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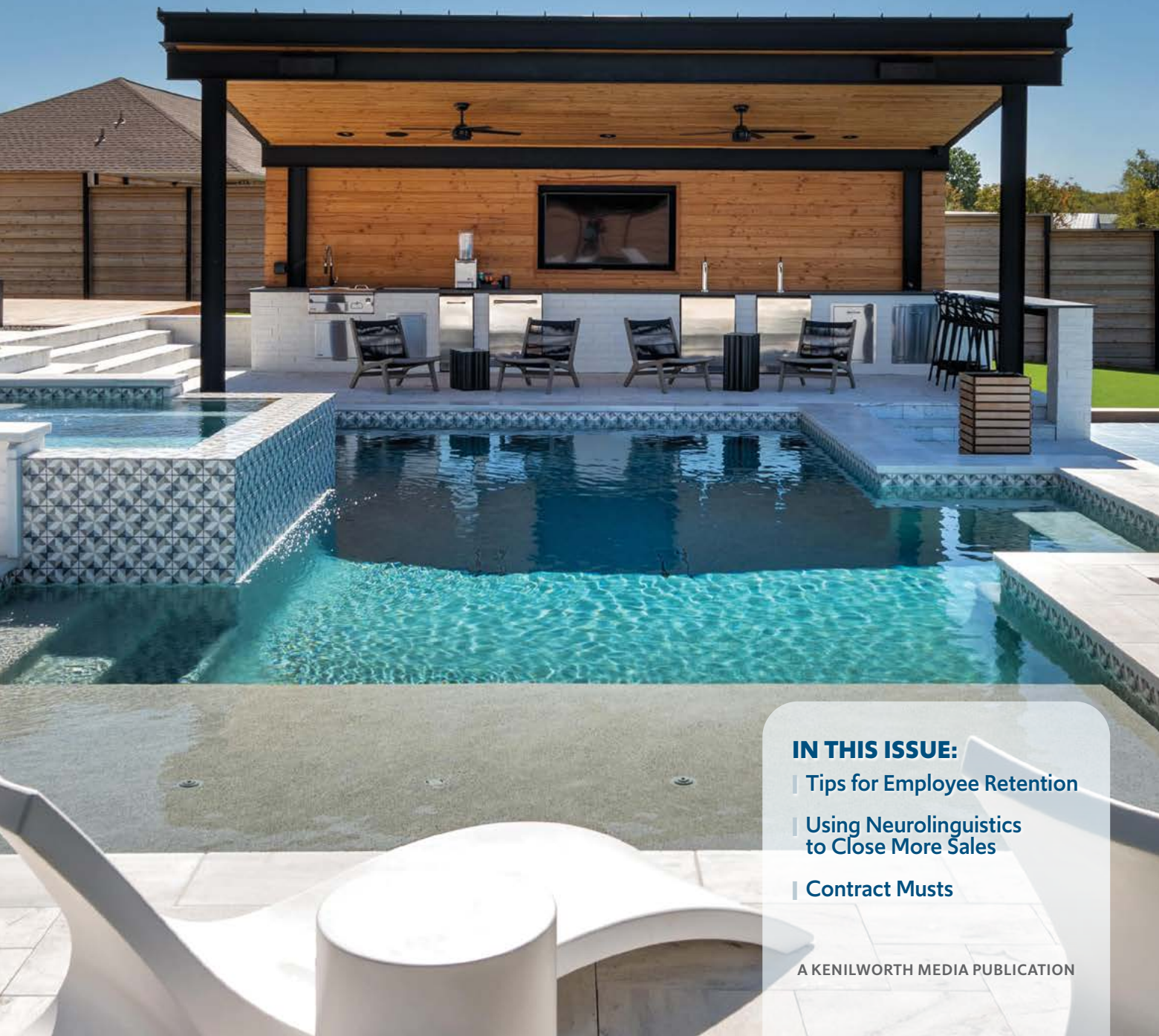
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APRIL 13, 2026

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POOL AND SPA NEWS

EDITORIAL

Joanne McClain | EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
jmcclain@kenilworth.com

Rebecca Robledo | DEPUTY EDITOR
rrobledo@kenilworth.com

SALES

Gary Carr | DIRECTOR, STRATEGIC ACCOUNTS
gcarr@kenilworth.com

Lisa Heitner | DIRECTOR, STRATEGIC ACCOUNTS
lheitner@kenilworth.com

ART

Melissa Krochmal | GRAPHIC DESIGNER

PUBLISHED BY KENILWORTH MEDIA INC.

Erik Tolles | CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Philip Hartung | CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

Krista Taylor | VICE-PRESIDENT OF OPERATIONS

Joseph Galea | VICE-PRESIDENT OF SALES

John MacPherson | DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Blair Adams | EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

Matthew Buckstein | DIRECTOR OF DIGITAL OPERATIONS

HOW TO REACH US:

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Say Yes to Saying No



There's a certain kind of pride in this industry that I really admire.

Pool and spa professionals are problem-solvers. They figure things out, they show up, and they try to make it work. And a lot of the time, that willingness to say "yes" is part of what helps a business grow in the first place.

But if we're being honest, saying yes all the time can also get a company into trouble.

Yes to the rush job. Yes to the customer who wants more than the budget allows. Yes to work that's not really in your wheelhouse, but feels too hard to turn down. Yes to one more exception, one more favor, one more "can you just ..." tacked onto an already full schedule.

At some point, all those yeses stop feeling like good service and start feeling like chaos.

That's why I think there's a real business case for saying "no" — and not in a cold or corporate way. I mean in a grounded, healthy-business way.

Sometimes no is what protects the quality of your work. Sometimes it's what keeps your team from getting buried and burnt out. Sometimes it's what saves a customer from a bad outcome that was never going to go smoothly in the first place.

We don't always talk about it this way, but boundaries are part of professionalism.

A company that knows what it does well, what it can realistically deliver, and where it needs to draw the line is usually in a much better position than one that tries to be everything to everyone. That doesn't make a business difficult. It actually makes it dependable.

And honestly, customers can usually tell the difference.

Most people don't need a contractor or service pro to promise the moon. They need someone who will tell them the truth. Maybe the truth is that the timeline isn't realistic. Maybe the truth is that a lower budget means scaling back the scope. Maybe the truth is that another company would be a better fit.

That kind of honesty may not feel as satisfying in the moment as landing the job. But it builds trust, and trust is worth a lot more than one shaky yes.

There's also the team side of this. When every job becomes an emergency and every request gets forced through, employees feel it first. They feel it in the schedule, in the stress and in the sense that the target keeps moving. If companies want to keep good people, they have to create environments where expectations are clear and not every day is built around overpromising.

Sometimes saying no is how a business protects its reputation, its people and its future. And in an industry built so much on trust and referrals, that's not bad business at all. That's good judgment. **PSN**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joanne McClain".

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Newly Structured Western Show Maintains Momentum

With a new opening event and daytime-only show-floor hours, the event retained brisk traffic.

Organizers of the Western Pool & Spa Show have been fine-tuning their opening-day social event, and they think they've come upon the right formula.

This year's WPSS, which took place Feb. 12-14 in Long Beach, Calif., saw attendance numbers among the highest ever, at nearly 10,500. In addition, more than 1,700 professionals attended the educational program.

