From the President

I would like to thank everyone that made the effort to attend AST in Denver this summer. The value that I receive from the scheduled presenters is more than worth the money and time that is spent to participate, but more than that, the value I receive from my peers outside of the formal framework is truly priceless. The biggest benefit of spending time with my fellow PDCA members is that they are uniquely qualified to feel my pain. They understand the challenges I face because it is often their same struggle.

These peers have become my advisory board, my mentors, my coaches, and most importantly, my friends. The relationships forged at events such as AST and EXPO continue well after the events are over. I now have a long list of people that I can e-mail for feedback on an obstacle I’m facing, that I can talk to about how to avoid the minefields that we walk through every day, or that I can call to just vent when needed.

September 2014

In turn I can also help others with their challenges, but of course, these benefits require taking advantage of attending these events. If we are too busy to attend, too busy to improve, too busy to give to others, we will never receive the benefits that are available to us with just a little bit of effort.

PDCA Expo is fast approaching in Charleston South Carolina. I encourage you to make the decision today to attend. Not because you might pick up an idea or concept that will add value to your business, although you most likely will. Come because your fellow contractors will be there to network, ready and willing to give and to receive. Come to build your team of advisors so when you need help, you’ll have access to the wealth of experience and knowledge we all have and are always happy to share.

Scott Lollar
Precision Painting and Decorating

Save The Date
more details inside...

AST 16 – July 17-18, 2015
Providence, RI
Lessons Learned at AST 15  

By Doug Imhoff  
imhoffpainting@msn.com  

Does what happen at AST stay at AST? No, not really. But some of the after-hours activities do - especially when the conference is in Denver!

I attend AST every year. This year it was in Denver and there was much ribaldry. Aside from the scheduled networking events: the Thursday night welcome reception sponsored by Sherwin Williams – thank you SW – and the Friday night party sponsored by Benjamin Moore – thank you BM! – there were small get-togethers on Saturday night too. Scattered around the busy restaurants and pubs of downtown Denver that Saturday night were scores of the best contractors in the United States. If you were smart enough to find yourself at one of these small gatherings of friends, you were in fine company because the people who come to AST are the best, and it’s these people that make this an event without equal.

This year’s conference was near a perfect score for content, quality of attendees, and invited presenters. For those who have yet to attend AST, the conference consists of a blended mix of guest presenters and member segments, roundtable discussions, and time for mixing with your peers. It is in these mixing crucibles that the business game changers are conceived, shared, borrowed and improved upon. Where tales of victory and defeat are shared, and new friendships are formed – this is why I will never miss AST, it is that good.

An additional benefit of attending an AST event that isn’t widely appreciated is the mental clearing of the deck that occurs.

In all seriousness, it is a pleasure to serve with such an amazing group of guys (hint, hint, we could use another woman on the board) and since I do love to write, I’m happy to be back in the saddle as your editor.

I hope you were both highly educated and highly entertained in Denver. We can’t thank our sponsors enough for their continued support, which makes our yearly conference possible. I’d also like to thank everyone who attended for all that you contribute to the group in sharing with your peers.

I know how hard it can be to come home from a conference and not fall back into old habits and patterns. I really hope you have your action plan taped to a wall in your office where you can see it everyday (if not, go grab it now and get it up there), and if you need help staying on track or with executing your plan, we’re all here to help. One of my favorite things about the Residential Forum is that we truly are a peer driven organization, and the answer to your question(s) are usually only a phone call or email away. Please keep working your plan, stay engaged with your peers and have an awesome 4th quarter.

Yours truly,  
Suhaiba Neill  

A Note From the Editor  

Back In The Saddle  
The running joke on all of our Residential Forum Board calls is that if you miss a meeting, you get all of the new assignments. I was off to a great start at AST 15, but unfortunately got sick and missed Saturday as well as our board meeting on Sunday morning (and no, I did not eat one of the “chocolate” bars that Brandt referred to in his opening talk). Upon my return home the following week, during our post AST “check in” call, Tony was kind enough to inform me that the board had reassigned The Painter’s Rag to me for the foreseeable future (first and last time I’ll ever miss a meeting).

In all seriousness, it is a pleasure to serve with such an amazing group of guys (hint, hint, we could use another woman on the board) and since I do love to write, I’m happy to be back in the saddle as your editor.

