

DRYCLEANING & LAUNDRY INSTITUTE CUSTOMER SERVICE TRAINING GUIDE



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Note: This information has been sourced from the Drycleaning and Laundry Institute Encyclopedia which covers all aspects of drycleaning and management.

4.CHECKING IN LEATHER AND SUEDE GARMENTS

CATEGORIES: CUSTOMER SERVICE

Unlike fabric, which can be manufactured with high degrees of uniformity and quality, leather and suede are not necessarily as perfect or uniform. Each skin or hide has its own individual characteristics, much like fingerprints on the human hand. The leather-cleaning process requires special equipment, additional processes, and skilled personnel to maintain the leather garment as close to its original appearance as possible. For example, special finishes might have to be applied, stain removal procedures require more time, and special pressing processes are used. For these reasons, the expense of cleaning leather garments is typically higher than that of normal dry cleaning. Therefore, it is important to educate the customer about some of the unique problems these garments can present. Remember, the amount of time it takes to examine leather or suede garments beforehand is a lot less than the time that would be spent afterwards resolving a customer complaint.

ACCEPTING SUEDES

In suedes, look for faded and worn areas. If stains are not set too deep, most of them will be removed or improved. Consider that most people get their suedes cleaned only once every 18 to 22 months. That's a very long time to accumulate soil and stains. Set stains are very difficult to remove because the chemicals required may affect the basic dye. If garments are heavily soiled, that alone makes it difficult to see the actual condition. Let the customer know that it is hard to tell if there are any discolorations or other conditions under the soil. Such areas might show up after the first cleaning stage. When suede is extremely faded or oxidized, dyeing the suede will not cover these areas, since suede dyes are translucent.

ACCEPTING LEATHERS

Grain and slick leather garments usually clean very well. The dyes utilized on grain leathers are more opaque and will cover more spots and stains that may not have been removed during the cleaning process. The most common after effects of cleaning are breaks or cracks which come from excessive wear and the natural tendencies of the leather itself. These breaks, which sometimes show up after processing, are set in the skins and cannot be removed.

Explain any possible problems to your customers. Assure them that the best possible care will be taken when processing the leather garment. Also, remind customers that any matching pieces that complete the outfit, whether its leather, suede, or any other multi-piece ensemble, should be cleaned together to maintain consistency of appearance.

INSPECTING THE GARMENT

For ease of inspection, hang the garment so that you can check carefully for the following conditions.

Stains: Although cleaning a leather garment can remove many types of stains, it is important to know what the stains are and how long they have been there. This will give the cleaner a much better idea of how to treat them. Some stains can cause the leather or suede to stiffen or lose color to such a degree that it might not be corrected by redying.

CHECK FOR THE FOLLOWING:

- Stains that have saturated the skin. They may never be completely removed.
- Heavily ground -in soil around hems, cuffs, and pockets. Such soil may be too set in to be completely removed.
- Perspiration, which can discolor and harden the skin and stain the lining
- Bloodstains, Results can vary after cleaning based on the age of the stain and any prior treatment by the customer.
- Stains from products and beverages containing alcohol. Alcohol stains can result in color loss and might not be restored to its original condition.
- Felt tip marker/ball point pen stains. Many can be removed in cleaning. Others may be permanent.
- Color loss due to bleach, alcohol, perfume, perspiration, or home stain removal attempts. Complete coverage of the resulting color loss cannot be guaranteed.
- Bum marks caused by salt splash.

COLOR FADING AND OXIDATION



Some leather and suede dyes will oxidize and fade readily from exposure to sunlight, artificial light, or atmospheric gases. Check under collars, pocket flaps, and other areas not exposed to light and compare them to the surrounding areas. Unfortunately, redying and refinishing procedures may not cover light fading or oxidization.

REPAIRS:

Rips and tears should be repaired before cleaning since they can be aggravated during the cleaning process. Warn the customer of this possibility. If he or she does not want the repairs, make note on the ticket where the existing damage is and get a signature from the patron acknowledging the warning of potential further damage.

- Fasteners. Check for missing or damaged fasteners.
- Zippers. Check to see that they work.
- Lining: Check for rips, tears, and needed repairs. Check white or light colored linings in dark garments for dye transfer.

SHRINKAGE:



Check to see if the lining is hanging below the hem or cuffs. Finishing procedures may correct this, but there is no guarantee.

NATURAL SKIN DEFECTS:



Check for small stiff white spots or thin streaks that are natural skin defects and vein lines. Belly wrinkles on suede and grain leather garments are intensified during wear and cleaning. They cannot be pressed out and made smooth once the skins have relaxed. Tick marks and scars are natural imperfections visible on many garments.

ORNAMENTATION:

Check trims to make sure they are securely attached. Fringe is often made from thin or weak skins that can break during wear and the cleaning process. This is something that is difficult to prevent.

ADHESIVE MIGRATION:



Check carefully for dark areas around seams, hems, collars, pocket welts, and labels. This could be due to an adhesive that has migrated to the surface of the skin and could worsen with cleaning.

MULTI-COLORED GARMENTS:

Check for dye migration from dark skins to light skins or fabrics. Check underarm areas for migration. If the color has already migrated, cleaning may result in more staining. These types of garments are difficult to classify and may need to be taken apart in order to clean them.

CONCLUSION

Misunderstandings can be avoided during check-in by carefully inspecting for stains, color fading or loss, needed repairs, and other characteristics of suede or leather garments. An explanation of why the cost to process these specialty items is higher than standard cleaning may also be of benefit.