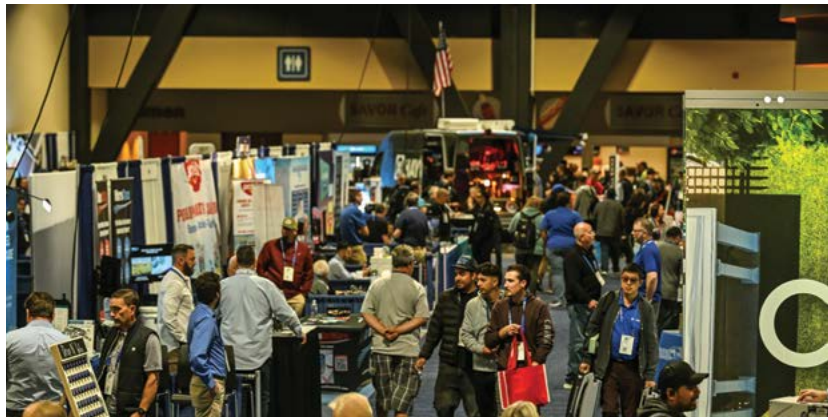
At "Rock the Pool Industry: A Night of Music for a Great Cause" the first night, attendees could network and enjoy the Journey cover band. Between the sales of 800 tickets and corporate sponsorships, they raised approximately \$70,000 that was given to the Pool & Hot Tub Alliance's Step Into Swim program, which provides funds for free or inexpensive swim lessons to those who otherwise could not afford them.

To accommodate the concert, everything on Thursday's schedule was backed up: Seminars started in the morning rather than the afternoon, with the show floor opening in the afternoon, rather than the evening.

"That allowed us to make it earlier, so you're not going until way after midnight," explained Show Director Eric Nielson.

Organizers have continued their move toward making business classes a bigger part of the mix, which included 94 sessions this year. According to Nielson, the additions are getting a favorable response, with courses on such topics as marketing, accounting, human resources, employee hiring and retention, and artificial intelligence filling more than their fair share of seats.

Nielson said the same schedule will be used for next year's Western Pool and Spa Show, set to take place Feb. 25-27, 2027 at the Long Beach Convention Center. **PSN**



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SCAN TO LEARN MORE

Updated Public-Pool Water-Quality Standard Published

The Pool & Hot Tub Alliance and the International Code Council have released the latest version of their water-quality standard.

ANSI/PHTA/ICC-11 2026 American National Standard for Water Quality in Public Pools and Hot Tubs/Spas (shorthanded as PHTA-11), provides recommended minimum guidelines for water quality in public pools and hot tubs/spas, intended to minimize health and safety hazards for bathers. While specifying parameters, it does not prescribe the technologies to achieve them.

Changes include a reorganization of content, especially in Section 5: "Parameters Impacting Disinfection and Public Health," and Section 6: "Parameters Impacting Physical Properties of the Venue." Significant updates and clarification of scientific terms were made for the definitions for "contaminant," "oocyst," "protozoa," and more.

The standard applies to pool service companies, certifying bodies, pool designers, public health and building code officials, local municipalities, and pool and spa operators. **PSN**

Heritage Announces New and Upcoming Locations

The McKinney, Texas-based megadistributor Heritage Pool Supply continues its aggressive pace of growth. It has announced not only 10 recently opened locations, but another 10 that are soon to come. New warehouses have recently opened in: Orlando, Pensacola, and Kissimmee, Fla.; Fresno, Elk Grove, and Roseville, Calif.; Alpharetta and Savannah, Ga.; Scottsdale, Ariz.; and Pharr, Texas. New locations are expected soon in Buffalo Grove, Ill.; Mansfield, Texas; Goodyear and Queen Creek, Ariz.; Huntsville, Ala.; Totowa, N.J.; Newbury Park, Calif.; Lafayette, La.; Hatfield, Pa.; and Panama City, Fla. **PSN**

Woman of the Year Award Program Launches

The Pool & Hot Tub Alliance has added a new category to its Superlative Awards. The PHTA Woman of the Year, co-sponsored by PHTA's Women of Water initiative and POOLCORP, recognizes exceptional women who have impacted the industry through their leadership, service, and influence. Candidates should demonstrate industry leadership, advocacy for women, professional integrity, commitment to education, impact and innovation, and community building and inclusion. To qualify, professionals must have a minimum of five years' experience in the pool/spa industry, be actively involved with PHTA, and be employed by a PHTA member company in good standing.

Nominations for this and all PHTA Superlative Awards are due by June 30. **PSN**

CALL FOR ENTRIES: 2026 Aquatics International Dream Designs

Our sister publication, *Aquatics International*, is accepting applications for Dream Designs — an annual program that celebrates extraordinary aquatics facilities and waterparks, and the design teams involved. Selected entries will be featured in the July/August issue of the digital and print magazine, as well as online. The program is open to all aquatics designers, builders and developers. Categories include leisure pools/family aquatics centers; waterparks; competition pools; waterpark resorts; hotel/resort pools; sprayparks; therapy/wellness centers; multifamily housing; swim schools; country club/swim clubs; health/fitness centers; and military/government facilities. Qualifying projects include new builds and renovations completed within the last five years. For more information about the program and how to apply, go to aquaticshintl.com. Do you have questions? Contact Rebecca Robledo at 323.801.4974 or rrobledo@kenilworth.com. **PSN**



PHOTOS: POST BROTHERS

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Legendary for a Lifetime

Meet the Lifetime Achievement honorees from this year's Pentair Pool Pro Awards.

By Nate Traylor

For this year's Pentair Pool Pro Awards, the manufacturer applied the theme "Backyard Legends." That title certainly holds true for two of its honorees in particular.

Among the various categories of winners recognized in Pentair's award program are two Lifetime Achievement Award recipients..

As the company describes it, these well-rounded professionals must set and reach a high bar for performance and influence inside and outside their own companies: "This award is designed to honor senior leadership and seasoned business owners who have made strides in their community and become local backyard legends through hard work and community relationship-building."

Here, we meet this year's Pentair Pool Pro Lifetime Achievement honorees: Shannon Graves and Sean Johnson.



Shannon Graves

*Owner
Graves Pools & Spas
Myrtle Beach, S.C.*

Shannon Graves Jones jokes that she's not old enough to have a lifetime achievement award. But after nearly five decades

inside the family business — and a career defined by steady growth, staff development, and a service-first culture — her Pentair Pool Pro Lifetime Achievement Award reads less like a capstone and more like a milestone.

Graves is the third-generation owner of Graves Pools & Spas in Myrtle Beach, S.C., a company her grandfather started in 1975. She began helping out at age 10 in the office with her grandmother. From the beginning, she says, the best part was learning the trade and the people side of it from the two men who built the company.

The experience wasn't only educational. "First, I loved working with my grandfather," she says. "Then I got to work with my dad — working beside him for 15 years and learning from him."

When her father's chapter in the business ended, Graves found herself at a crossroads about what came next. "When he left, I really had to do some soul searching," she says. "I decided this is the best

"No matter where the technology goes, there will always be a need for someone to install it, fix it, or replace it."

place I can be and touch a lot of lives. It's been pure joy ever since."

Today, Graves Pools & Spas serves both commercial and residential customers, focused on aftermarket work — service, maintenance, equipment installs and replacement, and water management. The company supports roughly 1,000 commercial accounts and 600 residential customers, with a team of about 50 employees and a 25-vehicle fleet.

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In addition to maintaining a high caliber of customer service, Graves keeps its operation properly staffed by recruiting high schoolers and showing them a career path.

PHOTO COURTESY GRAVES POOLS & SPAS

In recent years, it has expanded its offerings, including a pool-cleaning division that quickly grew to more than 200 accounts.

Built to serve: Graves' people-first blueprint

The letter nominating her for the award describes a culture anchored by five core values — dependability, faith, momentum, honesty, and teamwork.

These are communicated in a simple motto: “We are an honest, dependable, faith-filled team creating unstoppable momentum.” That faith-forward, people-first mindset isn’t a tagline for Graves; she treats it as a business operating system, reinforced through regular staff meetings and hands-on training in what she calls the ‘Graves way.’”

As Graves sees it, this ethic has served the company well. “This business is absolutely blessed,” she says. “We have not gone one year without 5% to 10% growth.”

She connects that consistency directly to the company’s identity. “I really think it’s because we are a service business,” Graves says. “Everything we do is serving our customers.”

That service shows up in the field and in workforce development. Graves worries about a shortage of hands-on tradespeople and actively recruits high schoolers by offering a path to a real career. “No matter where the technology goes,” she

says, “there will always be a need for someone to install it, fix it, or replace it.”

