

HIGH-PERFORMANCE HVAC TODAY™

If You Don't Measure, You're Just Guessing!™

SPOTLIGHT ON:

Hearn Plumbing & Heating *Seventy-Six Years Strong*



ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

- **The High-Performance HVAC "Difference Engine"**
- **Servant Leadership Made My Company Better**

**Special
Report!**

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80%



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HIGH-PERFORMANCE HVAC TODAY™



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When it Comes to Service, Put the Customer *BEFORE* Automation



Mike Weil is editor-in-chief and director of communications and publications at National Comfort Institute, Inc. Contact him at ncilink.com/ContactMe.

It's April and that means it's time for the Spring service season to begin. As customers begin calling to make appointments, how they are treated can make all the difference in their relationship with your company.

Are they greeted by a live person or by a recording followed by a list of menu items?

The latter is usually part of an **automated customer support system**. Depending on how these systems are set up and working, they can either streamline your business or they can frustrate customers. Or both.

For example, I recently had an issue with an airline that arbitrarily changed my flights. So I dialed up the customer service line and was confronted with their automated "attendant" that gave me options for everything except what I wanted -- to speak with a living, breathing human being.

Even when I eventually figured out how to get past the robo gatekeeper, I was then put on hold for 45 minutes until someone helped me.

This adds up to what I call a failure to consider the customer. Automated customer support systems that are difficult to navigate are neither customer-focused or relationship-oriented.

From a professional standpoint, I understand the need to streamline and control call intake. Many contracting companies today use some kind of automated customer support and answering system.

While automated answering frees a business owner from taking calls at all hours, it lacks the personalized touch that customers get when talking with a live person.

Furthermore, studies show that consumers **expect** personalized customer service in exchange for their loyalty to a product or service. Check out this article from 2018 that is still pertinent today: ncilink.com/TopPriority. It predicted that customer service would replace price as a key

differentiator by 2020. Too bad the airlines haven't gotten THAT message.

The above-mentioned article cites other studies that show customers are willing to pay a higher price when they are loyal to a brand or product. Even the **Harvard Business Review** did a study that showed companies that increase customer loyalty by just 5% can increase profits by at least 25%!

Doesn't that make personalized customer service more important than ever?

If customer service and building relationships/loyalty are your priorities as a High-Performance HVAC contractor, consider how you communicate with customers when they call. Also consider the impact of customers being misdirected to the wrong person or department. Finally, think about measuring the on-hold wait time your average customer must endure. Are you making it easy or frustrating for them?

When it comes to automated customer answering and support systems, the key is to implement them properly and in a way that makes it easy for the customer to get to a "live" person if that is what they want to do.

Even if you do have a live person answering your phones, how do they answer? Do they smile and say something like, "It's a great day here at XYZ Comfort Systems. How can I help you?"

Or are they chewing gum and saying, "Yeah, you reached XYZ Comfort Systems."

When I encounter the former, I feel like I will have my concerns or questions addressed immediately, properly, and in a friendly way.

When I encounter the latter, well my blood pressure begins to climb as I anticipate NOT getting the customer service I deserve.

When it comes to service, successful companies put customers before automation. 

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Written by HVAC Professionals for HVAC Professionals

DWYER® 460 AIR METER AND DRAFT GAUGE

The **Dwyer® Model 460 Air Meter/Draft Gauge** is a low-cost instrument that is essential for anyone who diagnoses carbon monoxide (CO) and combustion problems on vented equipment.

This package is for natural draft (draft-hood) and induced draft (80%) equipment. Without the Dwyer 460, you could easily misdiagnose a problem contributing to dangerous combustion readings.

With proper training, the draft gauge will tell you if there is enough combustion air available for the equipment and that no building pressure changes are interfering with equipment operation. In a few short steps, it can also tell you if a flue is restricted or undersized.

Contrary to popular belief, the draft



gauge cannot verify proper equipment venting. You'll need a combustion analyzer for that. The Dwyer 460 is an inexpensive and versatile solution for most draft pressure measurement applications. It comes with the following:

- Carrying case
- Dwyer 460 Air Meter / Draft Gauge
- 4-ft. length of pressure tubing
- Air velocity calculator
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We measure draft pressure in inches of water column (in. w.c.). The Dwyer 460

measures up to one-hundredth of an inch of pressure (.01-in. WC) and is very sensitive to pressure changes. To get this feature in a digital manometer, it would cost hundreds of dollars.

Pressure tubing connects the draft gauge to a curved metal probe that you insert into the flue for draft measurement. A small white ball inside the draft gauge moves up and down freely to indicate the draft pressure reading on the gauge's black scale.

Occasionally, inside the gauge may get damp from flue gas. To keep the ball moving freely, clean the gauge regularly.

If you want to learn more about the Dwyer 460, go to the NCI Store at ncilink.com/Dwyer460. 

-- by David Richardson, Director of Technical Curriculum and Instructor, NCI



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Hundreds of Technical & Marketing Downloads	✓	✓	✓
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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	✓	✓	
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Hearn Plumbing and Heating: Seventy-Six Years Strong

In 1946 the smoke was still clearing from the horrors of World War II. In Europe, the Nuremberg Trials were underway. Winston Churchill delivered his “Iron Curtain” speech warning of Soviet expansion (eerily familiar in 2022).

