cooling, Glenview, IL

The customer didn’t know anything was wrong, but my carbon monoxide angel was going off like crazy. I took the flue pipe apart and found a lovely tail and bones!

Dawn Mroczek from GV’s Heating and Cooling is the April 2020 winner of our Photo-of-the-Month contest, as voted on by the subscribers to the [High-Performance HVAC Today](#) and visitors to the website. She will receive a \$50 gift card.

You can too! If you’d like to submit a photo for consideration in our Photo-of-the-Month contest, click here ([ncilink.com/POMSubmit](http://ncilink.com/POMSubmit)) and fill out the information as requested.

THE MAY CONTEST OPENS ON APRIL 13, 2020.

That gives you plenty of time to submit something in any of our three categories: **The Good**, **The Bad**, and **WTH (What the heck)**.

So don’t wait. Submit your photos today.

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**Publisher**  
Dominick Guarino

**Editor-in-Chief and Associate Publisher**  
Mike Weil

**Art Director**  
Connie Conklin

**Online Development Director**  
Brian Roseman

**Circulation Manager**  
Andrea Begany- Garsed

**Editorial Assistant**  
Marge Smith

Email us at [contactus@hvactoday.com](mailto:contactus@hvactoday.com) with your comments and questions.



# Show Leadership By Staying Connected To Your Team



**Dominick Guarino**  
is publisher of  
*High-Performance  
HVAC Today* magazine  
and CEO of National  
Comfort Institute, Inc.  
He can be reached at  
[domg@ncihvac.com](mailto:domg@ncihvac.com)

In these unstable times, it's more important than ever to develop stronger bonds with our employees. Communication is key. We need to substantially increase our efforts to let everyone know what's going on, in real-time.

Justifiably so, most people are confused, worried, even scared about what might happen to their family's health and well-being. Their financial health is tethered to your company, and they are looking to you for leadership.

None of us have magic wands or crystal balls to help us reassure everyone that it will be alright, and things will go back to normal by a certain date. We can, however, reassure our people that we are doing everything possible to keep our companies strong and viable, while adapting to this new normal, albeit temporary. This steady leadership needs to be demonstrated in clear, concise words, but most importantly through our actions.

## TAKE ACTION

There are many ways we can take action to help ensure that we make it through these tough times. In the weeks ahead many articles will be written to address how you can keep your company strong through this pandemic.

One key action to take immediately is communicating with customers how you plan to keep them safe during this tumultuous time. Be sure to focus all your marketing and communication efforts on this messaging. I shared some thoughts on how you can be proactive with customers in my April *Last Word* in **Contracting Business** magazine: [COVID-19 And Your Business: Fight or Flight?](#)

## DISTANCE LEARNING CAN MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE

If things are slow, it's important to keep your people engaged and hopeful by looking forward towards the future. Keeping them engaged through learning is a good way to keep employees positive and hopeful.

Look for ways to enroll your team in distance learning they can take even if they are self-quarantining at home. They will appreciate that you care enough to do something positive for them.

This goes especially for employees who you've had to furlough or layoff temporarily. What better way to stay connected and show them you still appreciate them than by enrolling them in online training and other distance learning programs?

There are many organizations out there that have ramped up distance learning offerings just over the past few weeks. Many have great content. Be sure to study each offer carefully before enrolling. Some are just thinly veiled sales pitches designed to sell you into buying the latest end-all product or snake oil. Fortunately, most in our industry are legitimate and have great content.

NCI is also increasing our efforts with our distance learning programs, from short courses all the way up to comprehensive multi-day classes online. We offer dozens of learning modules on technical, business, and customer service topics, both ala carte and in comprehensive programs.

These are available to all your employees at one low cost and include more than 80 pre-recorded webinars with more on the way.

Our team is working around the clock to ready live, online residential and commercial recertification classes in response to having to postpone in-person training this spring. They will be available very soon. We will also be offering live, online classes on "Performance-Based Selling" as well as "Implementing Air Upgrades." Go to [ncilink.com/online](http://ncilink.com/online) to be contacted about any of these classes.

**One last note:** Consider doing your own web meetings with your employees to keep in communication with them about the company, what you are doing, safety protocols, and so forth. There are numerous free apps like Zoom, Google Hangouts and Skype. Some of these have upgraded paid versions. GoToMeeting is also a great and reasonably priced app – we use it here at NCI.



## DON'T LET DOWNTIME BE LOST TIME

Social Distancing and Distance Learning go hand-in-hand in today's environment. Take advantage of downtime to set your team up with two great online education options:

### NCI Online University

NCI's on-demand, Online University features dozens of training modules in three categories:

- Advanced Technical Training
- Business Management
- Customer Service

These classes are created 100% in-house by NCI's education specialists, and are based on real field and HVAC business experience.

Here's a small sampling of our advanced training:

- ◆ Measuring Static Pressure
- ◆ Airflow Testing
- ◆ Duct System Testing
- ◆ System-wide Temperature Diagnostics
- ◆ Managing Business Performance
- ◆ Creating the Ultimate Customer Experience
- ◆ And much more!

### Airflow Testing & Diagnostics Online Training

This highly-interactive course is now available online as a perfect step towards teaching your field personnel about High-Performance HVAC. The 6-module complete training program contains 8-10 hours of self-directed learning. It was created specifically to help your technical and sales personnel learn:

- ◆ The basics of static pressure and airflow testing
- ◆ How to diagnose common air-related issues
- ◆ Provide solutions that make a significant difference in your customers' homes & businesses
- ◆ How to price & sell NCI's unique Air Upgrades
- ◆ And much more!



Call 800-633-7058 or visit  
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# It's All About Your Success.

Your key to success in Performance-Based Contracting™ is a strong support network – always there when you need it. NCI helps its members overcome the typical hurdles associated with implementing this measured performance approach.

## Membership Options:

Turbocharge your investment in Performance-Based Contracting with added learning opportunities and financial incentives.

### FEATURES:

	 Learning Excellence Premium Upgrade	 Learning Excellence Online Upgrade	 Membership
Unlimited Toll-Free Support	✓	✓	✓
Members-Only Discussion Forum	✓	✓	✓
Find-A-Certified Professional Lead Generator	✓	✓	✓
i-NCI: Mobile-Friendly Technical & Sales Tools	✓	✓	✓
Hundreds of Technical & Marketing Downloads	✓	✓	✓
Members-Only Newsletter	✓	✓	✓
Article Library Featuring Technical & Business Articles	✓	✓	✓
Live & Online Training and Conference Discounts	✓	✓	✓
Member Rewards NCI Training Bucks on Purchases	15%	15%	5%
Training Incentive Partner Program (TIPP) Dollars	Maximum	Maximum	✓
NCI Online Store Discounts	✓	✓	✓
ComfortMaxx Air™ - Airflow Testing Software	✓	✓	✓
Unlimited Online University Courses	✓	✓	
Unlimited Webinar Access	✓	✓	
Bonus Annual NCI Training Bucks Earned	\$4200	\$1200	
ComfortMaxx Pulse™ - Air & Btu Testing Software	✓	✓	
ComfortMaxx Verify™ - Full System Testing Software	✓		
Print subscription to High-Performance HVAC Today Magazine	✓		
One Paid NCI Summit Conference Registration	✓		
<b>Monthly Investment:</b>	<b>\$999</b>	<b>\$450</b>	<b>\$100</b>

## FREE Trial Membership!

**Sign Up Now For Our FREE 4-week Trial Membership**



Scan this QR code or call NCI Customer Care to learn more about this great offer and how NCI Membership can take your HVAC business to the next level!



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