Graves also extends that service beyond her customer list. The company partners with the YMCA, providing products and services at no cost to help keep pools ready for swim instruction. “Our big focus is making sure we can get as many children through swim lesson at the Y as possible,” she says.

When Graves learned that an employee had nominated her for the Pentair award, she didn’t take it as a personal victory lap. She saw it as proof that the culture is real.

“I sat here and cried, because that means the world,” she says. “Her letter means more to me than anything. To be recognized by Pentair is truly a blessing.”



Sean Johnson

*Executive Vice President of Field Service
Amenity Pool Services
Orlando*

Sean Johnson isn’t the type to lead behind a screen, even when distance and title would make it easy.

Overseeing Amenity Pool Services’ Southern operations from New York City, Johnson still finds time to work alongside technicians in the field — ride-alongs, early starts, hands in the work — because he wants to stay close to the job, the customers, and the people who keep the business moving.

That hands-on approach is a big reason Johnson, executive vice president of field service for Amenity Pool Services, earned the Pentair Pool Pro Lifetime Achievement Award. Johnson didn’t campaign for votes, he says. The support came anyway.

“I was so surprised. I was super honored,” he says.

He still remembers the exact date he got his first job in the pool industry: April 4, 2000. He was 18 and working as a lifeguard — an ironic starting point, considering that pools made him

uneasy for much of his childhood. "Growing up in New York City, there wasn't a lot of opportunity for kids to swim," Johnson says.

He didn't learn to swim until he was 12 or 13, and he describes those early years as shaped by anxiety around water. Becoming a lifeguard changed that. It was a confidence boost and it set the direction for everything that followed.

A couple of years into college, Johnson helped launch the New York division for swimming pool management company American Pool. Over the next two decades, he scaled the operation from about 10 commercial pools to more than 400, turning the business into one of the largest commercial pool service operations in New York City.

Why Sean Johnson still rides routes

Today, Johnson leads Amenity Pool Services, a sister brand to American Pool, focused on residential pool service in Arizona, Texas, and Florida. The shift from commercial to residential wasn't just a change in customer type — it meant learning and adapting to new operating rhythms and regional realities.

"The way you clean a pool in Florida certainly isn't the way you'd clean a pool in Phoenix," he explains.

To learn it properly, he goes where the learning is. The move kept him on the road — 270 nights in hotels over the past two years, by his count — but he considers the travel essential. "I got 99 percent of my advice from the guys doing the work," he says.

Johnson's time in the field also sharpened his view on leadership at scale. "In a corporate environment it's easy to lose focus on the people actually producing the revenue," he says.

His antidote is technician-first thinking. "If you're not improving the lives of your techs, your business isn't going to grow," he says. **PSN**

"If you're not improving the lives of your techs, your business isn't going to grow."

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An Analytic Approach to the Employee Retention Issue

For this Millennial pool business owner looking to bridge the gap between his mentors and mentees, learning what made each employee tick proved the key to solving the retention issue.

By Josh Henderson

In late winter 2021, I entered into an agreement to purchase Adcock Pool and Spa in Southern Mississippi. I immediately decided that we needed to take the organization into growth mode so that we could afford to sustain the transition and get the business prepared for the impending recession that economists were predicting.

I was presented with a challenge: How could I grow the business while the country was amid a

pandemic and a labor shortage? I needed to put together a marketing plan for the business.

In exploring this subject, I gained a better understanding of our staff, which had ripple effects on all aspects of the company.

The less obvious route

There are two primary channels when it comes to marketing — public relations and human resources.

While public relations may seem the more intuitive of the two, my preferred marketing strategy is to maximize the potential of each existing customer and employee before I spend a single dollar trying to lure new ones.

Accordingly, I needed to figure out a metric to measure the performance of each employee. Were we maximizing each one's potential? If not, how could we? I decided to focus on the culture of our business to see how tuned in our employees were.

After performing an internal audit on the culture of the business, I thought I discovered that we had a big generational gap in our primary employees. Because of this gap, we had fractured into separate groups of employees that were at odds with others of different generational classifications. I needed to figure out how to build a bridge from one side of the divide to the other.

To develop a strategy for closing this gap, I determined that I needed to better understand who our employees are and what motivates them.

The first tactic I used to better familiarize myself with each employee was having each staffer take a Meyers Briggs Personality Assessment. This free test helps determine which of 16 distinct personality types the employee falls under. I emailed a link of the assessment to everybody on my staff. In addition, I started having all new hires complete the assessment. The results I received back from the Meyers Briggs assessments proved enlightening, supplying me with guidance on how to approach my team.

From our employees' Meyers Briggs assessments, I learned that it didn't really matter what age group our employees belong to. The assessments helped me understand that we all have a distinct way of interacting with one another. And based upon our personality profile, we tend to be introverted or extroverted, aggressive or passive, judgmental or accepting.

Understanding personality types

After learning the characteristics of a personality type, I could better understand that the way our employees interacted wasn't necessarily directly a result of their age, but rather was related to their personality type.

Understanding this helped take the sting out of the personal conflicts we were having. With a

better understanding of the differing personality types, I began having one-on-one meetings with each employee.

Prior to our meeting, I would email a link to the Meyers Briggs Assessment and then ask the employee to come to our discussion prepared with a list of goals. I wanted to hear about their specific objectives for the next six months, the next year, and then 2- and 5-year goals.

Everyone has bills to pay, but I wanted to find out the "why" proposition of each employee.

Having each employee bring me a list of goals helped determine that not all employees are motivated by money. In fact, a big percentage of our staff had goals that were not related to money, but rather health and fitness, hunting/fishing, and other recreational goals, or perhaps spending more time with family.

Of those who had financial goals, almost all of them were rooted in the desire to own a home of their own.

In terms of actual generational differences, the biggest lesson I learned was that the older group of employees seemed to be motivated more by time off to spend with family, whereas the younger group seemed driven by the desire to belong to something bigger than themselves, while still maintaining a path to homeownership. I now had a data set that I could analyze to determine the best path forward for the business.

It took me almost a month to complete my employee meetings. The time spent getting to know each individual was one of the most valuable time investments in my career. I made a point of memorizing specific aspects of each employee's life and goals. What we did with our data generated tremendous ripples across our company.

Guidance and counsel for after clocking out

Our employees inspired me to think outside the box.

During my interviews I discovered that many wanted to buy a house, boat, etc. But most believed that those goals fell out of reach.

I asked if they wanted financial help planning for their goals. Almost all said yes. Of those, I asked them to write down their monthly and weekly budgets. Many didn't have a budget, so I asked them to write a list of their expenses. When I dug into their expenses, I learned they would eat at convenience stores or fast

When Josh Henderson purchased Adcock Pool & Spa in Ellisville, Tenn., he not only had to transition it through a change of ownership, but also navigate it through pronounced generational shifts.

PHOTO COURTESY ADCOCK POOL & SPA



food restaurants everyday instead of packing lunches or eating breakfast before leaving the house.

I noticed symmetries in how our employees got their nutritional sustenance and this perceived inability to purchase a house. I became concerned not only for the employees' financials, but also for how they fed the physical energy demands of a full day.

Because of the labor shortage and our industry's inability to find talent, I decided to focus on making sure we were maximizing the performance of our existing employees before doubling down on finding new help.

To help these staffers meet their personal goals, and foster the company's success, I initiated some new programs as a result of these interviews.

Implementation phase

Professional athletes use their bodies to earn a living, so they tend to treat their bodies as finely tuned machines, with personal trainers, chefs and life coaches.

But where most professional sporting events last three hours, our employees spend eight to 10 hours a day using their bodies to earn a living. Much of that work is done in blistering heat, rain, snow, and cold temperatures.

But not all of us can afford personal trainers, chefs and life coaches. And many employees were relying

on convenience stores, fast food restaurants and energy drinks to fuel the grueling work day.

To help, I hired a holistic counseling business to take on our Human Resources Department. The company had nutritionists, dieticians, cognitive behavioral therapists, yoga instructors, and an ordained pastor on staff.