In the small village of Madison, OH (named for U.S. President James Madison), 1946 also marked the birth of a small plumbing and heating business by David Hearn. Interestingly, residential heating has been at the core of the very early days of Madison with the establishment of the Arcole Furnace Company in the 1820s, which manufactured the Buckeye Furnace from ore mined locally.

Hearn Plumbing and Heating operated mainly as a one-man shop. In fact, according to Tom Hearn, David’s grandson, the company operated this way for decades.

“My grandfather only ran one truck

with little to no identification on it. Eventually, my dad took over the business and ran just one truck. Marketing was based on word-of-mouth reputation. The business operated this way for 50 years,” Tom Hearn says.

He describes the business as being 100% family-owned and operated during that half-century. Tom’s father, Dan Hearn, continued in David’s footsteps until 2000 when Tom started with the company.

CHANGES

Slowly the company began to change as Tom got more experience and took over many management functions. In 2006 Hearn Plumbing and Heating added a second vehicle for Tom and in 2011 the company hired their first non-family employee. Sometime around 2010, Tom’s wife Dennielle joined the company part-time to handle bookkeeping and some other office functions. Four years ago, she gave up her years as a surgical nurse to join the company full-time.

As the business grew, so did the need for additional office personnel to handle the rising tide of invoices, payroll, and so on.

Other changes included Tom becoming involved

with a best practices group called [Airtime Success International](#). Through this organization, he met several other HVAC contractors who helped him better understand the business side of contracting. One of them was Tom Spall of TE Spall & Sons.

“Airtime helped us tremendously on the business management side of things,” Hearn says. “Through that experience, we were able to understand how to focus on what we are good at doing.

“That meant *learning the importance of slowing down and focusing* on who we wanted to serve.”

He adds that training became an essential cornerstone to the changes in the company. In addition to business management training, he began enrolling his technicians in technical training from manufacturers, distributors, and [National Comfort Institute](#) (NCI).

“Four or five years ago, I began looking into the high-performance approach. It made so much sense, and we now started understanding what was happening in a customer’s HVAC system. We began implementing testing, measuring, and diagnosing air-flow issues.

“Implementing the technical process wasn’t hard,” he continues. “We just made it part of how we usually run our processes in the company. Testing and measuring are required. They are not negotiable.



Left to Right: Dennielle Hearn, Tom Hearn, and Dan Hearn



“The hardest part was interpreting the data once we collected it and figuring out how to use it to educate our customers. I think that was the slowest learning curve for us: truly helping the customer understand the benefit of all these measurements to them.”

He adds that the most challenging part of the high-performance approach for the technicians was their understanding of the “why” of what we wanted them to do.

“We are always working on that through open communication and training.”

HEARN PLUMBING AND HEATING TODAY

From 2016 to today, Tom Hearn says the business has grown 30% year-over-year. In 2021 the company’s gross revenues topped out at \$2.717 million, of which 40% was in plumbing and 60% in HVAC. The firm employs 16 full-time people and services a 20-to-25-mile area around Madison, OH. He adds that they are beginning to push even further out, but 75 to 80% of their work is in the original service area.

“We are 101% residential on both sides of the business,” Hearn says. “That is our niche, and we excel at it.”

Tom’s father, Dan, is still present in the company spending most of his

days fabricating custom sheet metal or training new technicians. Tom is general manager and has a vision for where he wants the company to go and how to get there. That vision includes the need to bring on more team members.

However, like so many companies today, the biggest issue is getting the right personnel to help manage the growing workload. Dennielle Hearn says they need to find people to fill new vehicles.

“We have a plumbing apprentice who is training right now and who will crew a new plumbing service vehicle soon,” she says.

TRAINING IS THE HEARTBEAT AT HEARN

Tom Hearn says to achieve his goals, he needs a specific and organized approach to training. They also need a similar approach to recruiting.

He says they use technical schools outside of the area for new apprentices and seasoned technicians. For example, they send new plumbing apprentices to a four-week school in Nashville, TN, called [Total Tech](#).

“Our HVAC installers and seasoned HVAC technicians take training in Arkansas. They attend four one-week training sessions over the course of 12 to 24 months at [Ultimate Tech Academy](#), located in Little Rock. We

also use another school called [Perfect Technician Academy](#) in Weatherford, TX, for training new HVAC service and maintenance technicians,” he explains. “That is how we get our basic training done.”

Advanced HVAC training is through NCI. Hearn says that he first learned of NCI from a fellow Airtime member, [Summers and Zim’s](#) in Atglen, PA.

“They are a fourth-generation company who talked about NCI and Comfort Institute as high-end technical training outfits. So, I looked them up and found NCI was for real and located fairly close to us.”

Fellow contractor Tim Volpone of [H.J. Ziegler Heating Co.](#), Inc. in Ashtabula is a friend of Tom Hearn and an ACCA member who brought in Jim Davis of NCI to address the group. Davis taught a combustion and carbon monoxide class for the local ACCA chapter, and Hearn sent his technicians to it.

