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TOP Distributors Value Training

**Meet DOUG YOUNG
of Behler-Young**

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- **Commercial Balancing: Hydronics is NOT Optional**
- **Commercial Service: Changes Caused by the Pandemic**
- **Partner Spotlight: Behler-Young, Grand Rapids, MI**



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Supply Chain Woes Can't Stop the HVAC Train



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

Everyone is complaining about how difficult it is to “get stuff.” From raw materials to parts and components, shortages abound across all industries here and abroad. Many lay the blame at the feet of COVID-19. Some blame government mismanagement (especially during the run-up to the mid-term elections here in the U.S.).

The fact is that pandemic shutdowns DID have something to do with supply chain hold-ups, especially with how everyone tried turning everything back on at once. It apparently isn't as easy to reconnect supply chain links as it is to cut them.

Then, of course, minor inconveniences like labor shortages, inflation, and raging demand haven't yet been reigned in by the Federal Reserve's prime interest increase campaigns.

However, the HVAC industry is a very creative group. Manufacturers and distributors are tirelessly working to find alternative sources of materials, components, and products to help reduce order backlogs and keep our residential and commercial consumers as happy as possible.

Several distributors I spoke to recently say that things are complex, but creativity in how they approach solutions helps a lot. They say that supply chain woes won't stop the HVAC train.

Case-in-point: [This month's Partner Spotlight](#) focuses on Michigan-based Behler-Young. CEO Doug Young says that as the shutdowns began, his team started increasing their inventories in anticipation of shortages to keep their contractors supplied. They also pivoted to move their training to the cyber sphere during the pandemic to protect their employees and contractors.

Managing inventory, at least according to Doug Young, is a powerful tool to counter shortages. This fact is true for contractors as well. Historically, from contractors' perspectives, the ex-

act opposite was the preferred approach. Today the “just-in-time” inventory may not make as much sense.

If contractors have the space, many are stocking to battle shortages as best they can.


Another critical strategy is **open communications**. Good distributors are more open than ever with contractors regarding the status of orders, what to do in the meantime, and more. Better communication between contractors and distributors will help both face shortage issues, can help build relationships, and enable them to work better together in trying times.

Then there is **customer service**. In his article this month, contractor Tom Winstel says, “*Because of supply chain disruptions, people have come to accept lousy service as the new normal. As supply chains return to normal, we need to overcome mediocre quality service issues.*”

In other words, the supply chain issues shouldn't impact the service that distributors provide contractors, or the service contractors offer their customers. It's about managing expectations and finding solutions to supply chain woes.

And finally, in these times, you may need to **look for strong partners** for what you need. Dominick Guarino's [One More Thing](#) column at the back of this issue talks about the importance of partnering with distributors who can help you grow.

You can also use this time to encourage customers to invest in **service and maintenance agreements** to help keep older systems up and running. By scheduling off-season inspections, your customers can remain comfortable in their homes and buildings.

The fact is HVAC supply chain issues might last throughout 2023. But they won't stop the HVAC Industry. 

FIELD CONTROLS TYPE C CHIMNEY CAP INDUCER

The **Field Controls Type C Chimney Cap** (C-Cap) inducer may not be familiar to most, but it could become more popular as people invest in more wood-burning equipment in the future. It is a fan-powered cap used on wood, coal, and gas fireplaces. There might be some situations where it can also be used on wood burning, coal burning stoves, or oil-fired equipment. It is rated for up to 1300°F and has a continuous temperature of 900°F, making it suitable for even warm areas of the country.

Sheet metal adopters would be necessary for square or rectangular tile chimneys. The Type C Chimney Cap comes in 6, 8, 10, and 13-in. round pipes. It can be operated with just an on/off switch or

a variable speed controller, which would be the best option.

The C-Cap is especially helpful on wood and coal-burning fireplaces at initial start-up before an adequate draft is established. A variable-speed controller allows the fan to be adjusted perfectly to prevent smoke or fumes from entering the building. Also, the C-Cap is an excellent solution in certain buildings with excessive negative pressure. Too short flues would also be another good use for the C-Cap inducer.

Because fireplaces use a considerable amount of air, it is possible, after a few hours of use, for the building to start becoming negative. This allows smoke



fumes to enter the building. The variable speed controller can be adjusted as needed.

The Field Controls C-Cap also serves as a rain and wind cap. When the fire is smoldering at the end, the C-Cap is especially helpful in keeping smoke and fumes from entering the building as the draft will be reduced.

Fireplaces can produce a high level of carbon monoxide. Just because there is no odor in the building does not indicate there is no CO.

For more information, go to ncilink.com/C-Cap.

*- Jim Davis, Senior Instructor,
National Comfort Institute*

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History and Values Build Long-term Relationships

Three years before the onslaught of the Great Depression of 1926, two good friends decided to partner and start their own business. Wayne (Brig) Young and his hunting and fishing buddy, John Behler, left a company they worked for because they didn't like how the owner treated them. They set up a competitive shop four blocks away, and Behler-Young was born.

In 1926, many things were happening – many European nations were embroiled in small conflicts, Hirohito was crowned emperor of Japan, and in the U.S., coal was king in residential and

their product line, a variety of metal – galvanized sheet metal, stainless steel, copper, and so on. The partnership established a strong foothold in their Grand Rapids, Michigan market and survived the Depression by carefully managing their costs.

EARLY OPERATIONS

In those early years, Behler-Young in Grand Rapids operated by sending out a salesman to take orders, and then they would follow with trucks to deliver what they sold.

“My grandfather never wanted to do much work in Detroit,” Doug Young explains, “but we covered the rest of Michigan.”

The time after World War II marked a time of great growth and expansion in Michigan. He adds that John Behler's son, Jack, eventually joined the company and ran the sheet metal operation. Then in 1958, Doug's dad, Dick, got out of the Army and joined the business.