We also offered financial education. We began by teaching how to properly read a pay stub and about how earning compound interest through a 401k program can be a significant strategy for long-term financial security.

Secondly, we explained that convenience stores, fast food lanes and energy drinks were an expensive options for nutritional sustenance. Being disciplined and packing a lunch was healthy and could produce financial benefits.

Not only that, we explained, but it could have an impact on one's ability to achieve their goals. On average, an employee spends \$25 to \$30 per day buying meals and snacks. Packing a lunch could result in a savings of almost \$20 per day. Extrapolated across a work week, month and annually that could result in a savings of \$100 per week, \$400 per month or \$4,800 per year. These savings can translate into a down payment on a house, car or family vacation.

Essentially, we were eating our goals that we didn't think were attainable.

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The key to happiness in the workplace doesn't begin and end with pay. Taking the time to learn the goals, dreams, and likes of each employee helped Henderson build a stronger staff.

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In addition, these choices stand to impact the company. A diet of convenience store snacks, fast food and energy drinks can produce employees who crash mid-afternoon. It seemed that changing how we fueled up could result in more productivity by supplying the necessary energy to complete the last several hours of the work day.

I pitched the concept of voluntarily ditching convenience stores and fast-food restaurants. Our employees weren't super receptive, so I decided to outlaw stopping at convenience stores and fast food restaurants while on the clock. In exchange, the company provided water and Gatorade, and then we placed YETI coolers on each truck, so employees could keep their lunches and drinks cold.

Bridging the divide

Through the interviews, I also learned more about generational differences, especially the feeling by seasoned staff that newer employees don't work long enough hours, and that they spend too much work time on their cell phones.

I needed them to better understand our younger staff. Just because they liked working long hours didn't mean everyone around them should. Instead

of focusing on deficiencies, we should focus on each employee's strengths and put them in environments where they would succeed.

As a compromise, we told younger employees that they could check text messages and social media accounts in between customers and store duties. We created a private group on Facebook which is only for Adcock employees. This allows us to inform our staff about company meeting dates and announcements, but on their terms. Our private group is now also a fun way for staffers to share their days with members of other departments.

In 2022, we more than doubled our new pool builds versus 2021. Retail store sales also doubled time frame. While COVID and inflation no doubt accounted for part of that growth, I believe one reason Adcock's is surviving succession is because of our newfound understanding of our employees. **PSN**

Josh Henderson is general manager and owner of Adcock Pool & Spa in Ellisville, Tenn. With more than 20 years in the industry, he has led teams in service, retail, and marketing, and contributed to the Pool & Hot Tub Alliance and Master Pools Guild.

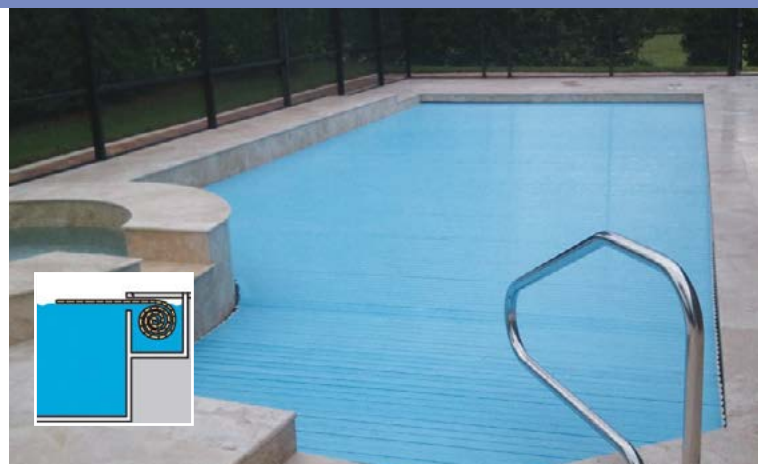
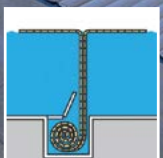
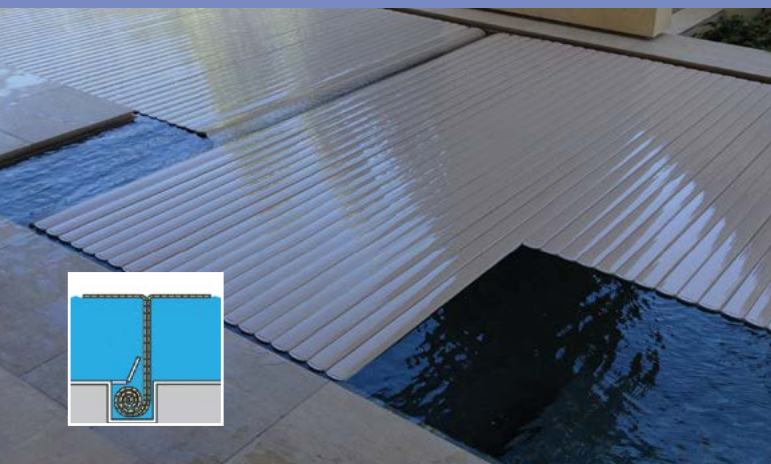


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From Rendering to Reality

This one-of-a-kind backyard by Phoenix-based Red Rock Pools & Spas merges the fun and novelty of a waterpark with the elegance of a resort. Years in the making, it has been chronicled in these pages since the early days. Here, a look at the progress to date before the project's big reveal in a future issue.

By Rebecca Robledo



RENDERING AND PHOTOS: RED ROCK POOLS & SPAS

► THE MAIN POOL



The main pool, which reaches 17-foot depths, features a floating firepit, swim-up bar, planter island, pavilion, and underground window. **Top:** The main pool during the shotcrete phase. **Center:** Farther along. Crews set the palm trees early to take advantage of the open access before more trades would crowd the site. **Bottom:** Here, the sunken firepit has been tiled. The main pool sits between the firepit and the cabana, seen on the left side of the photo. An underground window is seen at the far back, with a ladder in front of it. Artificial rock (foreground) has been sculpted for one of the grottos.

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► ROCK WATERFALL AND SLIDES



A massive rock waterfall, composed of both real and artificial boulders, features two slides — an open flume and a tube slide that wraps around the back. The extensive grotto underneath will include a bar and also be themed like a mine shaft, with exposed posts and beams, in addition to the rock work. **Pictured clockwise from top left:** To bury the fiberglass tube slide, crews cast a culvert around it. In the rock waterfall area, masonry walls with a concrete lid bear the weight, to spare the fiberglass. The artificial rock will be used throughout the grotto and slide area. The tube slide being built around the structure. The lower pool, with the hole denoting where the slide exits.

► SHARK TANK



A 30,000-gallon shark tank sits between the living room and main pool, with a submerged window providing a view from the water. The acrylic panels had to be installed to withstand water pressure on both sides – the pool on one side and the shark tank on the other. **Pictured above left:** The shark tank is erected before contractors build the basement room in which it will sit. The radiused acrylic panel that provides most of the viewing measures 350 inches wide and 130 inches tall. It had to be ordered well in advance, so the team had to build the structure and rebates precisely to fit the sizable piece. **Above right:** The shark tank window from the pool side, seen with the ladder in front of it.



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► LAZY RIVER



A lazy river runs approximately 540 feet throughout the backyard. A subterranean go-kart track and tunnel runs directly underneath for approximately 150 feet. **Pictured above left:** Early stage of the lazy river. The four square plywood frames will accommodate windows that serve as skylights for the underground go-kart track and tunnel directly below. **Above, right:** The shotcrete is extended across one of the river's loops to strengthen the structure. **Right:** The lazy river in advanced stages of construction, with the artificial turf pad to the left.



► SURF SIMULATOR



The most novel feature – taking the backyard squarely into waterpark territory – is a specialized FlowRider surf simulator. The inflatable feature can easily be deflated, folded and concealed by a Twinscape motorized movable floor, which is covered in artificial turf. This leaves more usable space, protects the surf machine from the sun, and leaves a cleaner look.