“That class pretty much sealed the deal for us,” Hearn says.

In addition to this “immersion” training approach, as Tom Hearn calls it, the company also does a lot of internal training.

“Every department meets once a week,” he says. “We have a company meeting on Mondays. Tuesday is our HVAC service and maintenance meeting, Wednesday is for sales, and

Thursday is for plumbing.

“For our installation department, I typically fit training in a morning that makes sense depending on what jobs our techs have. And then Dennielle meets with the call center: our CSR’s and the dispatcher.

“So we provide a lot of in-house training. Plus, several of the groups we belong to conduct live webinars; live, in-person training; and we leverage our vendors for technical training locally,” Hearn says.

RECRUITING GOOD PEOPLE

“Our focus when recruiting for the company is to find good people,” Dennielle Hearn says. “We do not target techs from other companies.”

“I knew to create something different; I’d have to look different,” Tom Hearn adds. “Slowly, we began looking for and recruiting individuals from other industries. To hire such individuals, you need a good training and onboarding program for them.”

Tom adds, “We hire based on character and having good technical aptitude. This interview process provides a good gauge on a potential technician’s comfort in the material space and world. We look at their hobbies to see how they work with their hands with construction materials. Overall, our interview process takes about 40 to 44 hours for a field position.

“We try to understand how they engage with their community and their families. We are looking for people who have a servant’s heart, first and foremost.”

Hearn says that a candidate’s technical aptitude shows him whether they can be trained in technical skills.

“After those 40 to 44 hours of meet-

ing with us and doing ride-alongs with our technicians, we’ll either make a job offer or not,” Hearn continues. “After being hired, we send them to those mentioned above heavy immersion-based technical schools around the country to get them up to speed in a short amount of time.”



Hearn Plumbing and Heating techs Dustin (in truck) and Aaron on the job.

HIGH-PERFORMANCE HVAC AT HEARNS

Hearn says his technicians do static pressure testing, temperature testing, and consider the ductwork part of the overall system.

He says, “On all of our maintenance calls, we use a 60-point checklist that requires the four points of static pressure testing, temperature rise, and so on. Our techs ask customers comfort-based questions.

“Most of our replacement projects include, at the bare minimum, some type of return air upgrade. An upgrade may involve increasing filter size and

trying to get static pressure down as close as possible to the manufacturer rating plate, so we distribute air better throughout the home.”

Hearn adds that they include combustion testing on every maintenance call and static pressure on every startup.

“That means we test in and out,” Hearn explains. “We recently began using a seven-point service safety report. Now on every service call, we’re testing combustion as well as part of our evaluation fee.”

The company has been selling air upgrades and duct renovations for the past four years, and Hearn says those sales have added nicely to their overall profits.

“The air upgrade approach helps us to help take care of issues that can prolong system life and add comfort to the house,” he says. “Plus, air upgrades increase the average ticket for a project and our overall gross margin on replacement. The best news is that it helps customers save on energy as well.”

This is important because, in the Hearn market area, 50 to 60% of the homes are heated using natural gas, 10% use propane, and the rest use (40%) oil or electric. The latter often employs heat strips with a heat pump. So, saving energy and maintaining good comfort levels are important to consumers.

These things added up to a growth spurt unlike any before in the company’s history.

“I suppose you could say our growth began when we truly decided to start running a business effectively instead of just being a contractor offering a service. We saw results immediately,”



Hearn continues.

“After learning how to price correctly, to deliver value related to that price, and offering customers service membership programs, this led to us building a loyal customer base.”

BE UNIQUE IN YOUR MARKETPLACE

In the end, Hearn says he believes that the training and the ability to solve customer problems that other contractors don't even know to look for is vital to standing out in your marketplace. He says that contractors

must work on the business, not in it as owners and managers.

“For any company looking to separate themselves from their competitors, NCI is one great avenue to do that. Not

only do they provide top-notch technical training, but they also offer communication training on how to talk to customers effectively,” Tom concludes.

“NCI delivers the true value of what this stuff means to everybody regarding safety and assuring customers receive everything from the equipment they're putting in their house.

The organization is a great resource to help contractors further separate themselves from the masses.”

For these and so many other reasons, **High-Performance HVAC Today** has chosen 76-year-strong **Hearn Plumbing and Heating** to shine our spotlight on. Congratulations to Tom and Dennielle and their entire team. **NCI**



Mike Weil is the Director of Communications for National Comfort Institute, Inc. (NCI). He also serves as editor-in-chief of **High-Performance HVAC Today** magazine, the only trade publication that targets the

High-Performance HVAC Contracting community. He can be reached via NCI's contact page at ncilink.com/ContactMe.

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NCI Certified System Performance: *An Idea Whose Time Has Come*

High-performance contractors have known for a long time that when it comes to getting the most comfort, capacity, and efficiency from HVAC equipment, it's the system that matters. You need to measure to find those improvement opportunities. Sometimes, it can be challenging to translate those measurements to customers so they understand how much you've helped them.

National Comfort Institute (NCI) has trained contractors for decades to measure, not guess when it comes to installed HVAC system performance. About 10 years ago, we briefly piloted the concept of offering third-party certification of those measurement results.