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Yours truly,  
Suhaiba Neill
When you’re out of town it feels like a vacation and you’re loose. You’re with peers and colleagues and they’re loose… but everyone is also highly focused on the task at hand — which is developing and cultivating improved business performance. Your mind is clear and you’re ready for what’s to come. Here is my testimonial.

Mine is a story of success. Not the kind of success I often see in my private cartoon bubble —

the kind where I’m being recognized and praised by my peers, friends or family for some action well done;

but the other kind of success, the real, private kind that is seldom shared because it often appears trivial when viewed as a singularity — without the festering heap of repeated failures to put it in context. It’s the kind of success that is sustainable because it is repeatable, inexhaustibly repeatable: it is the little success, the micro victory.

Day 1: Stagnation happens. It isn’t far into the first morning session that it occurs to you, that some level of poor performance has settled into one or more aspects of your business and you’ve either: tolerated it, not fully realized it, or over time grown accustomed to it. So much so that you stopped noticing it, and like driving a truck with a bent frame where you get used to keeping it just slightly pulled to one side, you’ve been making adjustments or excuses for the problem and lost sight of the importance of correcting it.

It’s very easy to lose sight when you’re in the soup of daily service. Attending AST is like letting your dad drive your bent truck; he’ll remark within a few moments that the frame is probably out of alignment, maybe bent, then he’ll ask you how long it’s been that way and if you’ve made any attempts to straighten it out? And since he’s your dad you say something like: “well sure I have dad… got an appointment next week”, then later you’ll scramble to address the problem and try to remember how long it’d been that way, and you won’t be able to. A few days later you’ll tell your buddy “yeah, I noticed the frame is bent on my truck… gotta get that fixed” and like a big stud you’ll take ownership of the discovery your dad made. I remember my first AST, I swaggered into the room ready to tell everyone how great I was, and I left at the end of weekend humbled, and grateful. It was a real eye opener.

Day 2: Barnacles are part of life. My younger brother is an experienced lake mariner, and each year when he prepares to “winter” his boat he goes through the same ritual. The motor is serviced, the wood and paint finishes are restored, and the hull is cleaned of barnacles. The boat is always ready for action come spring because of this routine.

Your business is a little like a boat; it will go wherever you take it, it needs maintenance atop and below, and if you ignore its needs you’ll discover that your boat can easily go adrift. Regular maintenance; how many of us do this with our businesses? I’d bet it’s a small percentage. What do the rest do? Nothing. We just keep putting gas in the tank and hoping for the best. But hoping for the best never, never, never results in the best. Taking yourself out of town to attend and participate in AST is like taking your business out of the water for routine top to bottom maintenance, including scraping off the mental barnacles that build up on your minds hull. Properly serviced, you return home and put her back in the water and she runs like a shark! And for a time thereafter you are a better business owner, wiser, less burdened by non-essential debris you march on with greater clarity.

We grow this way, and gain novel perspectives on our conduct, our interactions and our thought patterns. This can be depressing, of course, if our performance hasn’t moved us any closer to our objectives — personal or professional. But with repeated effort and a little humility it becomes a call to order, inspiring us to renew our dedication to whatever we recognize as essential for improved performance and sustainable change. We see clearly for a short time, but it’s not a one shot vaccine; like maintenance it should be regularly scheduled.
So I went to AST this year, and even though I live just a few fathoms from downtown Denver I booked a room and took myself out of the soup for a few days. I went with a vague mental list of functions that I knew were not being executed well, things that I imagined were minor inadequacies that needed only the proper formula of skill and will applied in the right measure to remedy. I found what I sought, as always; there’s always someone who’s been there, or knows someone who’s been there and makes an introduction. But my micro victory occurred a few days after AST.

I always return home from AST with a few things I’m intent on doing. But when I get back to my life roles I’m immediately besieged by the barnacles I only just scraped off. The repeated pattern imposes itself on me instantly – displacing the new ideas I so passionately want to act on. It always happens, and this time was no different – I was right back in the soup. A week passed and the short list of key points was beginning to gather dust on my desk. Then on Thursday a good customer asked me to drive out to his ranch and collect, compile, evaluate and replace any of the materials used at the ranch that had collected in the storage room over the years. This is exactly the sort of high-level service I like to provide for my clients, it’s the sort of relationship glue that cements a client to us, but was it the best use of my time as an owner? No. It was not. I caught myself, and explained that I’d be sending one of our lead painters out to do it instead. The micro victory for me was an exercise in identifying essential activities to say yes to, and what to delegate.