Pictured left: The pool that will house the surf simulator. **Below left:** The surf simulator in progress. The inflatable portion will sit atop the slats, with the funnel intake underneath. The notches in the edges of the basin will accommodate rollers for the movable floor. **Below right:** The movable floor during installation, with the artificial turf pad below.



BONDED BY NEUROLINGUISTICS



PHOTOS: GREEN SCENE LANDSCAPING AND SWIMMING POOLS



The success of a project begins with the customer relationship. Here, designer Scott Cohen explains how to develop a quick rapport by adapting to how they relate to the world.

By Scott Cohen

Did you ever notice how sometimes you just “click” with some people but not others?

Over the years, I have become great friends with many of my clients. By the end of a project, I know exactly what they want and how to make them happy. But what if you could become close friends at the very beginning of the project? Wouldn't a closer relationship right upfront help you understand their desires better? How can we get to click with all of our clients?

I spent the first decade of my 30-year career in garden design focusing on being the best pool designer, contractor, and garden artisan that I could. But I spent half my time working as an impromptu marriage counselor. Many clients are couples, and I often find the old adage “opposites attract” to be true. This sometimes leaves us designing a single project for two people with completely different ideas and preferences. It makes things interesting.

How can we all get on the same page? We want to communicate with both personalities in their own preferred language.

Steal a chapter from the therapists' book

Professional therapists need to quickly bond with their clients and build rapport with a high level of trust to be effective at their jobs. Knowing this, I have stolen a chapter from their book — well, not just a chapter.

Actually, I have read a dozen books on the subjects of body language and neuro-linguistic programming to help me quickly become a better friend to my clients. Neuro-



When building rapport with new people, try matching their tempo, tonality, and speed at which they speak. You will find yourself in sync with them.

linguistic programming, or NLP, is actually a type of hypnotherapy developed by Dr. Richard Bandler and Dr. John Grinder back in the 1970s. Understanding the basics of NLP will help you develop a better way to communicate directly with your clients and become friends fast.

People hire whom they like, and they like those who are similar to them.

Whether we like it or not, people decide how they feel about somebody within minutes of meeting them.

They will make this decision based on what they see and hear. When they like you, they subconsciously tend to see you in the best light, looking for opportunities to agree with you. If they don't like you, the opposite is true.

Think back to high school: Remember all those cliques of people who hung out together? I think the saying goes, "Birds of a feather flock together." Well, that remains true forever. We never really get out of that high school mentality. Think of your own close friends and the people you hang out with today. They probably are a lot like you, with similar interests, clothing styles, likes, and dislikes.

Through NLP, we form a bond with a customer by relating to them where they are. It begins by understanding that we all have a preference in how we take in information. Some of us are more visual, some auditory, and others kinesthetic. We give away our preference through the language that we use. Some examples:

- "Do you see what I'm saying?"
- "Do you hear what I mean?"
- "Do you understand what I'm getting at?"

Your answer may help determine if your personal preference is visual, auditory, or kinesthetic.

Clues on language preference

To learn about our clients quickly, we should use the same words they do when they communicate with us.

But it starts by listening to them.

When meeting with clients, I go through an extensive design questionnaire with dozens of questions about entertaining needs, style preferences, spouse, etc.

Honestly, I already know the answers to most of these questions when I ask them. But through their answers, I am seeking information about whether the client is more visual, auditory, or kinesthetic, so I can select and phrase the words I use accordingly. At the end of the meeting clients often say, "I just feel like we click."

You can tell a potential client's preference by listening well to the words they use when communicating with you. Keep them talking as much as possible. I realize this is contrary to the practice of many salespeople in our industry, who love to tout the benefits of their products and services. My advice: Shut up and listen. You'll gain a ton of information and really learn how to service your client best. That strong relationship leads to better designs, happier clients, and more money for your firm.

People with a visual preference will say things like, "I know what I like when I see it," "I have trouble visualizing," and "Can you show me a picture?"

People with an auditory preference will say things like, "Tell me more about it," "That sounds interesting," "I love the sound of waterfalls," or "As you said ..."

Kinesthetics will talk thoughtfully about the "feel of the yard." They will say things such as, "I want a space that feels homey, or cozy," or "I like the ambiance of a fireplace." They typically also talk with a lot of hand movements.

There are also eye charts that help you identify language preference by watching the client's eye movement when they are speaking. Visual people often look up when they are explaining something,

as if the information is somewhere up inside their head. Auditory preference is shown by side-to-side eye movement. And, finally, people with a kinesthetic language preference often look down and to the right (opposite for left handers).

Parrot back the words they use

If they want a spa, sell them a spa — don't call it a hot tub.

I once saw a salesman correct a client who asked for a Jacuzzi. "What you mean is you want a hot tub," they said. "Jacuzzi is just a brand name." The potential customer's body language shrank away, and you could tell the salesperson had made him feel stupid and embarrassed. It was no surprise when the potential customer chose not to buy either a hot tub or a Jacuzzi on that particular day.

It's not that people won't understand what you are saying if you don't speak in the identical manner of their preference. One time I heard a child say, "I'm thirsty for pizza." I know what it means, but it

required another step. On the other hand, when you do match a person's language preference, the information is taken in directly to their subconscious, removing the step of translating into their own preferred language.

It's very subtle, but it works.

Mirror, mirror on the wall

Rapport is a state of unconscious responsiveness.

When building rapport with new people you meet, try to match their tempo, tonality and speed at which they speak, in addition to their language. You will find yourself in sync with them: Subconsciously, they will see you as a friend, and people look for the best in those they like.

Match their physical movements as well. If a client puts her hand on her chin, mimic the behavior and put your hand on your chin. It might seem awkward at first, but you'll get the hang of it quickly, and it speaks to their subconscious. In their mind, you are a trusted friend.

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Matching and mimicking behavior can be about how you dress, too. Don't show up to a business meeting wearing flip flops and a tank top. I try to remember what the clients were wearing at the last meeting and dress accordingly at the next.

The best first impression

My wife says there are two things I need to improve, the first one is that I need to listen better.

I don't remember what she said the second one was.

Becoming a better listener can help you improve your design skills, customer service, work relations and, yes, even your communication with your significant other. NLP may very well be the key to developing this skill.

Everyone wants to be able to quickly build rapport and "click" with clients. Learning more about NLP will help you do that and more. As I explained before, NLP has to do with using your client's language preference — visual, auditory or kinesthetic — to communicate more effectively with them. As you hone your NLP and listening skills, you will be able to present concepts that are more in line with your clients' desires and earn more positive referrals and reviews.

Earlier, I discussed listening to the clients' words and communicating with them in their preferred language. Communicating with words is only half the story. We all take in a lot of information and decide if we like somebody else, not just by what they say, but also by reading their body language.

Now, I will address laying the groundwork and making a great first impression.

The voice of your business

We begin forming a bond from the very first time the client contacts us.

The first phone communication is critical. It sets the expectation of the client. When I go to a restaurant, it is often the waitperson who is my first point of contact. When they introduce themselves and open up in a friendly and enthusiastic manner, it makes my whole experience better. On the contrary, when they appear rushed or bothered by the added work, it sets a negative tone for the entire experience.

The person who answers your phones has the same impact. For this reason, my staff receives extensive training on phone etiquette.

The "first on phones" person is responsible for speaking to potential clients, answering questions, and writing down pertinent information about them. They must qualify the client without offending them, and do it all in a warm, friendly tone. They convey our excitement at meeting a new client and discussing an opportunity to build something creative and add another beautiful project to our portfolio.

They also need to capture keywords and phrases to help us assess the client's communication style. The initial phone intake person tries to identify whether the potential client is primarily visual, auditory, or kinesthetic by listening to the words they use and how they phrase their questions. On an intake form, the phone screener will write down keywords the client uses. This will help the designer who goes out on the site consultation to quickly bond with the new client. It can be remarkably effective.

I'll give you an example. On the initial call, a potential client mentioned her house looked like a "high school yard with nothing but concrete and large block walls."

One week later I went to the site on a design consultation. I met the homeowner, and she asked me what I thought of her backyard. I said, "Honestly, all these block walls and concrete remind me of my high school yard from years ago."