The pilot was met with great enthusiasm. Roughly 50 contractors signed on to offer certified systems to their customers.

Unfortunately, software technology at the time wasn't quite "there." Plus, there was a lack of awareness of field system performance measurement. Customers didn't know that better comfort and lower bills were within reach. Most contractors didn't want the hassle of dealing with a

clunky software interface or more paperwork to educate those customers.

CURRENT SENSITIVITIES

Today's residential equipment is more sensitive than ever to system deficiencies. Yes, variable-speed blowers can sometimes be forced to overcome high static pressure, but they do that with a high energy cost penalty. Many furnaces and air handlers are rated at just 0.5-in. of static, vs. the more common 0.8 or 1-in. models from the past.

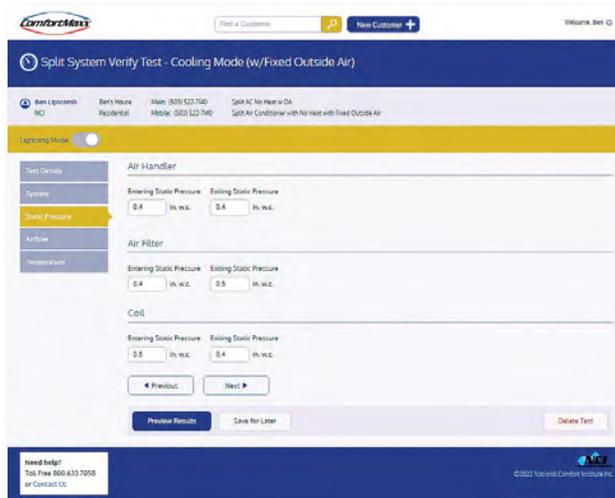
Modern refrigerants are more sensitive to charge and airflow deficiencies. The faster heat pump market penetration versus furnaces means more systems must contend with these issues in heating and cooling, and ducts from old furnaces are likely to be undersized in heating-dominated climates.

Meanwhile, customers today are starting to realize that more than just equipment matters. Years of awareness campaigns by governments, utilities, and organizations like NCI combined with online services allow homeowners to compare contractors making them armed and dangerous to box swappers.

All this means that high-performance contractors have a landscape ripe for harvesting before them. It's time to dust off the tools!

GIVING PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT NEW LIFE

NCI has steadily improved our software options for measuring and calculating installed system performance. In 2015 we launched a new cloud-



Pictured to the left is a screenshot of the ComfortMaxx Verify™ Software interface.



help keep their systems operating at peak performance.

HOW TO GET STARTED

The first step is to be sure you have trained and certified technicians and installers who can perform the required testing. To qualify, they must hold an NCI **Residential System Performance Specialist** certification.

We also strongly recommend that your test-out technicians have an NCI **Residential Air Balancing** certification, so they know how to balance HVAC systems properly using NCI protocols.

To learn more and enroll in the program, go to NCICertified.net or go directly to our **Online Application**. All of the qualifications and

requirements are spelled out there.

Once your application is approved, you will be able to purchase access to ComfortMaxx Verify in the cloud, and you can also acquire your first certification packets.

NCI provides online training to participants and their employees included in the program at no additional cost. We also have a consumer website



Ben Lipscomb, P.E. has more than 16 years of experience in the HVAC industry, including laboratory and field research, Design/Build contracting, and utility energy efficiency program design. He

is National Comfort Institute's director of engineering and utility programs and may be contacted at ncilink.com/ContactMe.



Dominick Guarino is the chairman and CEO of National Comfort Institute, Inc. (NCI) – a national training and certification organization he co-founded with Rob Falke in 1994. NCI has also grown into a

premier membership organization focused on every aspect of helping HVAC contractors. He can be reached at ncilink.com/ContactMe.

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The High-Performance HVAC “Difference Engine”

In the 1820s and 30s, Englishman Charles Babbage invented the forerunner to the modern computer. He called it The *Difference Engine* – a mechanical system for doing complex calculations that, had it been completed, could have put the British Empire permanently ahead of all its national competitors in science, technology, military, and power.

Unfortunately, it was so far ahead of its time that very few supported it. As a result, it was only partially built, never implemented, and left the doors wide open for Britain’s competitors to move in and take power.

There are many *difference engines* in the HVAC universe today. One of them is the high-performance approach to HVAC contracting, which calls for including ventilation as part of the over-all system.

As such, this science-based method is very different from how most of the HVAC Industry approaches business. Most contractors today focus only on the equipment. But comfort, energy efficiency, and safety involve much more than that.

This difference engine opens the door to many

opportunities for contractors and can set them apart from everyone else in their marketplace.

WHAT HIGH-PERFORMANCE CONTRACTORS ARE SAYING

Last month *High-Performance HVAC Today* magazine surveyed its 15,000 readers to find out how this service and installation delivery method impacts their business. Here are some things they told us. First, of the respondents, 86% are HVAC contractors, and 70% say they spend the time and money training their installation and service technicians in how to test, measure, and diagnose HVAC system issues.