Young says that in the 1950's, small competitors were popping up around the state. “In 1960, to combat these competitors, my dad focused on finding interested competitive companies across the state and buying them.”

He says that the first branch was in Traverse City, the next one in Kalamazoo, followed by a branch in Lansing, and so forth.

“This was the birth of the Behler-Young branch operations that we have

today,” says Young. “That changed how we did business. We started buying things centrally and shipping them out to those branch locations, and our business continued to grow.”

He also says that before developing branch operations, the company took on its very first HVAC equipment line – the Luxaire brand. He says many contractors began buying the Luxaire equipment as their second HVAC product line.

Prior to Young joining the company in the early 1980s, he not only graduated from the University of Michigan with an industrial engineering degree but also earned a master's in business administration from Carnegie Mellon in Pittsburgh. Then, as a best practice before coming to work for Behler-Young, he worked for five years at a small family-owned business that supplied fasteners to the auto industry.

“When I joined the company,” he says, “my father told me not to expect to be running the place. He said I had to earn that. Forty years later, here I am.”

CHANGES IN THE WIND

In 1991 Behler-Young acquired the Bryant factory distribution operation in Detroit. That purchase made the company a significant player in Detroit. It was at this time that Doug Young became president of Behler-Young.

He says that his team built another distribution center in Brighton,



Behler-Young CEO Doug Young

commercial heating. The newly formed partnership focused on the ventilation side of the heating business, including sheet metal ductwork, asbestos insulation, grilles and registers, and more.

Third-generation owner Doug Young says they even had gutters as part of



outside of Detroit. They continued to open branches throughout Michigan and Northwest Ohio, most recently opening their 19th branch in Troy.

In 1998, Doug Young became CEO. As the economy weakened between 2006 and 2009, Michigan was hit hard, and so was Behler-Young. He says at that time, “half of our business was in the residential new construction market, and during that downturn, new construction pretty much shut down throughout Michigan. That forced the company to make major changes, including reducing staff, closing a branch on the north side of Grand Rapids, and changing how they went to market.

“We pivoted and began focusing more on the replacement and service parts business,” Young says. “Frankly, that is what saved us. Today, we are much stronger in the replacement products, equipment, parts, and supplies serving the Michigan residential and light commercial markets.”

He adds that after shifting the business mix, Behler-Young began working in earnest on strengthening their culture and core values, and he feels that made them a solid company.

These changes didn’t mean the company got entirely out of the new

construction business. Young says they just became more selective about it. New construction still accounts for between 10-15% of their business. In his opinion, this move made the company strong enough to weather other economic challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic.

STAYING SAFE, STAYING HEALTHY

At the outset of the Michigan COVID pandemic, most companies, including Behler-Young, had to send team members home. After six weeks, the federal government deemed the HVAC Industry essential, and Young says they got back to business, but had to modify operations significantly.

“Many team members worked from home. Customers were not allowed into our branches. We asked them to call ahead and served them curbside for several months. They could also order online for deliveries.

“As the supply chain started to experience challenges, we began increasing our inventory to the point where we could continue to supply our contractor customers. The result of doing this was that our business grew,” he says.

“There’s no doubt that the supply chain issues are still challenging. Our

team did a phenomenal job of flexing where they needed to, negotiating with our current suppliers, and picking up some new suppliers where we could.

“Our employees’ health and safety are extremely important to us.

“We’re a family business, and we treat everybody like they’re part of the family. We were careful about taking care of people during the pandemic. Our culture is very strong and is the main reason for our ongoing strength and success”

BEHLER-YOUNG TODAY

As time marches on, Behler-Young prepares for the future. Step one was to design a succession plan. Doug Young promoted the company’s CFO, Dave DeJonge, to chief operating officer (COO), who was then promoted to president in 2021.

“Dave handles the day-to-day management of the company,” Young continues. “I’m still involved with strategy and oversight. I am also the cultural cheerleader. As such, I get to go out and see our customers and our team members and work with them to ensure our culture remains strong.”

Furthermore, Doug Young’s sons are also beginning to move into the business. His eldest son, Jonathan, worked

for the company for 11 years and then moved on to pursue other interests. His middle son, Cameron, joined Behler-Young three years ago and helped the firm grow its digital eCommerce business. He is now working on Business Development. And Doug Young's youngest son, Mackenzie, will join the company's purchasing department in November 2022.

"So the fourth generation of Youngs are coming on board," Doug says. "When I joined the company, people told my dad how excited they were because it meant that the family would keep operating the business. They like working for us."

"Today, I'm getting the same comments about my sons coming in and the fact that people like to work here. There's a sense that there will be continuity of our strong culture."

CUSTOMER TECH FLUENCY IS A MUST

Behler-Young is very focused on spreading its family approach to business outwards to the HVAC contracting community they serve. Doug Young says the company's territory managers and salespeople need to be capable of communicating clearly to contractor customers, but he also wants those contractors to be fluent in speaking clearly to their customers.

"When you're a 97-year-old company, training becomes a core part of how you operate," he explains. "My dad got us into training back in the 70s and 80s. We trained contractors in the state of Michigan. Whether it's technical training, product training, sales method, or business training, we try to offer contractors help."

"We conduct classes in conjunction



Pictured left to right: Brent Bunce, B-Y; Jeff Knapp, B-Y; Contractor Nick VanHuis, Contractor Todd Cammenga, Doug Young. **In front,** Cameron Young

with our vendors. Organizations like BDR get into sales and business training, NCI focuses on technical training, etc. There are a lot of service providers out there that provide training.

We used to have just three training centers in Grand Rapids, Detroit, and Lansing, which required contractor technicians to drive quite a ways to attend. Today, to make things easier, most of our branches have a training room set up to fit 40 to 60 people. Plus, technology plays a central role in the company's efforts to advance the education of contractors as well as internal staff."

