

Mr. Clean

When Mark Bannister was Vice President for Southern

California Edison, he was frustrated on many occasions—not with his job or his employees but with the janitorial companies that cleaned the building.

He wound up going through several janitorial companies in just a few years “because none of them were good enough,” he says candidly.

Later on, when SoCal Edison decided to restructure, it asked Bannister to relocate to Los Angeles. But he did not want to leave the Orange County, California area.

So he left the company and decided to start his own, — and he wanted a job in a “recession-proof” industry that wasn’t ruled by economics like previous positions he held in computer printing manufacturing and aerospace.

Mark Bannister’s business exceeds client expectations because of his obsession to satisfy customers.

Bannister spent several months researching job opportunities and wound up choosing – surprise – janitorial services. “Even when companies downsize,” he says, “they still need janitorial services. That never goes away.”

So Bannister launched Clean Inc. – and he knew what it took to run an efficient janitorial operation. He had, after all, “hired and fired several janitorial companies, so I knew what it took to be a good one.”

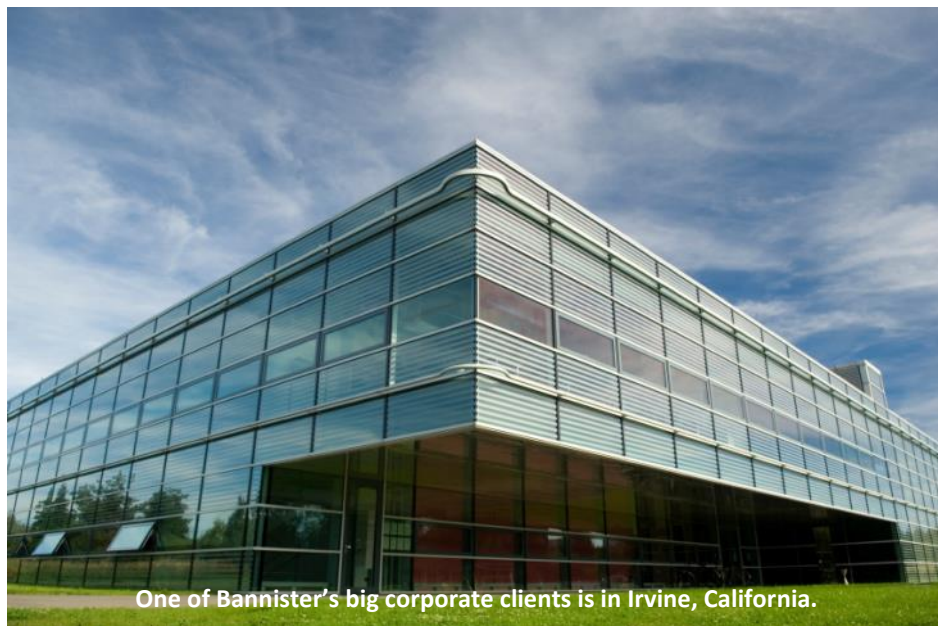
Today, he has a successful, multi-million dollar, full-service janitorial firm that “doesn’t cut corners” and gives clients the type of service they expect — excellence. His company is one of the largest in the county and he has long-term contracts with some of the biggest companies in Southern California.

“My pet peeve is to be consistent and to provide quality service day after day,” he says. “No inconsistency. Some janitorial service companies tend to slack off, take short cuts, and then the overall work begins to deteriorate.”

That’s not what Bannister’s company is about. It’s not what he is about, either.

He is a perfectionist with integrity and morals.

“My philosophy is that I’m in business to satisfy customers,” he says. “If I do that, the business will make money. Basically, my company cleans buildings and office spaces the way I’d clean it if I had to do it myself.”



One of Bannister’s big corporate clients is in Irvine, California.

Bannister’s company is superior to competitors because of his philosophy of satisfying customers and his desire to excel in a field where there are slackers.

Unlike many company presidents, Bannister accompanies his crew the first couple of weeks they clean buildings and office spaces. That way they know exactly what needs to be done and how long it takes.

When a company signs a long-term agreement with Bannister, it gets more than it expects. For instance, spot carpet cleaning may be required only once a month, but with Bernstein it doesn’t matter.

“If I see a spot in the carpet, I won’t have my crews wait a few weeks to take it out just because of the contract,” he says. “We’ll clean it when we see it, period. That’s the way we do things around here.”

Same thing goes for dusting cobwebs and anything else of that nature.

What separates Bannister even further from competitors is that he cares so much about doing the best job possible for clients that he has his wife call customers without revealing her identity. She informs the client that they were listed as a reference and that she is considering using Clean Inc.

With this approach, Bannister knows exactly what his customers think of his company’s work, and if there’s a problem, he’ll immediately address it.

“I always tell my clients that the best thing we can do is communicate,” Bannister says. “I need to know how they feel. I want to know if they are satisfied with the work. All my clients know that if they have any problems, no matter how small, they can tell me. I *want* them to tell me.

“I’ll jump through any hoop to make sure my clients are happy.”

—By Rick Weinberg, Editor in Chief,
California Business Journal