



COMPANY:
Scarlet & Gray Cleaning Service, Inc.
HEADQUARTERS:
Cincinnati, OH
EMPLOYEES:
220



CIMS Certification Fosters BSC's Confidence, Promotes Employee Professionalism

Seventeen years ago, Mark Cappel was a student at The Ohio State University, cleaning apartments in order to put himself through school. Today, he owns his own thriving cleaning company, Scarlet & Gray Cleaning Service, named for his alma mater's school colors. The company employs 220 people and cleans 43 schools in the Greater Cincinnati area.

When Mark heard about ISSA's new Cleaning Industry Management Standard (CIMS) and certification program, he knew pursuing certification would be a beneficial move for Scarlet & Gray. CIMS is a comprehensive management and operations standard of excellence designed to assist building service contractors and in-house service providers develop quality, customer-centered organizations.

"We viewed CIMS certification, and the possibility of being recognized by an independent, outside source as one of the best-run businesses in the industry, as a great way to separate us from all of the mom-and-pop companies out there," explains Chris Cappel, Scarlet & Gray's Human Resource Manager. "Mark was originally pushing for it, and soon the rest of us came on board."

But they knew the process of attaining certification would not be an easy one, especially when it came to making sure that they had all the necessary documentation.

"We had many, but not all of our policies and procedures written down. The meatier things we had, but not everything," explains Mark. "We are a small and growing company, and we knew we couldn't create the remaining documentation we didn't have overnight."

They started with the CIMS self-assessment checklist, cross-referencing it with what they already had. From there, they saw what they had to produce from scratch.

Chris and the others on the management team recall that Mark had been encouraging the company to document its policies and procedures long before CIMS certification came along. What would be the benefit of documentation, they wondered.

"We always asked: Why? But now, after going through this process, I've got to admit that he was right," says Chris.

Some of what they needed to produce was in the area of daily operations, notes Tim Cappel, who serves as Operations Manager for the company.

"Some of these things like certain cleaning methods or workloading, we had never written formal policies or procedures for," Tim explains. "We knew how to do it because we'd always been doing it the same way, but writing it down? It's like parallel parking a car. You know how to do it, but how would you begin to write down the steps?"

It was a big job assembling all the necessary documentation in one place, but the whole team wholeheartedly agrees it was well worth the effort. They had never before taken such an intimate look at the company's policies and procedures and were surprised with the benefits of analyzing the company's operation as if under a microscope.

“What ISO 9000 is
to the manufacturing industry,
CIMS can be to the
cleaning industry. It provides
an intimate look at a company's
policies and procedures
that results in amazing
benefits.”

~Mark Cappel, President,
Scarlet & Gray

**BEST TIP
FOR COMPANIES
THINKING ABOUT
CERTIFICATION:**

Start immediately upon getting the application. The process certainly takes an investment from the beginning, but the pay-off is well worth it.

"It helped our confidence," notes Chris. "Starting off, years ago, we had little experience in operating a business and often times, we seem to be running the company by trial and error, but we found out that we were doing many of the things on the checklist already."

Tim agrees, "The process of becoming CIMS certified was a great exercise for us as a company."

When they had all of the necessary documentation in place, it was time for the independent assessor to visit. "I was nervous for the assessment," Tim admits. "I had worked on this thing for six months and I was really hoping we had done everything right. But the assessment went great. We were ready to go and the CIMS Assessor saw that."

Another benefit to becoming CIMS certified is the effect it has had on Scarlet & Gray's managers. "A lot of these guys have worked their way up from cleaners who started with us when they were in school. CIMS and all of the formal documentation of policies and procedures have given them a sense that this is a real profession. It is a career, not just for us, but for every manager, too."

Mark notes that the formal, written policies and procedures produced via the CIMS process can act as a valuable tool and help push his managers' performance to even greater levels.

"Say that a good manager in any given cleaning business should be doing ten things on every shift," Mark explains. "Before this, all of my managers were doing seven or eight of them — and not always the same seven or eight. Some would be lax on the training of their cleaning staff or some wouldn't be up-to-date on their logs. Now, they all have to do all ten of those things and they follow-through."

Mark sees a number of primary benefits to CIMS certification for Scarlet & Gray.

"First, it makes our 15 managers feel like professionals," he notes. "Further, it has legitimized all of the procedures and policies that I've wanted to implement for some time, and it will be a valuable tool to use when soliciting new clients."

"But one of the biggest benefits of certification comes in the form of a thank-you to Scarlet & Gray's existing customers," Mark says. "Our customers have always been loyal to us and taken care of us, and becoming CIMS certified is a way for us to show them that their faith in us has been justified."

Mark explains that one longtime customer, the Superintendent of a local school district, actually came back from vacation early to be part of the CIMS assessment process.

"His district was one of the first contracts we were awarded 13 years ago, and he's been a mentor to us and watched us grow. It meant a lot to him that we were doing this." 

About CIMS:

CIMS is the first comprehensive management and operations standard for cleaning organizations. Administered by ISSA and the American Institute for Cleaning Sciences, CIMS is a standard of excellence designed to help building service contractors and in-house service providers develop quality, customer-centered organizations.

The CIMS framework is built around five quality principles that have proven to be the hallmarks of well-managed, successful cleaning operations:

- Quality Systems
- Service Delivery
- Human Resources
- Health, Safety & Environmental Stewardship
- Management Commitment

Why should a company certify to CIMS? Daniel Wagner, director of CIMS for ISSA, explains: "Implementation of the Standard's elements affords an organization a tremendous opportunity to validate its management systems and processes. Professional, customer-centered cleaning organizations finally have a touchstone resource, a common rallying point around which all members of the industry can gather and work toward achieving an unprecedented level of professionalism and excellence."

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The Worldwide Cleaning Industry Association

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www.issa.com/standard.