TECHNOLOGY HAS A KEY ROLE

"I believe technology plays a significant role across all aspects of our business. In fact, that is an understatement," says Young.

"Our president, Dave DeJonge, is a technology activist. In any place where he feels we can better serve our people, customers, or vendors, he looks to take advantage of technology – from software to APIs and more."

"We have a robust LMS (learning management system) so people can get online, take classes, and track where they are in that training. Because some classes are required, and some are optional, we track what training they're doing to better assess promotional opportunities."

Behler-Young is proud to promote

from within. As positions open internally due to a promotion, retirement, or whatever, it creates a domino effect of sorts.

Says Young, "We promote someone into an open position, and then must fill the role that the promoted person just left and so on. It's amazing how many positions that can affect."

"As we bring in people or move people up through the ranks, we'll teach them what they need to know. They need to have the right attitude and meet our core values."

CORE VALUES

So, what are the Behler-Young Core Values? Young says there are four of them, and they are:

- ◆ **We care about others** – Doug says this is about their team, customers, and community
- ◆ **We do the right thing** – Doug's grandfather always said a company that practices honesty and integrity will prosper. Doug says honesty and integrity are central to the company's values
- ◆ **We pursue great rather than good** – This focuses on continuous improvement, always striving to do better
- ◆ **We do whatever it takes** – Behler-Young works hard and, according to Doug, is recognized for providing superior service.

"In everything we do, we relate it to one of those core values," he says. "And we talk about those values to constantly remind people about what it means to be really good at our business. That's the foundation of our culture."

THE NCI CONNECTION

Doug Young says that his company's

core values mesh nicely with National Comfort Institute and other organizations across the industry.

"We sell technical equipment that, if not installed right, can injure people," Young explains. "We take that very seriously. We are very selective about who we sell potentially dangerous equipment to. If contractors are unwilling to train, they cannot buy gas-fired equipment or refrigerants from us.

"We completely agree with the concepts of training contractors to look at both the equipment and the ductwork as a single system. Technicians working in the field need to understand what that means. When out on service or maintenance jobs, techs should be able to recognize whether a system was designed and installed properly.

Sure, quality equipment counts, but there are so many other factors that go into having a system that ultimately performs well," says Young.

He adds, "We preach to our contractors to ask their customers what comfort is worth to them. Customers typically talk about how many quotes they received and how expensive they are. They have no idea about who makes their equipment or who installed it.

"They have no idea because everything is hidden in the basement or attic. But once you get them thinking about the value of their comfort, the quality of their air, then the discussion changes.

"To me, that is the secret sauce that differentiates the high-performance approach from all others."

THE VALUE OF RELATIONSHIPS

Earlier, Doug Young talked about how, as a 97-year-old company, they always focused on taking care of their customers and their team. In some cases his customers are second or third-generation owners whose grandfathers did business with his grandfather. Doug says you don't reach the 97-year threshold without creating long-lasting relationships. He adds their success is also due to incredible people on their team.

"When you get down to it, we're not in the business of getting quick fixes. We're in it to win it long term," Young concludes. "Relationships are the key, which is why it must work from the very beginning of the supply chain to the ultimate end user." **NCI**



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Commercial Balancing: *Hydronics is NOT Optional*

I've been involved in the Testing, Adjusting and Balancing (TAB) trades for years, and often have discussions with industry professionals who question why they need to get certified in Hydronics when they never perform any hydronic TAB?

In fact, many contractors will say things like: "I have twenty years TAB experience working on box stores, etc., and I NEVER encounter hydronic systems."



Technician [Dana Walsh](#), part owner of Direct Flow Balancing, Inc., of Mt. Pearl, Newfoundland, Canada works on balancing a commercial hydronics system.

My answer to both questions is "*Just because you ignore hydronic systems, doesn't mean you aren't supposed to know how to work on them.*"

I've personally worked on hundreds of retail stores and restaurants that did have hydronics. Many mixed-use buildings in most metropolitan areas have some sort of hydronic system in-

stalled, whether it's hot and chilled water or a condenser water loop.

Recently, I was in a stand-alone bank in Cleveland, OH that had three DX (direct expansion) systems. It had hot water re-heat on all three and they were never balanced. When I asked why, the answer was that the owner never asked for balancing or that the system was working fine.

Maybe it works fine now, but if a unit was piped backwards, or a valve was installed backwards, problems will eventually surface. Sadly, I've read hundreds of TAB reports where the HVAC equipment was either a water-source heat pump or ground-source heat pump, with ZERO hydronic data included in the report.

YOU CAN NEVER BE A MASTER OF YOUR TRADE WITHOUT HYDRONICS SKILLS

That is the bottom line. Think about it: there are plenty of carpenters who never build stairs. There are thousands of plumbers who only install hot water heaters or toilets. Given the demand in the trades and labor shortages, there are probably electricians who may have gotten away with only installing light switches and electrical outlets without ever wiring in the main.

Regardless, it's universally accepted that to obtain your master status in these trades, you must know all aspects of each trade. Why should TAB be any different? Guess what, it's not. If you want to obtain your senior certifications, you must have this skill.

TAB IS KEY TO ALL COMMERCIAL SYSTEMS

I recently spoke with Steve Kidrowski, a 30-year-industry veteran who is a [TABB](#) (Testing, Adjusting and Balancing Bureau) Certified TAB Supervisor and a contributor to the [SMART](#)

and [ITI](#) TAB Education curriculum. He made a couple of statements that made a lot of sense to me. He said:

- “A TAB professional will never fully understand variable volume system balancing until they have balanced hydronic systems.”
- “Anybody can stick their head in a duct and figure it out. Now stick your head in a glycol-filled pipe and figure it out. Time for education, math skills, and experience, to resolve the issues.”

[NEBB](#), the National Environmental and Balancing Bureau used to certify “Air Balancing,” and “Air and Water Balancing.” In 2006, they changed this and mandated that anyone who was Air-Only certified had to become certified in hydronics as well.

