

CLEANING SUCCESS

The personal touch that clearly works

by Helen Geraghty

business writer

THE tools of the trade are mops and buckets rather than computers and mobile phones – but for one Kent cleaning firm, rocketing growth is a fair swap for glamour.

In June 2004, Ian Beach decided he had had enough of making money for other people by helping them run successful cleaning firms.

He branched out on his own, initially working from home – not easy with a young family – then moving to his present modest offices at Aylesford Business Centre, off Aylesford High Street.

Today, Ian, 50, managing director of Ridge Crest Cleaning, has an annual turnover of £2.15 million and a staff of 300, mainly in the South East, but reaching as far as the Midlands. His staff clean commercial, public sector, leisure and industrial premises.

He said: "For years, I had wanted to run my own company and manage my own destiny. I had seen myself help companies in this industry grow quite massively. But with a mortgage to pay and so on, the usual things, I kept waiting.

"It was only when I sold my small shareholding in the

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last company I worked for, for £150,000, that I thought, 'Now is the time'."

Ian put £50,000 of the cash into setting up Ridge Crest, hit the phones with his best sales pitch, and has never looked back.

In October 2004 he landed his first contract, with Skinners' School, Tunbridge Wells, inheriting the 12 existing cleaning staff there.

Soon afterwards Tonbridge Grammar joined the fold.

Now, Ian's staff also clean up after Maidstone Borough Council, at the greyhound stadium at Wimbledon, three Riva bingo halls and Larkfield Leisure Centre.

He looks after the sales side – racking up an impressive 14 clients – three-quarters of them

Ian Beach, managing director of Ridge Crest Cleaning



schools, which so far at least appear safe from the credit crunch. He works with two administrators.

He attributes the success of his firm in great part to his insist-

ence on the personal touch, something which he believes some clients have found lacking with past cleaning firms.

He said: "Part of our success I think is the fact that people like

to deal with the owner, the MD. It is that personal involvement that they like. I think it goes down well.

"They know that if something needs sorting out quickly they

can get on the phone to me."

Clients often provide a small base for cleaners and each contract has either a supervisor or client manager. Recruiting for staff and managers carries on year-round.

Ian is quick to clear up some popularly held perceptions about his industry, such as that cleaners are all on the minimum wage. His own experience is that outside central London, few self-respecting cleaners will get out of bed for the minimum wage.

And to the perception that cleaning is all dismal drudgery, he says: "I find it a fascinating business. It is a very people-oriented business. If you like people, then you will enjoy it. We have some wonderful staff, some real characters."

Whatever you may say about it, cleaning appears a lucrative business to be in.

Ian said: "It's true that where there's muck there's brass. Our overheads are low and 70 per cent of our costs are wages.

"I'm absolutely glad I set up my own company. I only wish I had done it years earlier."

■ Ridge Crest Cleaning won environmental awards for its green credentials in 2006 and 2007, for using environmentally friendly and biodegradable cleaning products.

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