

Providing quality service in New York City

by Steve Howard

NEW YORK — What is it like to provide heating and air conditioning service in the nation's most congested area? According to Bob Berger and Bob Keingstein, owners of Frankel-Berger Cooling Corp., a 21-employee firm operating in Brooklyn, "Doing the work is the easy part. Getting to the job is the problem."

The first problem is parking. It is not uncommon for a service technician to circle the area for over an hour to find a parking space. Once a space is found, it is likely to be a commercial loading zone, with 20-minute parking. When he returns to his truck, he may find it ticketed or towed

away. Getting it back can cost \$140. Berger Corp. spends almost \$1,000 per month in parking tickets and towing fees.

Building access is also an obstacle. Many times a technician must park four or five blocks from the job. Not only is this inconvenient, but it also increases concerns about vandalism and theft.

Often, it takes 20 minutes of waiting for freight elevators each way. If every conceivable tool or part is not carted to the job, it could take an hour to go back to the truck for a wire nut.

Contractors usually rely on cranes or helicopters to get hvac equipment onto building rooftops,

but not in New York City. When Berger Corp. installs a replacement cooling tower, they may have to strip it down to individual components, then try to get the parts into the freight elevator, hoist them up under the elevator, or jib them from the outside of the building. It is easy to see how retrofit jobs in New York can easily go for two or three times what they cost in other parts of the country.

With office rental rates ranging from \$28 to \$40 a square foot in Manhattan, where the company has 85% of its accounts, hvac remodel jobs require much planning and ability. Keingstein says, "We must get the equipment off the floor, yet still keep it accessible for maintenance. When you come right down to it, there are no easy jobs."

Under less than ideal working conditions, the company has grown and prospered year after year. As Berger and Keingstein shared their philosophy, it became apparent that the secrets to their success are applicable to any hvac company.

Quality service

The owners believe that the secret of their success is doing all they can to implement the company motto: "Quality works at Berger Corp."



BERGER CORP. owners, Bob Keingstein (left) and Bob Berger, find sharing the same office reduces communication problems.

Each customer receives a "Quality Report Card." When cards are returned, they are placed on a bulletin board for all to see. Next to the report card is a sign stating the company's quality policy: "Berger Corp. is committed to prompt, professional service the first time, every time, with guaranteed customer satisfaction. Satisfied customers will insure continued growth of our company and the people who make our company work."

Both Berger and Keingstein

have attended the Quality College sponsored by the Air Conditioning Contractors of America (ACCA). Since only about 12 other companies from the area have been to the Quality College, they believe this gives them a tremendous competitive advantage.

Keingstein said, "People must get something over and above what they expect. Quality must be talked about, it must be refined, and it must be delivered."

Customers

According to Diane Berenger, who has been the company's office manager for over 20 years, "The reason we've been successful is we treat our customers and employees like family. When customers call again we recognize their voices. We let them know we

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Berger said, "Our customers know we're an integral part of their business. They rely on us to manage their air conditioning needs. We're their consultants. They see us as the pros."

Keingstein added, "Our customers ask us for advice, like I'd ask my dad for advice. Our customers are more intelligent about hvac today. They're asking better questions. They're asking for better systems and better service. They're also asking for the right price for the service we deliver. Because our customers know more about their hvac needs, they realize the right price is not the low price. They have been around the block and want to get the best value for their money. And value goes back to quality."

As an extension of the family atmosphere, the company provides office employees with lunch. The

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