The client's body language lit up. She smiled and said, "I know, right?" We experienced the instant bonding "click" that is the goal of practicing NLP.

The right mindset: Make friends first, sales later

If you are like me, you enjoy meeting new people and making friends. I tell my sales trainees not to worry about closing the sale. Let's aim to meet new people and make friends. I challenge them to learn as much as they can about potential new clients and just be friendly. If the homeowner chooses to hire us, all the better.

Still, there are things we should do to make a good first impression on the design consultation. People hire who they like, and they like people who are perceived to be like them. Nobody wants to work with a sourpuss.

Leave your baggage behind. We don't always have great days. Sometimes we get stuck in traffic, our

kids spilled their breakfast, or maybe our boss yelled at us. Whatever the case, take a moment before you walk up to the homeowner's door, take a deep breath and think positive thoughts.

In preparation, I also like to stop a few houses down the street, read the intake form, and familiarize myself with the clients' keywords and verbal cues. Then I approach the home.

First introductions are key to building rapport quickly. Be open, energetic, and stand facing with your heart towards their heart. Shake hands and be the first to announce your name. "Hi! I'm Scott!" with a big smile. When they give you their name, repeat it as you shake hands. This really does help build rapport quickly. After all, isn't it mostly friends who call us by our first names? **PSN**

Scott Cohen is president of The Green Scene, an outdoor design/build firm in Chatsworth, Calif. He also is a construction defect expert witness, consultant, instructor, and author.



Providing samples to touch can especially appeal to those who are more kinesthetically inclined.

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On the Dotted Line

Presenting a contract that clearly outlines your terms has never been more important than in these changing times. Start with these key points.

By Rebecca Robledo



Contracts should specify what happens in the case of unforeseen events such as drastic price increases, severe weather events, or the unearthing of something unexpected in the soil.

AI-GENERATED PHOTO



The decade so far has been one of mystery and frequent use of the word “unprecedented.” First, managing the dichotomy of price increases and supply-line issues paired with record sales. Then, with the more predictable slowing down of construction activity while service remains robust.

As such, everything has become more important. This includes the writing of construction and service contracts. Whether trying to keep up with year-long backlogs or activating plans to balance profit losses, nobody has time for litigation.

To help pool/spa professionals safeguard their businesses, industry and legal experts have weighed in on this and other key issues to address in your contracts.

First, a note about the importance of clarity in your contracts. One might think ambiguities will afford you more leeway in meeting the terms of your contract. But, especially when working with homeowners, the opposite is true. In some states, home-improvement laws fall under the consumer-protection umbrella, because the consumer is considered at a disadvantage. (Conversely, in commercial work, both sides are considered on equal footing.)

If a homeowner files a complaint on a matter about which the contract is vague, the court will decide whose interpretation applies. That rarely works in the contractor’s favor.

“Home improvement ... laws favor the customer,” says attorney Eric Probst, formerly outside general counsel for the Northeast Spa and Pool Association. “So

if there’s any vague statement in the clause, the courts will interpret it against the party who drafted it.”

Here, experts offer more tips to protect yourself.

Update your contract to allow for current conditions.

After the pandemic hit, the entire industry came to more greatly appreciate the value of the *force majeure* clause. Meaning “superior force” in French, this clause relieves the parties from meeting the terms of a contract if circumstances beyond their control make it impossible, illegal, or inadvisable.

To ensure enforceability, the clause must list all the situations that would trigger it. Earthquakes and weather events frequently come in these clauses, as do riots and declarations of war.

During the pandemic, not all states agreed that a standard *force majeure* clause applied to COVID-related issues. So, moving forward, these clauses also should include outbreaks and pandemics, along with related market conditions such as labor and supply shortages. Governmental restrictions such as declarations and emergency orders also should be named, as they can render work illegal and limit the ability of building departments to issue permits.

Of course, if something does activate the *force majeure* clause, the builder or service firm should contact customers immediately to let them know the impact on their projects.

At least as important, contracts should allow room to make price adjustments in response to the frequent

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and sometimes sizable hikes in products and materials. Include clauses that clearly state how long your price is valid and under what circumstances it could increase.

“Be specific as to what triggers an increase, so that way there’s no question as to whether a triggering event has occurred or not,” says Steve Getzoff, outside national counsel for the Pool & Hot Tub Alliance.

It also helps to provide a concrete point of reference for the price hikes, adds Getzoff, also a partner in New York-based law firm Lester Schwab Katz & Dwyer, LLP. For instance, the manufacturer list price could provide this reference.

“That way, there’s no dispute as to what prices we’re comparing,” he explains. “If there’s a dispute, everybody can go look at the list price ... and there shouldn’t be an argument over whether or not the price went up.”

Explain how much of an increase would activate your right to make adjustments, as well as how you’d adjust your price. Will you only charge them your added cost, or will there be mark-up? “Preserve as much right and leeway as you can in your agreement,” Getzoff says. “Then when push comes to shove, see what you can do to satisfy the customer, because that’s always the cheapest way to resolve it.”

As a sidenote: When raising prices post-contract, make sure to present the customer with a change order. And understand that they don’t have to agree to move forward. “You can’t build the pool for [a higher price] if they don’t agree to it,” Probst says.

Also understand that, while such a price escalation clause likely would hold up in court if written properly, it doesn’t necessarily prevent disputes. “That’s a different issue,” Getzoff says.

Finally, salespeople should point out the potential for price increases before the contract is signed.

“If you verbally communicate it, it’s a sign of good service, and it will help you if there’s a dispute at a later time,” Probst says.

List the specific scope of services.

Whether for construction or service, your contract should provide a thorough and detailed account of the services to be provided.

Oversights seem especially easy in service contracts, as companies may overlook aspects of their job that they assume the consumer would know were included, say attorneys who work with pool/spa professionals. “When you get a bill at dinner, it doesn’t just say, ‘\$100 at a steak house,’”

Probst says. “It says ‘\$100’ and includes everything that you have ordered to make sure that’s exactly what you received and then ate.”

As important as what you will do, the contract should outline services you will not perform, and expectations of the customer.

“You might say, ‘We’re here to put in chemicals, test the water, and scoop out leaves. We’re not here to evaluate the pump,’” Getzoff says.

David Hawes, CEO of H&H Pool Services, in Dublin, Calif., specifies that his technicians will not add water to their pools, that solar covers must be removed, that any toys in the pool will be kept there, and that gates need to be unlocked unless the tech has a key or lock combination. His contracts also explain that the company closes between Christmas and New Years. He specifies what special processes will be required occasionally, such as annual service for salt systems and twice-yearly cleaning for filters, and that clients will be charged for them.

On the construction side, list what areas you will not touch. Make it clear if you’re not handling electrical or gas, for instance. If the homeowner is responsible for contracting out the barriers, stipulate that. And if you know other contractors will handle decking or other peripheral features, make it clear you’re not involved or responsible.

It becomes even more important to outline what you won’t do when performing renovation work. Here, you need to avoid liability for problems rooted in original construction or services performed before you were contracted. State exactly what areas you will alter, along with which you will not touch and, therefore, carry no responsibility for.

Say how conflicts will be resolved.

Arbitration clauses, stating that disputes must go to arbitration rather than court, have been a favorite for a while.

When including this clause, look at the costs of arbitration, as it sometimes can be more expensive. Also have an attorney review this language to make sure it aligns with state requirements.

Consider stating that you can work outside arbitration if trying to collect unpaid fees. Some states do not allow contractors to file mechanics liens in arbitration proceedings. And certain states offer other alternatives that yield decisions more quickly and cheaply.



Contracts should make clear what services your company will provide — and what it will not.

AI-GENERATED PHOTO

As an alternative, attorney Mark Stapke considers stating that the parties must go through mediation before seeking arbitration or the courts, because mediation is a non-binding process handled between the two parties rather than the court or other outside entity. In a form contract that the California Association of Realtors provides to its members, for instance, mediation is required as a first step. If the client tries to bypass that, the losing party must pay attorneys' fees.