Anyone who refused to comply was decertified. The point of this is that the general industry consensus is that a certified TAB professional must master both air and hydronics.

EDUCATE YOURSELF

There are multiple hydronic TAB training opportunities out there, but it starts with you. You need to determine how much time and effort you are willing to put into it, and how much research you plan on doing.

Don't worry, I'm going to provide you with multiple resources.

STEP ONE: READ

I often hear the phrase, “I don't learn by reading, I learn by doing.” However, if you are to master any trade, you must start by being a reader. Buy the “[Pump Handbook](#),” “[Pumping Away](#),” or various other publications on hydronics in general. Even if they aren't TAB specific, almost ALL



hydronic material is relevant to TAB and mastering hydronic balancing.

You have to understand the systems and equipment before you can balance them. Then purchase relevant TAB manuals starting with [ASHRAE 111 – 2008 \(RA 2017\) Testing, Adjusting and Balancing of Building HVAC Systems](#).

Other well-written TAB resources include:

- SMACNA (Sheet Metal and Air Conditioning National Association) [HVAC Systems Testing, Adjusting and Balancing](#)
- [NEBB Testing, Adjusting and Balancing Manual, Third Edition](#)
- [AABC Technician Training Manual, 3rd Edition](#)
- and the classic [Kahoe Test & Balance Field Manual](#).

Also note that most of these organizations have magazine or newsletter publications that you can download.

In addition, many manufacturers have multiple resources that you can also download and read.

For example, [Caleffi Idronics](#) technical magazine is probably best

known and has dozens of issues for download. [Bell and Gossett](#) has a series of training manuals for download that cover subjects like system sizing, variable flow, and circuit setter balancing procedures. These are free downloads, just sitting there waiting to be read.

A search of other manufacturers websites will not only produce other written resources, but a variety of online/distance learning options as well.

STEP TWO: ONLINE TRAINING

There are dozens of options for online training, a lot of which are free. I take many of these courses myself and I always learn something.

Many online training courses also offer professional development hours that are accepted by some states and organizations for annual CEU requirements. The point is, investing your time in these courses extends beyond just what you learn.

Here are several online training courses to consider:

- [Taco Comfort Solutions](#) offers webinars, online courses, and training videos

- IMI Hydronic Engineering offer's [Hydronic College](#) that provides webinars and courses on subjects such as Balancing Fundamentals, Pump Optimization and Pressure Independent Balancing and Control Valves
- A few others include [Lochinvar University](#), [Armstrong Fluid Technologies](#) (over 130 webinars), [Thermal Tech, Inc.](#), and [Emerson Swan](#). There are multiple others out there, too many to list. If you go to any manufacture of hydronic system components, 90% will have some sort of training
- Finally, NEBB has recently updated the [NEBB Learning Center](#) to provide a wider variety of TAB training options.

STEP THREE: ATTEND LIVE TRAINING

Another complaint that I hear is that there simply is no classroom/

hands-on training available. Well, there is more than you realize, if you simply look.

For example, there is a two-day hydronic TAB course offered by the National Comfort Institute (NCI) called, "[Hydronic Testing, Adjusting and Balancing](#)." This class is solely dedicated to hydronic TAB and is capped at 12 students to ensure optimum hands-on training. It is offered at both the NCI California and Ohio training centers.

NEBB offers multiple [Testing Adjusting and Balancing Seminars](#) around the country at various locations including the NEBB headquarters in Gaithersburg, Maryland or the IMI Training Center in Irving, TX.

Their current TAB Training team are some of the best TAB professionals in the country.

[Engineered Air Balance](#) in Houston, TX, offers classes in TAB Fundamentals and Air & Water Systems

Procedures. I've toured their AABC-Endorsed training center, sat in on classes, and have been highly impressed.

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the apprenticeship training opportunities offered by both the Sheet Metal Workers and Fitters Unions in various areas.

This past winter, I got to tour most of the training centers for [Sheet Metal Workers Local 104](#) in Central California, and it was like Disneyland for TAB geeks. They have amazing training centers with very capable and experienced trainers.

In general, people don't know that many of the Pipefitter/Steamfitter Locals offer TAB training, and who better to teach hydronic systems? I've recently had multiple conversations with the [Southern California Pipe Trades District Council 16](#), regarding TAB training.

District 16 represents 13 Locals in Southern California. However, if interested in either the sheet metal or pipefitter's programs, you'll need to contact the local in your area to find out what options are available.

Finally, there are A LOT of live training opportunities available from the manufactures themselves. Again, even if the training is not directly about Hydronic TAB, all hydronic training is relevant to TAB.

Bell and Gossett's [Little Red School House](#) near Chicago is probably the best known, and their training is free of charge. Upcoming subjects include "Modern Hydronic Heating Systems – Basic Seminar," and "Water-Based HVAC System Design."

IMI Hydronic Engineering's [Hydronic College](#) has over 40 dedicated trainers and multiple training centers around the world, including



Contractors participate during an instrument demonstration in an in-person Hydronics training class at the National Comfort Institute training center in Sheffield Lake, OH.

locations in Irving, Texas and Atlanta, Georgia.

Again, a lot of other companies such as [Taco Comfort Solutions](#), [Grundfos](#), [Lochinvar](#), etc., offer live training. Some companies will even send the trainer to your location. In fact, that's one of the favorite parts of my job is meeting customers on job sites and teaching them how to use our equipment.

PURCHASE AND USE THE EQUIPMENT

That may sound like a loaded statement coming from someone who works for an instrument manufacturer. However, I'm an instrument geek. I hate NOT having the right tool for the right job. I personally own three hydronic meters and had them prior to working for the manufacturer.

Part of the reason I was hired by [Evergreen Telemetry](#) was because I bought their hydronic meter years ago and use it in the field. I arm myself with multiple hydronic meters and use different ones for different applications. That may not be practical for most companies.

