

What Is Your Reputation as an Adjuster?

Would you want to deal with someone like yourself? Holding contractors accountable to identify if proper practices and procedures were performed during the water damage mitigation process can be very challenging in terms of the type and quality of documentation you typically receive.

Are you the veteran adjuster who pretty much tells the contractor it is your way or the highway, or the new, inexperienced adjuster who questions little and relies heavily on their “advisor contractor” who taught them what to expect?

Do contractors shudder when they think of dealing with you, or do they feel you are knowledgeable with a **reputation of being firm but fair**?

Taking a step back and looking at how you treat contractors/vendors is a good exercise. Unfortunately, too many times in this industry, contractors feel the adjusters don't know what they're talking about and they should just leave it up to them since they are the professionals, and many adjusters feel most contractors are incompetent, unscrupulous, or at best just not good at providing documentation of the mitigation process. Too many times, this leads to a combative relationship that helps little because inevitably both parties will have to deal with each other again. It is up to you to lay the foundation of a good relationship by treating contractors fairly and raising the bar of expectations to improve outcomes for policyholders.

Here are my top 10 tips on how to earn respect and trust in the water damage mitigation industry:

1

Educate yourself so you can ask better questions. This, in turn, makes the contractor have to know their material better to be able to answer you properly. Example: “What type of meter do you use to take your moisture content readings?” Typical answer: “The yellow one.” But they should know the name of their moisture meter and how it works as it is what we rely on to confirm all affected materials were dried properly and there won't

be a future mold issue. Try to attend industry conferences regularly, like the PLRB, to educate yourself better, and if possible, attend an IICRC course to become certified in water damage restoration (WRT) or the applied structural drying (ASD) certification. Be a serious student of water damage restoration, and it will help you ask better questions while you earn respect for your knowledge.

2 Be properly prepared. Use the 5 Ps: Proper preparation prevents poor performance. You must be able to state the other person's case better than they can. Prepare yourself before getting on the phone with a contractor, and have a list of question prepared.

3 Focus on what's right. Learn to effectively communicate in a collaborative manner so everyone wins. Be positive, and learn to disagree agreeably. Take the conversation to the interpretation of the IICRC S500 industry standards, if possible, and whoever knows the standards best will have a distinct advantage. Have a list to "talking points" prepared to address common issues.

4 Set the right tone at the beginning of the conversation. Be positive and expect the best from everyone. Assume they are good at what they do and that they should be able to answer all your questions. Be prepared to give your reasoning if you disagree with something they are proposing or billing for. Don't take it personally if they disagree with you.

5 The person who asks the most questions determines the content and direction of the conversation. Control the conversation by having a list of questions prepared to give you all the information you need and keep the call on track. Set deadlines for the receipt of missing documentation. Take good notes, and strive to be fair.

6 Never argue but instead ask clarifying questions for understanding. You can disagree with someone indirectly by simply asking a clarifying question that weakens their position. It is fine to disagree respectfully; just be ready to state your reasoning for your alternate position. If you treat people fairly, they will want to treat you fairly.

7 Be a good listener. The person who listens the most will have the greatest effect on the outcome of a dispute. Ask good questions, and don't interrupt their answers. Keep your answers short as short answers are strong answers. Make sure they know what they are saying is important to you, and you will give it serious consideration if it makes some sense.

8 Remove negative emotion from the discussion. You can disagree indirectly by pointing out the weaknesses in the other person's proposal or position in a positive manner. Stay as positive as possible, especially in tough conversations. Don't back down if you believe in your position, but if needed, it's OK to concede a point, if you think it is warranted. Remember, after you concede a point is a good time to ask them to concede a point.

9

Use the 4 Fs when negotiating. There are some powerful “F” words out there, and it’s not the “F” word you’re thinking about. You can change peoples’ minds by using the 4 Fs: Feel (I appreciate how you feel), felt (I have felt that way myself), found (I have found these reasons why I now feel different), and facts (educate with facts to support your position). You can disagree with someone by trying to see the other person’s perspective first and then better explain why you may not agree with their position.

10

Proposing a solution. When trying to obtain an agreement with someone when there are two opposing positions, try giving them a trial close by stating something like, “How about we try this?” or “What do you think of this?” This gives them a chance to vocalize any objections so you can better understand their position. Before you get on the call, be sure to know what your “walk away” position is, and don’t be afraid to disagree with someone or set a point aside for further consideration or investigation.

If you follow these tips, you will earn trust and respect, and when you have to deal with that individual again in the future, it should be easier to come to an agreement the next time.

MEET ED

Instructor Ed Jones has more than 30 years of experience in the industry, has the title of Master Water Restorer, is an Institute of Inspection Cleaning and Restoration Certification (IICRC)–approved instructor, and has served on the S500–2021 consensus body committee to develop the most recent standard.



Happy Drying! Ed

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