"That's a big deal," says Stapke, a partner in Stapke Law, a Santa Monica, Calif.-based firm specializing in the construction industries.

"If you get a case involving lots of time in arbitration, then attorneys' fees can be a pretty important part of the case ... I'd recommend the industry learn from the Realtors. You could say you have the right of attorneys' fees and prosecute recovery if you win anyway, but I thought the incentive to go to mediation is a really good one."

Review contracts for accuracy and consistency.

It's easy to repurpose a previously used contract, or borrow from others. When doing so, review the entire document to make sure the final version accurately reflects the services and terms of the work for this particular client.

Contracts often combine special conditions, meaning they were written for the specific job, with general conditions, which are used all the time. If this is the case, it is possible to provide contradictory terms.

For instance, one part of the contract may state that disputes must be resolved through arbitration, while another may require going to the court of jurisdiction. In another example, one clause may say the price is good for acceptance within 30 days and construction within a year, while another may preserve the pricing for a longer period.

Always review the document to make sure that everything is consistent.

"Making sure that your first page in your proposal is mirrored by the other provisions in the contract is pretty important," Stapke says.

Also, if you update certain terms, such as the time window during which your price is valid, make sure your general conditions reflect that.

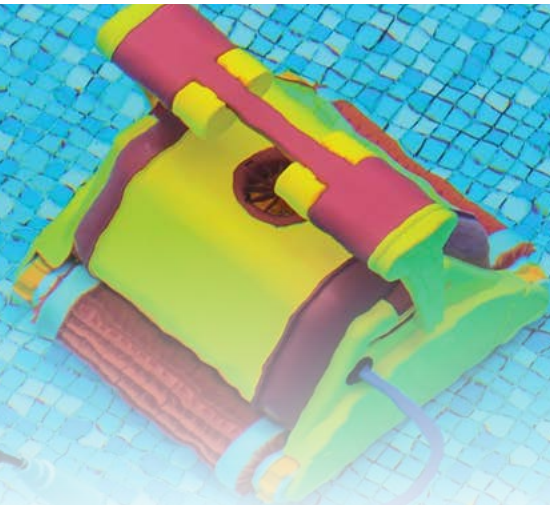
Otherwise, Stapke says, "that's an ambiguity in the contract, and a court would have to figure out that ambiguity if the parties couldn't agree."

When performing construction on commercial projects, the general contractor often will take your bid and submitted contract, then draft up a contract of their own and present it to you to sign. If that's the case, check to make sure all your terms have been included.

For builders, a big one here could be clauses outlining what happens if you hit rock. In his experience, Stapke has sometimes seen that clause removed by the general contractors on large-scale commercial projects.

"It may say you got the soils report, you take the risk of whatever the soils are," Stapke says. "And that could be a big deal ..." **PSN**

Automation and Systems



HYDRAMATIC COVERS

The motors of Aquamatic's Hydramatic covers run on hydraulic pressure rather than electricity. Its patented cable compensator automatically aligns both sides of the cover as it extends and retracts. Choose from 11 standard colors and six designer colors.

Aquamatic Cover Systems | aquamatic.com

AQUA-REX WK1P

The Aqua-Rex electronic water conditioner is designed to control scaling on the tile walls, reduce phosphates, enhance the effect of biocides, and reduce scaling in salt cells. Any scale thrown out by the salt cell is softened without sharp edges.

It leaves the calcium in suspension in the water so it is available to balance low pH at any time.

Aqua-Rex now celebrates 16 years in the U.S. pool market.

"It was greeted with some skepticism when launched 16 years ago, but it has proven itself over the years by delivering what it says on the box," says Aqua-Rex President Jonny Seccombe. "The best thing about it is it's a completely maintenance free product that just gets on with its job without any need to service it."

The Aqua-Rex comes with a 100-Day Money Back Guarantee, along with a warranty that has been extended from 5 to 8 years.

Aqua-Rex | aqua-rex.com



OMNIX

While automation has become common on many new pool builds, the vast majority of residential pools still operate without it, relying on manual timers and basic equipment controls. Hayward OmniX technology is designed to change that.

Rather than relying on a separate automation panel mounted on the wall, OmniX embeds automation intelligence directly into Hayward equipment. This built-in approach allows pool professionals to introduce automation capabilities simply by upgrading key equipment such as pumps and heaters.

Developed with the aftermarket in mind, OmniX enables existing equipment pads to evolve into connected systems without the need for a full automation overhaul. With OmniX-enabled products communicating across the pad, pool

professionals can deliver modern automation functionality to pools that were never originally designed for it.

Contact: Hayward | hayward.com



MOBILE WATERLINK SPIN TOUCH LAB

Designed for pool professionals, the Mobile WaterLink Spin Touch photometer offers a full-color touchscreen to display results or offers the option to transfer test results into the WaterLink Solutions PRO software.

Each sealed reagent disk contains the precise amount of reagent needed to run a complete series of tests in 60 seconds, saving pool businesses time and clean-up procedures.

“This groundbreaking analysis system is so simple anyone can use it,” says Rich DeMoss, Global Pool Business Director at LaMotte Co. “They are reliable, fast, and easy to operate and calibrate, making them a great solution for both field and lab applications.”

Technical support is available at lamotte.com/support, and the unit comes with a 2-year warranty.

LaMotte Co. | lamotte.com

MOBILE LIVE RETAIL & SERVICE

RB's Mobile Live feature is specifically designed to help pool and spa businesses both on the retail floor and by helping service departments in the field.

RB Mobile Live Retail's Line Buster feature offers mobile inventory look-ups and instant access to customer history and profiles. Use a tablet, integrated magnetic strip reader, and pocket barcode scanner to complete sales transactions, process credit cards and email receipts from the retail floor or even in the parking lot.

Using Mobile Live Service, service techs can easily view Scheduled Jobs along with the customer's information including equipment profiles, job notes, directions and pictures on record. Mobile Live eliminates service forms, allows techs to record pool or spa water test results, take payments at the job site, look up inventory and do physical inventory on their truck, all on a phone or tablet.

RB Retail & Service Solutions Software | rbretailandservicesolutions.com



PUMP SHUT-OFF SYSTEM/ SVRS

Vacless' VGB-compliant SVRSs feature an electrical pump shut-off system with an alarm or siren, which instantly turns the pump off upon entrapment.

The SVRS is automatically resettable in 3 minutes, and features no nonsense programming, no false tripping, choice of air or no-air induction, and no bypassing for pool vacuum cleaning.

It installs in 5 minutes onto the pump in place of the suction side drain plug without the use of tools, and is designed for use with pumps of up to 25 horsepower.

“The best thing about this product is the easy installation, no nonsense programming and unquestioned reliability,” says Hassan Hamza, Vacless' president.

Marketing materials and technical support are available. The units are covered under a 3-year warranty.

Vacless Systems | vacless.com



Filters and Filter Media



HALO360 CARTRIDGE FILTER CLEANER

The new Halo360 Cartridge Filter Cleaner features stainless steel construction with six powerful nozzles.

Designed with ergonomics and efficiency in mind, it hooks up directly to a standard garden hose for all pool service professionals to use with ease.

Evolutionary Pool Products | evolutionarypoolproducts.com



HAYWARD SWIMCLEAR CARTRIDGE FILTERS

Hayward SwimClear Cartridge Filters are designed to deliver high-performance filtration while simplifying maintenance and reducing water waste.

Available in both single-element and multi-element cartridge configurations, SwimClear filters provide the flexibility to match filtration capacity to a wide range of residential pool applications, from equipment replacements to new pool builds.

SwimClear filters use large-capacity cartridge elements engineered to capture fine debris while maintaining strong hydraulic performance.

Because cartridge filtration does not require backwashing, SwimClear filters help conserve significant amounts of water compared with traditional sand filtration. The top-access design also allows service professionals to remove and clean cartridges quickly, helping reduce routine maintenance time.