On the other hand, I know of several companies with eight to 10 technicians who must share one meter because they have one "Water Guy" who uses it most of the time. In this scenario, the other technicians are denied the opportunity to work on hydronics or to simply familiarize themselves with the meter.

I mentioned earlier that I often hear, "I only work retail or light commercial, so I don't need a hydronic meter." If that was true, then why is there an Ohio-based TAB contractor – [Melink](#) -- whose primary focus is the TAB of

retail and restaurants?

Each of their 22 NEBB Certified Professional and Certified Technicians carry a hydronic meter. This is a significant investment for a company that primarily works on projects that "never have water."

"A TAB professional will never fully understand variable volume system balancing until they have balanced hydronic systems."

– Steve Kidrowski

I asked Darren Witter, Melink's Senior Vice President of Strategic Programs, why they make this investment.

He said, "I frequently find that hydronic systems are not appropriately installed, started-up, or adjusted during construction.

"For this reason, we invest in education and instruments for our field technicians to inspect, test, and balance hydronic systems in conjunction with air systems."

The primary brands of hydronic meters include Evergreen Telemetry, Shortridge, Alnor, and Dwyer. There are others, and they range in price from \$800 to just under \$4,000 (and that doesn't include ultrasonic meters). If you are just getting started, simply invest a few hundred dollars in a pair of reliable instruments and start using them.

They may not be acceptable by most certification standards; however, they'll be just fine for starting out.

Do you want to train yourself on how to use them? Revisit hydronic


projects you completed years ago. Tell the owner you want to conduct a quality control investigation, which is exactly what you are doing! Test hydronic systems that you encounter during service calls. You are training yourself AND providing a value-added service to your customer.

ALL OR NOTHING - YOU CANNOT MASTER "PART OF SOMETHING"

As mentioned before, you cannot obtain Master Plumber or Electrician status if you complete only part of the skills required. Why should it be different for someone who desires to be a Master of the TAB Trade?

Do you want to have open heart surgery by a doctor who only knows how to operate on three of the four heart chambers?

On that note, to quote Steve Kidrowski again, "Do you want a basic flow hood technician or a multiple-skilled technician to test and adjust your hospital operating rooms?"

This article was inspired by dozens of conversations with professionals all over the country. Hopefully I've provided a clear road map with plenty of resources to help you along the way. Many of them are free. If you truly want to be a master of your trade, hydronics is not optional – it's a must. 



Scott Fielder is the Director of Field Operations for Evergreen Telemetry, a Phoenix-based TAB equipment manufacturer. Scott has over 23 years in the TAB industry, to include 15 years working in the field in Texas, and seven years providing TAB training and training development. He can be reached at ncilink.com/ContactMe.

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NCI Commercial Air Balancing Certification Program (Three-Part Series)

November 16, 17 & 18 | 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. | Anaheim, CA

Manitowoc Ice Machine Service Training

November 17 | 6 p.m. – 8 p.m. | Online

Advansor CO2 Booster Refrigeration System Start-Up

November 22 | 1 p.m. – 3:30 p.m. | Online

IHACI Non-Residential Building Acceptance Testing Employer (ATE) Training (Two-Part Series)

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Changes Caused by the Pandemic in Commercial HVAC Service

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the question for us as commercial HVAC service contractors is whether the public awareness and need for good indoor air quality (IAQ) will remain strong or fade into memory. Our industry knows what it takes to provide proper indoor air quality for commercial owner-occupied buildings, and we've substantiated that in our ASHRAE standards and codes.

What changed was how the pandemic brought awareness to IAQ favorably and positively. This situation forced us as contractors to react to the marketplace, and the market was telling us that occupants wanted confidence that their offices and workspaces were healthy environments.

During the pandemic, one of the key desires among building owners and managers was to create a healthy indoor air environment that reduces virus transmission. Pre-Covid, most people didn't give much thought to filtration even though [ASHRAE Standard 180P](#) recommends

Merv 8 filters. During the pandemic, building owners suddenly understood the difference between good and poor filtration. Some of our customers began requiring Merv 13 or even 15 filter replacements.

IAQ AWARENESS AND DEMAND INCREASES

We also saw increased demand for air purification either through ultraviolet germicidal irradiation or bipolar ionization devices. Sales of those types of air handler renovations increased significantly. And as the pandemic grew, IAQ demand by building occupants increased.

Here in Ohio, we saw the Columbus Teachers Union go on strike, not necessarily for more money but for better working conditions. Among those conditions was the demand for better comfort and indoor air quality.

These demands increased business for commercial HVAC contractors but also increased potential problems. By enhancing filtration, you increase static pressures as well. As a professional contractor, you must do the engineering calculations to ensure the air handler and duct systems can handle that increase.

Also, when you enhance dilution, you're bringing in more outside air, so additional problems can arise. We saw increasing complaints because of higher humidity, especially in the summertime. Not all air handlers are meant to take more than X-percent additional outside air.

During the height of the pandemic, we explained to customers how there's a balance to all of this. We showed how customers might see increased energy costs from some of these solutions even though they enhanced indoor air quality. Our company, [Enerwise](#), created a [Return](#)



with Confidence Report, which is essentially a healthy building assessment checklist. We use this report with building owners and operators to list their HVAC assets. We also use it to develop an approach to ensure we don't change the use of their HVAC and ventilation system design to the point where it would negatively affect comfort or operation.

Interestingly, as the pandemic is winding down to a more seasonal disease, like the flu, my peer group is seeing a swift return to what I would call a typical approach to indoor air quality. In other words, the heightened awareness created during the pandemic seems to be waning.

We still see continued demand for purification products, especially in the healthcare and education sectors.

SUPPLY CHAIN DISRUPTIONS

Beyond IAQ, today, the U.S. suffers from severe supply chain shortages. There is an interesting debate as to whether the current supply chain issues were caused by the pandemic or not. This is an important topic of conversation amongst my peer group.