In fact, over the past two years, 47% of the respondents say they have sent from half to all of their field technicians to High-Performance HVAC training taught by National Comfort Institute (NCI). Based on that training, many have implemented testing and measuring into everything they do. This implementation means performing static pressure measurements and tests (63% of them) and temperature measurements and tests (53.3%) on every call.

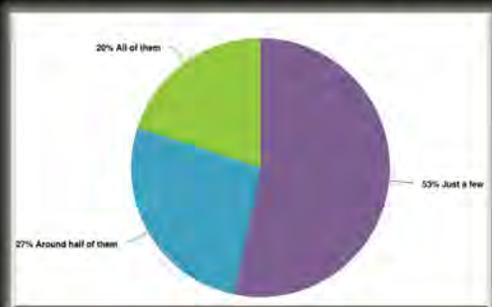
From a safety standpoint, 43.3% of the respondents say they also conduct carbon monoxide testing on every call.

They capture the results of their test measurements in various ways, with 76.6% of them using paper forms. But the digital age is upon us, and a growing number of contractors are using mobile apps to not only record the data but use it to help educate customers so they can make the right buying decisions. Among the app tools they use:

- 13.3% use NCI’s AirMaxx™ or AirMaxx Lite™ mobile app
- 36.7% use other digital means.

Among the apps most often mentioned by

Over the past two years, how many of your field techs have undergone NCI training?



RESEARCH

respondents are Fieldpiece Job Link® and iManifold®, as well as spreadsheets, in-house proprietary software, Aptora® Mobile and Measure Quick apps, and others.

Though most of our respondents tell us they have yet to incorporate measurements and testing into their service agreements, 43% of them do, which helps to set them apart from local competitors.

WHAT CONTRACTORS SAY THEIR CUSTOMERS ARE SAYING

We asked High-Performance HVAC contractor survey participants what their customers say about the services they provide, and the overwhelming response was, “no one ever does what you do.”

Chris Trujillo, manager at HASCO Air Conditioning in Riverside, CA, says, “this has been a shocker to some of our customers. I usually must explain how and why we measure and test.

“Customers are often surprised with the equipment (tools) they see me using to test their system and gather data. More importantly, they are relieved and thankful when we confirm their system is safe after checking for carbon monoxide.

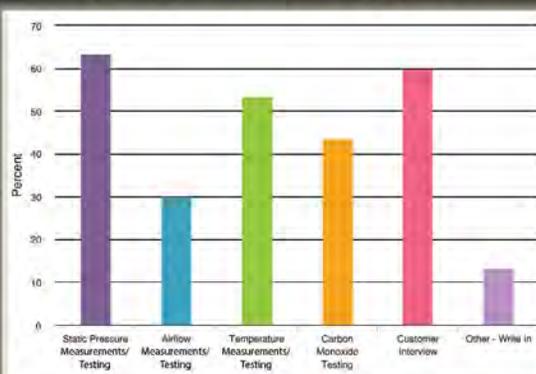
“We have long-time customers of 30+ years who witnessed our evolution over time,” Trujillo adds.

Another typical comment respondents said they get from customers is about professionalism. In that light, contractor Roy White of Fixed Right and Guaranteed in Owings, MD, says,

highly professional and courteous.

Interestingly, comments like these seem to contribute to increased morale among respondents’ technicians. More than half of them say their field teams take more pride in their work because of their NCI training and the results they bring to customers.

What standard services do you perform on every call?



“I’ve only had one or two customers who’ve told me they’d experienced a contractor doing static pressure testing before us.

“More often, they say that no other contractor does testing and measuring. I feel this definitely helps with our reputation and all the social media love we get.”

Other respondents tell us that customers consider their technicians

SPREADING AND TRACKING THE GOOD WORD

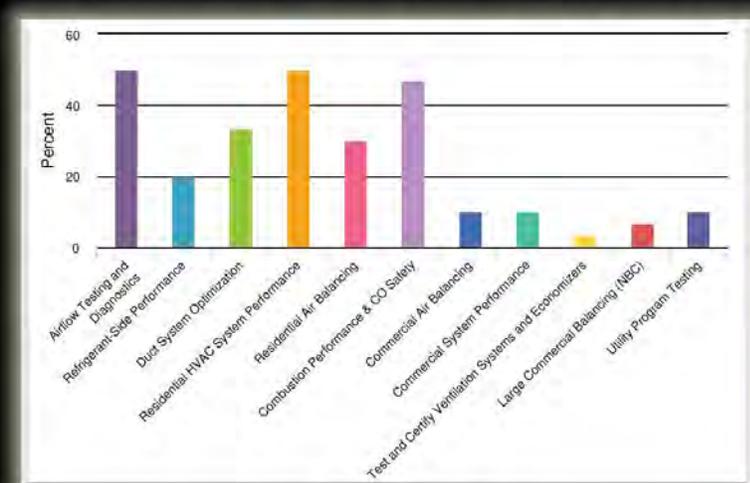
As I mentioned before, in the case of the Babbage Difference Engine, very few in the business world at that time supported the idea of this new, before-its-time technology and approach to calculations, and so it died on the vine.