Hayward | hayward.com

PLATINUM PURPLE CARTRIDGE FILTERS

Hurricane Ventures' Platinum Purple Cartridge Filters are designed with several key features.

An antimicrobial infusion helps prevent the buildup of biofilm on cartridge filter's surface.

Its specially engineered end caps hold strict tolerances while still being thermally pliable for different pool and spa environments and temperatures.

The Max Flow Core is strong and highly efficient at directing optimized water flow. Each cartridge filter has high pleat rigidity, making it durable and easy to clean.

The double glued bands add another layer of structural integrity to the entire cartridge filter.

In addition, the filter is attractively priced.

"Our highly efficient USA manufacturing team and process helps protect margin on each cartridge filter we make," says Nathanael Murphy, Hurricane Ventures' director of marketing. "Pool service pros love our cartridges because it's easy for them to sell their own customers on the premium purple product, and the price allows them to maintain healthy margins."

Hurricane Ventures | hurricane-pool-filters.com



ONCORE FILTRATION POOL & SPA FILTER CARTRIDGES

OnCore Filtration replacement filter cartridges are engineered for reliability, water clarity, and long service life. Designed and manufactured in the United States, OnCore cartridges combine advanced filtration media, durable construction, and dependable availability to support pool professionals, distributors, and retailers.

OnCore products are built using high-filament spunbond polyester media, injection-molded cores, and chlorine-resistant urethane end caps, creating cartridges that resist cracking, chemical deterioration, and premature wear while maintaining consistent filtration performance.

OnCore offers a broad lineup of replacement cartridges compatible with most major OEM pool and spa filtration systems. This wide compatibility makes OnCore a dependable source for service professionals who need fast, accurate replacements across many filter platforms.

OnCore Filtration | oncorefiltration.com

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ESSENTIALS SPA SUPPLIES

Mineral Harmony was developed exclusively for use with mineral treated water and is now available in larger sizes with easy use instructions for swim spas and small pools. Each bottle has a chart with swim spa/small pool gallons listed to provide accurate guidance for effortless water balancing.

Essentials-SpaSupplies.com



LATHAM, THE POOL CO.

Latham has expanded its popular Astoria fiberglass pool series with the new Astoria 12 — a 12' x 28' pool/spa combination that delivers a variety of features in a compact footprint, including a built-in spa, tanning ledge and swim-up ledges.

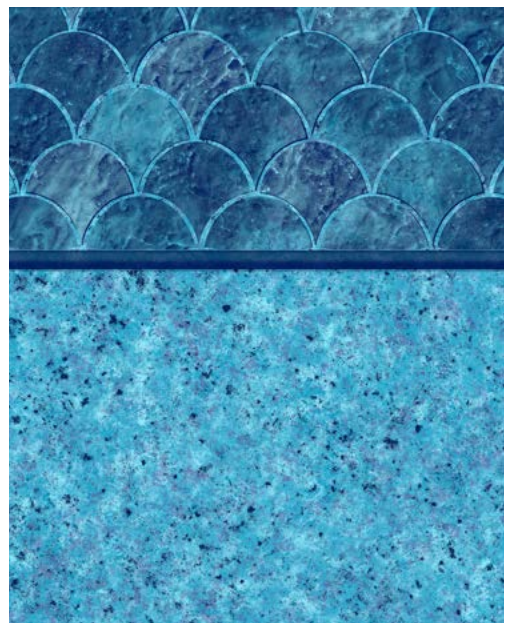
latham.com



LIFE FLOOR

Planks are a new standard Life Floor tile shape which allow for greater design possibilities. They are 48" x 6" and can easily be used in tandem with Life Floor's 24" x 24" squares and 12" x 24" rectangles.

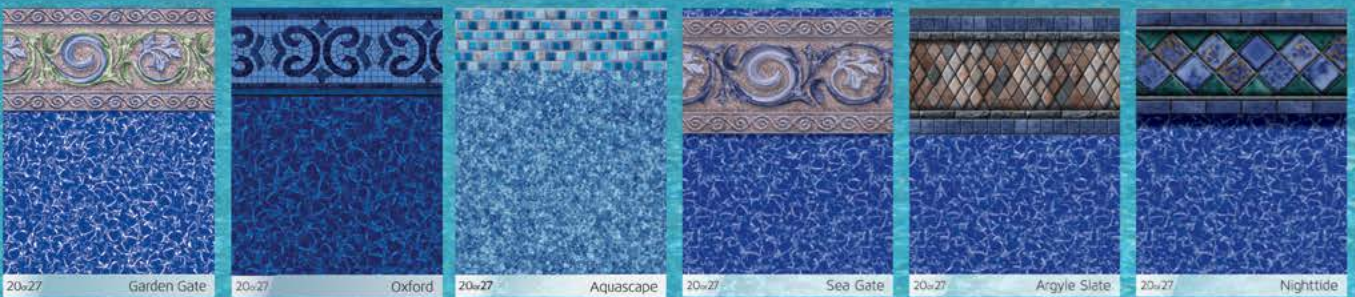
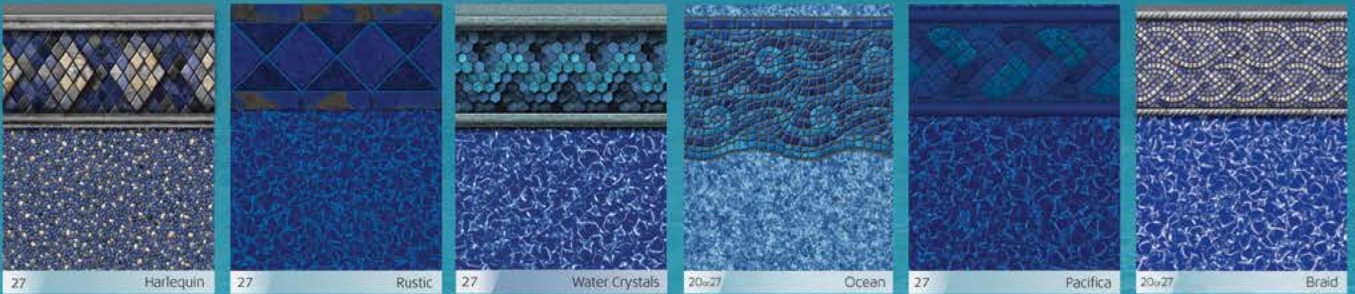
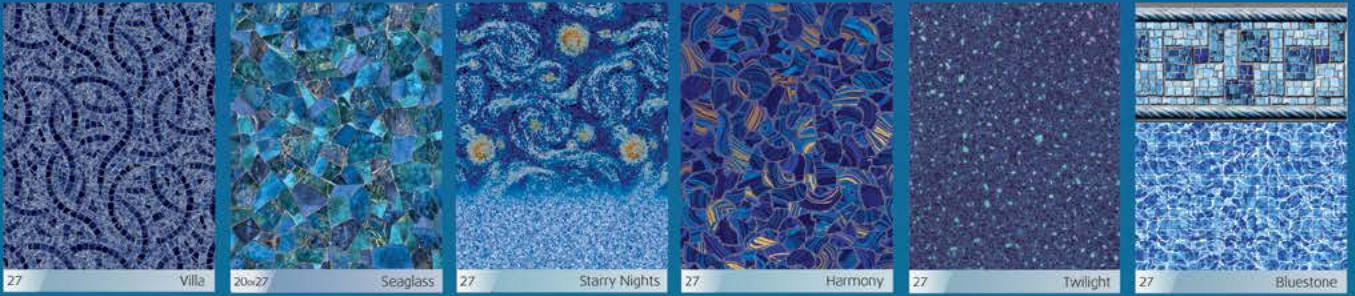
lifefloor.com



POOLSIDE BY CGT

Full Sails from Poolside by CGT is its newest border print for 2026. Inspired by the textured beauty of zellige tiles, this design blends modern sophistication with timeless charm. Soft, tranquil hues create a calming mosaic that evokes the gentle rhythm of water and the mystique of coastal landscapes.

poolsidebycgt.com



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