The reality is that no matter the cause, we must deal with it. We see rooftop equipment delivery delays going out six to eight months. Hydronic and chilled water system delivery delays can stretch out for a year. I've never seen such supply chain disruptions in my career, and I have been in this industry for 36 years.

Furthermore, critical component delays are rampant. You might have a system that lost a crucial component like a compressor, heat exchanger, or coil, and today, many replacements are unavailable.



Typically building owners have the option to repair or replace components. If they can't replace it because deliveries are sliding, they could repair what they have. That might be their only option.

But what happens if they can't do either due to supply chain issues?

If they had redundancy, that's certainly beneficial, but not in all situations is this the case. At Enervise, we are moving toward temporary solutions like heating and cooling equipment rentals until critical systems can be retrofitted or repaired.

Good quality commercial service contractors want to be a single source for their customers. We want to provide turnkey solutions. I see supply chain issues creating opportunities in rentals and just-in-time cooling systems as a part of a service we can offer.

However, we typically are not in the rental business. I believe it's important to keep yourself in a position to coordinate that service. So that means partnering with vendors in the rental industry.

OTHER SUPPLY CHAIN ISSUES

Today, there are new protocols required to enhance rooftop unit energy efficiency. Original equipment manufacturers are not only dealing with everything from products stuck on ships to transitioning their plants to build the new model units that are required.

This perfect storm is creating even more significant supply disruptions for some manufacturers.

Add into that the high-tech chip shortage. One of our customer's 140-ton chiller failed, and we couldn't find the chip necessary for the solid-state control board.

At Enervise, we partner with a heavy chiller technician specializing in major system overhauls. We asked for his help on this project. He found he had two of the control boards we needed sitting on a shelf and agreed to sell us one of them. Now we could get the client's chiller system back up and running.

These situations force us to manage expectations. It's more important than ever to communicate with clients

what you are doing to expedite parts and equipment and manage all that is within your control to ensure delivery.

INFLATION COSTS AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Recently the Biden administration created [The Inflation Reduction Act](#). I believe the HVAC contracting industry must consider this act and its impact on our businesses and customers. To me, the dollars allocated through this program will go toward demand-side energy efficiency improvements.

The idea behind this act is great, but not all commercial HVAC contractors can take advantage of the 179-D tax deduction, for example. That deduction is only for work provided by firms that pay prevailing wages and that have a federally approved apprenticeship program. Non-union companies that aren't participating in a federal apprenticeship program are not eligible, and neither are their commercial clients.

The Inflation Reduction Act is a gift from the Biden administration to the trade labor unions.

AABC and other organizations have spoken out on behalf of non-union contractors. This is something that should invite participation from the entire HVAC contractor community.

FROM NATURAL GAS TO OIL – ENERGY COSTS ARE CHANGING

American energy independence can be attributed to the success of [fracking](#), which helped drive down [electricity costs](#). In parts of the Midwest, where electric prices are typically low, it's not easy to have demand-side energy savings drive project retrofits based

on energy efficiency.

Unfortunately, [oil](#) production and delivery disruption from the war in Ukraine and OPEC's production limit announcements will continue to cause energy prices to rise.

And then there is the U.S. [electrification](#) movement which I believe is putting extreme pressure on the power grids. Our grids can't handle the mass adoption of electrification.

Electrification success will require utilities to reinvest in infrastructure improvements to ensure sound transmission lines and grids. The costs for doing this typically get passed on to consumers through higher electrical utility costs.

Regarding [natural gas](#), we have a 100-year supply in the United States. We've become the next net exporter of natural gas to Europe.

Now our natural gas prices are being driven more by international than U.S. supply and demand. That means our natural gas costs will continue to rise for the foreseeable future, especially if Europe becomes more dependent on our exports.

THE TECHNICIAN SHORTAGE

The HVAC Industry continues to face a [severe labor shortage](#). There are many reasons for this shortage, which have been piling up for years.

Today we face issues with getting young people to choose careers in the trades and those who do flit about looking for the most money.

As I see it, the issue is endemic to how America overemphasizes four-

year degrees with high schoolers. This approach ignores programs for skilled trades apprenticeship training paid for by employers or the government.

If we, as a society, promoted the trades equally to how we encourage college, young people would see how the trades as a cool and practical pathway to rewarding careers. Oh, and by the way, they would graduate with no debt.

WHAT HASN'T CHANGED BECAUSE OF THE PANDEMIC

As a society, because of these vast supply chain disruptions, people have come to accept lousy service as the new normal. As supply chains return to normal and eventually will, we need to overcome mediocre quality service issues.

Building owners and managers want [quality service](#). That means, as an industry, we must get back to having responsive service. This isn't new. Providing good quality service remains the hallmark of a good contract service contractor. We cannot let our quality thresholds drop.

Doing [proper maintenance](#) is always good for the industry. Good tasking and frequency enhance customer



benefits like indoor air quality, uptime, comfort, equipment energy efficiency, and more.

The fact is, when you have properly maintained systems, you don't have breakdowns. That system should be able to run without issue. Then you can provide responsive service when the customer does have an emergency breakdown.

We cannot hide behind the supply chain or tolerate mediocre quality service as an industry. In responsive service, we need to enhance communications with customers to explain supply chain issues and how proper maintenance benefits them.

Good quality service and maintenance do not go out of vogue. It's as essential as ever.

Yes, the pandemic caused many changes, but so much remains the same. As commercial HVAC contractors, we remain in a unique position as relevant resources to building owners and managers.

We must continue positioning ourselves as knowledge leaders who can help or advise customers through their challenges.

There's still a need to communicate well with customers. The moment of truth is identifying what they need, resolving it, and then closing the loop with the customer and letting them know what you did. **NCI**

HOW GOOD IS GOOD ENOUGH?