High-Performance HVAC Contracting, though not new by any means, is still considered by most to be ahead of its time. So how do contractors who provide

this service keep it from dying on the vine?

In a word – promotion. Our survey shows that 43% of respondents use Google to promote and track their company and service reputations. With the advent of digital marketing, many have taken to using social media to inform and educate their customers and other homeowners in their market area.

What NCI classes have your techs attended in the last two years?



Other respondents (23.7%) mentioned using Facebook groups, Yelp, Review Buzz, and Nearby Now for promoting their services and tracking their reputations.

Though this is excellent, the survey also shows there is plenty of room for contractors to get better at spreading the word about their **brand, services, and professionalism**. The **importance of marketing** – both in the traditional sense and the digital sense, is still a practice most HVAC contractors need to learn about and practice.

It is easy for consumers **to judge contractors** who bring all these tools and instruments to the job as trying to jump up their price.

Survey respondents certainly told us that many of their competitors tell homeowners this. So, the need to tell your own story and get the word out to your marketplace is even more critical today than ever before.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TRAINING

High-Performance HVAC contracting is not easy. If it were, everyone

would be doing it. Getting technicians trained in the technology and communications aspects of testing and measuring and then sharing results with customers is key to closing more sales.

David Thompson of Thompson's Heating and Cooling, Fort Worth, TX, says, "NCI courses have greatly increased our duct job replacement sales after we explain and show the homeowner how their system is starving for air. We use the analogy of walking down the street trying to breathe through a straw. This is a great word picture sales tool."

Others say the high-performance approach sets them apart in their marketplace. For example, one respondent, Beau Prince of On Time Service in Birmingham, AL, says, "I believe this training creates higher standards of work and accountability."

Prince, a service technician at On Time Service adds, "Testing and measuring as taught by NCI is a more professional way of doing work. I feel like it makes our team more

knowledgeable than competitors."

Training is one of the most valuable things contractors can do for their people. Some comments from respondents were pessimistic about the cost to train techs who will leave to go to a competitor at the drop of a hat.

But most believe that even if that happens, those well-trained technicians go into the industry knowing how to do things right. Isn't that great for the entire industry?

Respondent Mike Greany of Aire Rite Heating and Air Conditioning, Corona, CA, sums it up nicely: "As the saying goes," he says. "If you don't test, you're guessing. Customers want to be more educated than ever before. They seem to appreciate the added value performance provides. From a company standpoint, performance pays!"

In the end, it would be safe to say that in the 21st century, High-Performance HVAC contracting is the Difference Engine of modern times. It goes far beyond the traditional up-selling and servicing of higher-efficiency equipment. By addressing airflow through testing and measuring, and understanding how ductwork conditions impact comfort and efficiency, contractors can genuinely bring value to their customers and get paid handsomely for it. **NCI**



Mike Weil is the Director of Communications for National Comfort Institute, Inc. (NCI). He also serves as editor-in-chief of **High-Performance HVAC Today** magazine, the only trade publication that targets the High-Performance HVAC Contracting community. He can be reached via NCI's contact page at ncilink.com/ContactMe.

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How Servant Leadership Made My Company Better

The days of running daily business operations from the top down are numbered. This is where the owner or manager leads by creating processes that cover everything from office procedures, sales, and hiring to how technicians operate in the field. The objective is usually geared toward improving a company's profits, reputation, or even the leader's self-image.

When you look at what are considered the great companies worldwide – Apple, Ford, F.W. Woolworths, and so many others – is it accurate to say they are considered great because they prioritize serving others?

In my experience, when I look closely at the organizations I admire and respect, I often find their performance is the result of their management teams and employees putting the wants and needs of others ahead of their own. In the business world, this is a [Servant Leadership philosophy](#).

SERVANT LEADERSHIP IN HVAC CONTRACTING

The servant approach not only works in big businesses and organizations like the ones I mentioned above, but it works in ALL businesses – including those operating in the HVAC Industry.

My family business, [Ball Heating and Air of Biloxi, MS](#), operated following a Servant Leadership approach. It didn't always run this way, but we learned that service goes a long way to keeping all of our stakeholders – man-

agement, employees, customers, families, and friends happy and taken care of well.

The phrase “Servant Leadership” is somewhat of an oxymoron. A true servant would never perform their acts of service with the end motivation of leading others. Servant Leadership is not about hoping to become a better leader whose

reward is meeting all their financial needs. There are no magic wands here.

To demonstrate what I am talking about, let me explain how I failed because I placed my needs or wants ahead of my co-workers.

In one case, Ball Heating had a technician who quit work late on a Friday evening at the start of

his on-call week. I knew this tech wasn't pulling his weight for several weeks, but I did nothing about it. I failed to place his and the team's needs above my desire to hold the peace. So he left us, which made it hard for the rest of our co-workers and our customers.

In another example, I put my desires above those of a partner -- a job superintendent who kept calling my office to ask questions about a job I designed and that my guys were installing. I didn't like his questions. Therefore, I neglected to serve him. The result was that he made sure I never had the opportunity to work with his company again.

These failures gave me pause. They left permanent imprints on me. Combined with other issues that cropped up, I realized these were failures. I wanted to fix them.