Tom Winstel is president of **Enervise, LLC**, a commercial HVAC facilities management company headquartered in Cincinnati, OH. Tom is a fourth generation owner whose company offers services ranging from nationwide retrofit and strategic replacement programs, national facility commissioning, and more. He can be reached at ncilink.com/ContactMe.

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Great Distributors See Value in Training

Supply chain and economic pressures are forcing contractors across the HVAC Industry to face some harsh realities – things take much longer and cost much more. This can put a strain on every channel within the HVAC supply chain.

These issues are why it is so important for contractors to develop strong partnerships with their distributors. Together they can withstand almost anything the world throws at them. Alone, things can be so much more difficult.

WHY TRAINING?

Distributors see great value in training contractors because they want their partners to be prepared to deal with anything the market throws at them. **Chad McAllister, vice president of sales for R.E. Michel Co., LLC**, Baltimore, MD, says, “We focus a lot of effort in training our contractor customers because we see a direct impact on callback and warranty claim reductions, as well as how it helps them increase billable hours.”

McAllister adds that training benefits the marketplace because properly installed equipment “equates to less energy usage, more comfortable homes, and facilitates word-of-mouth sales that is the core of contractor referrals.”

In St. Louis, MO, Air Management Supply Branch Manager Craig Broadfield agrees with McAllister and adds, “Being more than just a distributor by partnering in the growth of the dealer is how we like to do business!”

“This is important to Air Management. We want our dealers to have every opportunity to grow and better serve their homeowners. We believe if they continue to strive for something more and become better, it allows us to continue to grow with

them as their partner,” he adds.

Training is also an opportunity for vital communication between distributors and contractor customers. **In Grand Rapids, MI, Behler-Young CEO Doug Young** says, “there is no doubt that the supply chain issues are still challenging. This challenge means that open, honest communications from my team to our contractor customers are a must.

“When you’re a 97-year-old company, training becomes a core part of how you operate. Whether it’s technical, product, sales method, or business training, we try to offer contractors help. That is why we partner with organizations like National Comfort Institute to help bring world-class technical training to our contractors.”

THE VALUE TO CONTRACTORS AND DISTRIBUTORS ALIKE

During economic slowdowns, many companies tend to tighten their belts, which often means training falls under the category of “optional expense.” But from a distribution standpoint, the opposite is true. They see training as an investment, no matter the economic situation.

“At RE Michel, we want to be a complete partner to our customers, says Tracy Johnson. Tracy works with Chad McAllister in the corporate sales department and adds, “To us, training is one of the most important services we provide to a contractor. If we can be a resource to them for all their needs, it will only make our industry the best it can be.”

Broadfield says that the more knowledge the dealer brings to the home when providing service or replacement, the better the consumer experience they provide. “This creates more confidence in having the contractor work on their home.

PARTNERSHIP

That gives the marketplace more competition based on competence versus just price.

"I feel training has more value than some may realize," Broadfield continues. "Whether you pay for a class or attend for free, the important part is that the information you take away from training is something you can build on!"

When the pandemic shut the U.S. down, the probability that training would also fall by the wayside was huge. However, many distributors and other industry training organizations turned to technology to keep their teams and contractor customers up to speed.

Doug Young says Behler-Young already had some capabilities in conducting webinars and online training. "We pushed forward with streaming technology," he explains, "so our contractor customers don't have to attend in person. They go online, and we stream it to their office or home, and they can participate."

"We're using technology to help us advance the education of our customers as well as our internal staff. Technology plays a significant role in all aspects of our business. In fact, that may be an understatement," Young says.

"IRRESISTIBLE" TRAINING

In the training world, they use a phrase to describe how to attract people to seminars and classes. They say you must create "irresistible" training. Interestingly, this can mean many different things to different people. Chad

McAllister sees this as targeting training programs by individual markets.

"For example," he explains, "If we hold a steam humidification class in the Florida panhandle, we will likely have a low turnout. However, if we hold that same class anywhere in Maryland or the north, we will likely have a packed classroom. You must know your market and contractor needs and bring quality and relative training to that base."

From Craig Broadfield's perspective, "The key to a successful training program is determined by the amount of participation from your contractors."

"A true partnership works better if both sides feel the information being conveyed and received is useful toward each party's goals. At Air Management, we try to make our training irresistible by using our training funds for classes we host with groups like National Comfort Institute and never charging our dealers/partners for training we provide otherwise," Broadfield says.

If done right, Broadfield adds that training also builds loyalty. "Our goal is to provide a high level of hospitality and a comfortable and flexible space so everyone can feel at home. We feel that if contractors feel comfortable here, they will continue to join us."

Tracy Johnson says that RE Michel's internal training programs most certainly build loyalty among their employees. "If we consistently bring knowledge and training to our customers, loyalty will also follow."

Another aspect of making training


irresistible is making the contractors part of the planning process. While it's the job of the contractor management team to identify the skill gaps within their organization, it is equally essential for distributor partners to learn about those gaps and create training programs around them.

"RE Michel reviews our training programs annually," says Johnson. "We make changes and additions based on our customers' feedback and HVAC Industry direction."

The same holds true for the team at Air Management. Craig Broadfield says that "dealer input is always at the forefront of our planning process. Between their input, plus the content and the PEU credit hours needed for licensing, we try to find a good mix of topics to present so that contractors want to join and don't view the training as a waste of their time."

PARTNERING FOR THE FUTURE

The idea of partnering with distributors is not new. But it is vital because partnerships benefit both parties and help both be more successful. Training does the same thing. As Craig Bradfield says, "If contractors continue to learn and grow, they will continue to strive for and achieve success. As their partner, we share the rewards of their success through their continued business."

Partnerships are the heartbeat of the marketplace. HVAC distributors who value providing training to their contractor customers see this as a vital part of what they bring to the table. 