Servant Leadership is a philosophy where the goal of the leader is to *SERVE*. This differs from Top-Down leadership where the goal is to influence or guide individuals, teams, or entire organizations.

servant leadership



LESSONS LEARNED

Life has a funny way of providing you with the answers to your questions. For me, the answers came from my after-work life. For example, when my wife and I would go out to dinner, I began noticing superior service when the wait staff put my desires first.

MY OBSERVATIONS

Here are some observations and lessons learned from these experiences.

Observation One – Speaking of dinner, don't you love going to a restaurant where the service is so on point that the meal tastes better. They do simple things like making sure no glass is ever empty on the table. They pay attention to every request, like having a sauce on the side or extra napkins on the table.

That experience demonstrates how to take care of people. You might even think they could have charged twice as much, and it would have been worth it.

I find that this level of service is a dying art. So I made it my business to practice Servant Leadership at my company. I had the opportunity to serve a co-worker in such a way that

enhanced his life. After a rough time in his life, this co-worker came to me, confessed the past, and asked if I could help him start over.

We served him by providing training opportunities, showed him areas where he could improve, helped him get his family health insurance, taught him how to serve our customers, showed him that serving customers is a privilege.

Over time he found that serving others was fulfilling and that he could also help those he worked with learn how to serve along with him. I would argue today that he is an artist. His art is to exceed customers' expectations. He inspires me with this service.

Observation 2 – A Servant never has a bad day. Someone who loves to serve never runs out of work. That Servant looks around at the daily chaos and sees opportunities. The act of serving is motivation. Even when that chaos directly impedes the Servant, they calmly move forward to serve despite their circumstances. They make the needs of those served more important. People know they are dependable, aren't out for glory, but get

to do what they love.

At our company, we had techs that I didn't wonder where they were between calls or worry about if they were taking the best care of my customers. These technicians enjoyed finding ways to solve customers' issues. Because they enjoyed the work, they were anxious to get to the customer's home and solve problems.

When we were busy, and the phones were ringing off the hook, these techs focused on the work and didn't ask the office how many more calls they had or if they could leave work at 5:00 pm. They wanted to serve others.

Observation 3 – Many servants are serving, and as a result, those served have the time and the opportunity to succeed. At Ball Heating and Air, my experience with the success of others is a direct reflection of how well the servant leader is serving.

My technicians' performance directly reflects how well I serve them. When I serve my techs better, the quality of our service to customers improves.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

In one example, we put up [scoreboards for everyone to see](#). One

**Servant Leadership
is not about
hoping to become
a better leader
whose reward is
meeting all their own
financial needs.**

KPI (Key Performance Indicator) we track is the technician's percentage of callbacks.

Tracking this KPI is a service to our techs. It revealed an area that may need to be improved. Knowing this KPI caused our techs to ask how to improve. To serve them, we investigated the causes of callbacks. This investigation led us to training areas we had to address.

Once we knew those areas, we provided the appropriate training then re-evaluated those KPIs. We repeated this process. Over time, the callback percentage trended downward. Furthermore, not only were our techs better trained, but they also became more confident to do their job. Plus, our customers were served better.

TRUE SERVANTS INSPIRE

You know there are many more observations about serving others. One thing is for sure; a true servant inspires those around him to serve. Now how does that relate to the Servant Leadership philosophy? How can you inspire those around you? How can you become a better servant?

Look for those examples around

you. Recognize those who serve and help your team be inspired by their actions. Admire the beauty of great 'Servant Art' and make sure those around you see that beauty too. Serve others despite your situation and chaos so you won't have a bad day.

Then quietly go about serving those around you so they can succeed. 



Jim Ball was the general manager of Ball Heating and Air Conditioning, Biloxi, MS. He was National Comfort Institute's (NCI) 2017 Medium Contractor of the Year and is a strong believer in High-Performance HVAC Contracting. He recently sold his company and joined NCI as a trainer. You can reach him at ncilink.com/ContactMe.



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NCI Welcomes New Members

Membership in National Comfort Institute (NCI) is a step toward becoming a High-Performance HVAC Contracting firm. It is a commitment that has an extraordinary impact on your business and your team.

So, it is our pleasure to recognize and welcome those new members who joined our ranks since January 1, 2022:

Baggett Heating and Cooling, Clarksville, TN

Comfort Monster Heating and Air, Raleigh, NC

Greg Steger Heating & Air, Plymouth, WI

Greiner HVAC, Dixon, CA

Mid South Air Cond., Starkville, MS

Picture Rocks Cooling, Heating, and Plumbing, Tuscon, AZ

Thermo Direct, Raleigh, NC

Volpe Service Co., East Hanover, NJ.

We are pleased you all opted to join our family and look forward to working with all of you.



Meet the Latest NCI Partner

The team at NCI are pleased to welcome the newest partner to our

Training Incentive Partnership Program (TIPP).

Mosaic® is a financing company that helps to make financing high-efficiency HVAC systems and other home improvements accessible and affordable for homeowners.

Contractors who offer Mosaic financing through TIPP earn incentive dollars (known as NCI Bucks) that they can then use to offset the costs of training and more. If you are unfamiliar with TIPP, go to ncilink.com/TIPP to learn more.



Mosaic makes it easy to offer no money down at-the-point-of-sale loans with fixed interest rates and multiple term options. Some of these options include 10- and 15-year terms for 16 SEER and up systems.

The company provides a streamlined financing platform to help contractor partners increase their margins and drive sales growth.

Learn more by pointing your browser to ncilink.com/mosaic.

NCI's Online U. Offers Many Training Options

From HVAC contracting firm owners, office staff, to field technicians and everyone in between, the NCI Online University has something for everyone in your company - at all learning levels.

These courses are created by the team at NCI and are focused on helping your organization succeed and grow, at your pace. If you're just starting out, or have been in business for decades, there's training that you will find helpful on your path to high-performance

HVAC contracting.

Our Online University is organized into "logical learning steps" that begin with:

- Advanced Technical Training
- Business Management Training
- Customer Service Training.

Members get a 10% discount on all classes, while those with the [Learning Excellence Premium](#) and [Learning Excellence Online](#) subscriptions get the entire Online University included.

Here are the highlights of two classes available in the [Online University](#):

In the advanced technical training category you can find **System Performance Testing**. This series of modules covers the basics of system temperature measurements, system and equipment Btu measurement fundamentals, and much more.



In the customer service category, consider the **Proactive Customer Service 201** module. This online class will teach you how to get customers to the right person, setting up service appointments, escalating calls, accountability, and much more.



This class provides more than two hours of education that includes downloads and more.

Use NCI Online University to keep your team sharp, to prepare them for live training where they can earn certifications, and to keep your team ahead of competitors.

Find out more by visiting ncilink.com/OnlineU or call 800-633-7058 and ask for a customer care representative.

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NCI Unveils Certified System Performance At High-Performance HVAC Summit 2022!



Dominick Guarino is publisher of *High-Performance HVAC Today* magazine and CEO of National Comfort Institute, Inc. He can be reached at ncilink.com/ContactMe

It's very exciting and humbling to announce that at NCI's High-Performance Summit this year we are unveiling a brand-new product we have been working on for several years: **Certified System Performance**.

HVAC System Certification allows High-Performance Contractors to take their great work to the next level. Want to learn more? Read on.

WHAT DOES IT DO?

This brand-new certification allows you to test, verify, and certify an HVAC system's delivered performance into the home. Certified contractors are now able to offer this certification on any of the systems they install and service.

System certification lets you promise a highly performing system – and prove it! Plus, it is backed by one of the HVAC industry's top training and certification organizations. National Comfort Institute has helped tens of thousands of HVAC professionals deliver high-performing systems for more than 28 years!

HOW DOES IT WORK?

The process is pretty straightforward. A technician starts by testing an HVAC system that has been upgraded to deliver a high percentage of its rated capacity into the home.

Next, they enter data from the testing into NCI's cloud-based **ComfortMaxx Verify™** software to determine whether the system meets the minimum criteria for **Silver** or **Gold** certification.

Once the system achieves certification, a serialized number is assigned to it, and your technician applies labels to indicate it has been certified.

A packet that includes literature on the certification is handed to the homeowner. They can also

download a PDF of the certificate and final report at any time.

WHY SHOULD I CERTIFY SYSTEMS?

This certification can build great value for you and your customers. It sets you apart from other contractors in your market. It also gives your customers the certainty that you delivered high value for the work that you performed. You can certify equipment replacements, Air Upgrades™, or complete system renovations.

The result of the above is that a certified system increases the resale value of a home as it proves it is more comfortable and energy efficient.

Another great benefit of an NCI Certified Sys-

tem is you create a baseline that you can test against whenever you perform service or maintenance.

It's a great way to promote maintenance agreements that include a quick, easy-to-perform re-test of their system allowing you to continue to add value on every visit.

This helps ensure your customers continue to enjoy the comfort and energy efficiency of their improved HVAC systems year after year.

HOW DO I LEARN MORE?

You can start by checking out NCI's consumer website at NCICertified.com. Here you can learn about how the certification works from a homeowner perspective, its benefits, and how to access a certification. Access our contractor website on System Certification at NCICertified.net.

For more details on this ground-breaking product be sure to read, "NCI Certified System Performance – An Idea Whose Time Has Come" on page 12 of this issue. 



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Apr 12-14: Wood Dale, IL
Apr 12-14: St. Louis, MO
Apr 12-14: Austin, TX
Apr 19-21: Bloomington, MN
May 3-5: Philadelphia, PA

Commercial Air Balancing Certification Program

Apr 19-21: Richmond, VA
May 17-19: Livonia, MI

Residential HVAC System Performance and Air Balancing Certification Bundle

Apr 26-28: Monroeville, PA
Apr 26-28: Melville, NY
May 10-12: Centennial, CO

PUBLIC ONLINE TRAINING

Combustion and Carbon Monoxide Online Recertification

April 26-27: ONLINE

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Apr 5-6: Los Alamitos, CA

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April 4: Los Alamitos, CA
April 7: Sacramento, CA

Refrigerant-Side Performance Certification Program

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May 17-18: Los Alamitos, CA

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