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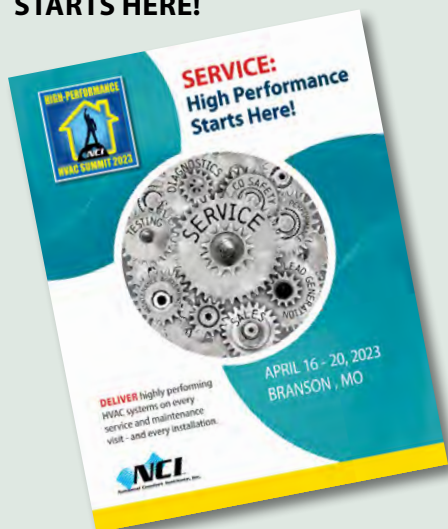
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forum is the only forum dedicated specifically to the High-Performance HVAC contracting method. Here contractors can talk to their peers about everything from specific testing issues to tips on how to implement some aspects of the performance approach into their businesses.

If you are unfamiliar with online forums, in a nutshell, they are internet spaces designed and built around discussion, usually through active participation. This is done by posting questions,

responding to questions, and sharing experiences. Though many of these discussions don't take place in real-time, they can be arranged by topics, sorted by date, and archived, enabling discussions to occur over days, months, or even years.

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Some distributors call it dealer development, others simply refer to it as a commitment to help train their customers' employees.

Whatever the term they use, distributors who provide high quality education on a regular basis are true partners that can help you grow your contracting business.

Is your wholesaler known for providing more than the occasional product demo "training" accompanied by a slice of pizza? Do they have good technical support within their organization?

Are they dedicated to bringing you cutting edge HVAC training, both in terms of technical knowledge and skills and classes to help you grow your business and become more profitable? If the answers are yes, they are a great training partner.

THE RIGHT DISTRIBUTOR

A distributor who is truly committed to helping their customers grow will have a well-equipped

training facility. This includes a dedicated room that can fit at least 20-25 students, along with a good selection of both gas and electric live-fire equipment. They should also have at least one accessible working air distribution system.


Of course, a great training facility is only as good as the education that takes place in it. Your distributor should offer ongoing classes for owners, managers, customer service reps, and field personnel. This can include training in business management, operations, sales, customer service, and technical skills focused on improving best installation practices, service, and maintenance. Certification training and testing are an important part of a good program.

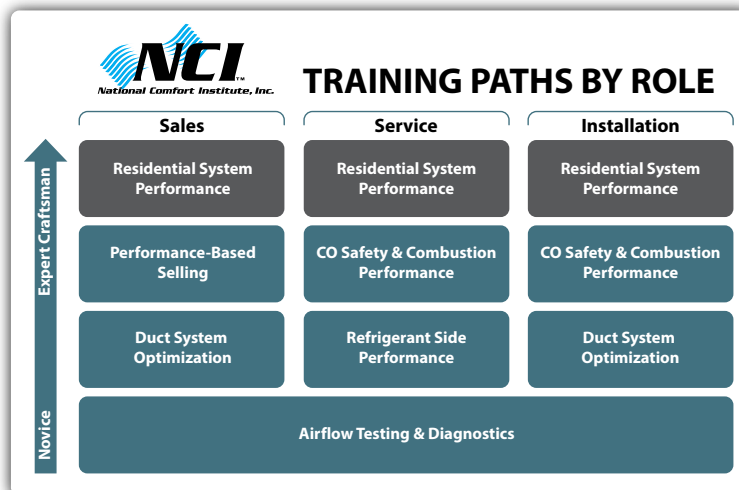
From a High-Performance perspective, NCI recommends training that begins with system diagnostic basics and moves up through each of the steps involved in delivering high-performance HVAC systems. These classes should be offered on a quarterly rotation so you don't have to tie up every installer or service tech at the same time.

A WINNING COMBINATION

Your distributor needs contractors like you to help grow their business. If they don't already provide the level of training described in this article, don't be shy about asking for it.

Solid, consistent training is a win-win-win for you, your customers, and your distributor.

Customers will get better installations and service. As a result, you can profitably grow your company, and in turn become a bigger and more valuable customer for your distributor. 



This "Training Paths by Role" matrix shows how to build a high-performance team step-by-step. In addition, NCI provides both Residential and Commercial Air Balancing Certifications so you can both test balance your installations and renovations.

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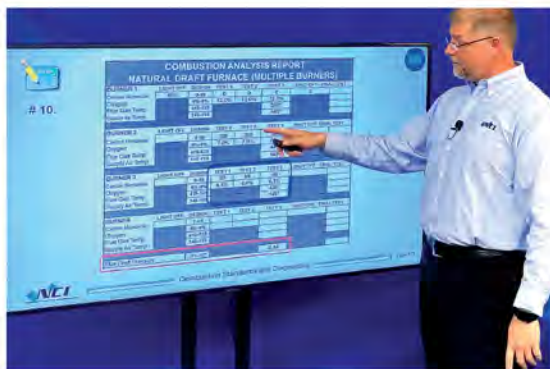
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Residential HVAC System Performance and Air Balancing Certification Bundle

November 1-3: Anaheim, CA

Test and Certify Ventilation Systems and Economizers Certification Program

November 8-9: Anaheim, CA

Commercial Air Balancing Certification Program

November 16-18: Anaheim, CA

Combustion Performance and Carbon Monoxide Safety Certification Program

December 7-9: Anaheim, CA

**TECH CLEAN CALIFORNIA TRAINING ncilink.com/TECHCleanCA

Residential HVAC System Performance and Electrification

November 29-December 1: Indio, CA

High-Performance HVAC Design and Redesign

December 14-16: Paso Robles, CA

December 19-21: Indio, CA

* NCI training sponsored/subsidized by Southern California Edison (SCE) for qualified local contractors.

** NCI training sponsored by TECH Clean California for qualified local contractors.



Visit **NCIlink.com/ClassSchedule** to view the latest schedule.