This probably strikes you as rather pedestrian, like the trophy for 9th place. But I started my business with a flair for personalized service and building relationships, so the event described above would be fairly routine for me. And saying no was an exercise complete with trembling hands, beads of sweat, and a shaky voice...it was horrible, but it started a new pattern.

Since that day I have had a small and growing collection of micro victories – paint ordering, equipment sourcing, PAYROLL and quarterly filing (that one was not hard) – things I’ve taken off my plate, and this little collection sits aside the heap of failures; years of saying yes to very nearly everything, being pulled in many directions and losing focus. Left on my plate now are my essential activities: sales calls, customer service (ongoing operations) calls, coaching team members, estimates & invoicing, strategic planning, and marketing. And for now that’s enough for one person.

The entire point of holding Advanced Shop Talk in the middle of the busy season is illustrated here. Can you imagine a football or basketball game without halftime break? The players would be worthless in the second half and the coach would be exasperated. I’ve heard it a million times, “I’m just too busy”, but that is exactly why you need to stop and take a breath. And AST is the perfect place to regroup and plan for the second half.

Thank you all and a special thanks to this year’s sponsors: Ben Moore, Sherwin Williams, Advisors On Target, Pro Painting Net, Shurtech, Purdy, Wooster, High Stepper, and Kovrd; without which the event wouldn’t be possible. In addition to having the best contractors captive in one place for the weekend, we often hear how much value the forum actually conveys for these representatives in their skills and knowledge base as well. In fact, many have taken feedback from AST and funneled it into the R&D pipeline back home. And thank you to the attendees, your contributions and fellowship are appreciated – you’re a special group.
We had a blast in Denver! If you were unable to make the trip this year, here's a snippet of what you missed. And be sure to mark your calendar NOW for next year's conference. We need you at the table to share your knowledge and experience.

Testimonials

"If you are looking to get the most out of your PDCA membership, you need to attend the next AST conference." Art Snarzyk, Innerview Advisors, Inc.

"The bang for the buck is huge. I have not found any other investment in my business with returns like AST." Kevin Weinmann, Weinmann Painting

"Absolutely enjoyed how everyone was so willing to share. What an amazing value. We will be coming next year!" Kelly Krusnoski, Sunshine Painting

"The best place to learn from the best contractors and share best practices to be more efficient and effective in your business." John Peek, Peek Brothers Painting

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dXZgp8ii_M0
"AST is the highlight of my business calendar every year." Doug Imhoff, Imhoff Painting, Inc.

The real gems that come from AST are in the form of peer relations and idea shared from real life experience. Marc Poulos, Marc Poulos Painting

"It's terrific to stop the work you do day in and day out, get a little distance and perspective, immerse yourself in the inspiration and intelligence of others in the industry." Deborah Costolloe, Catchlight, Inc.

"As my company begins to grow, so does the relevance of AST in my company." Rachel Robnett, Colorado Chroma
What prompted you to sign up to attend AST this year?

RV I thought it would be a great learning opportunity.

What were your expectations coming into the conference?

RV My only expectation was to learn more about the PDCA Residential Forum and how I can become more involved.

What portion of the conference did you find to be the most valuable?

RV The presentations by the other members and their insights into the industry as well as the Round Robin session.

What was your biggest take away how do you plan to put it to use in your business?

RV Gaining a general understanding of running a painting business helps me better understand the needs of painters as they relate to our company’s products.

What would you like to see more (or less) of at next year’s conference?

RV More of the same; the guest speakers (Amy Shoemaker and Paul Cook) presentations were fantastic.

Any additional thoughts/comments.

RV Overall a great few days. Looking forward to many more.
The date is set, the hotel is booked, and the planning will soon be underway for our annual 2-day conference. The only thing missing is a new name.

Over the past few years, Advanced Shop Talk has continued to evolve, and a few have mentioned that we’ve outgrown the name AST. So, what better way to pick a new one than to have a contest and ask you, our members for suggestions?

Please submit your suggestions to Tony Kozak by Friday, October 10th. The board will select a new name from your submissions, and the winner will receive a $50 Amazon gift card plus bragging rights (which are priceless is this group). Ready, Set, Go!!

Renaissance Providence Downtown Hotel is among the most remarkable hotels in Providence, Rhode Island. Our downtown Providence hotel is housed in a beautifully restored historic 1920s era building, 264 stylish, exquisite guest rooms and 8 magnificent suites offer exceptional comfort. Our conveniently located hotel in downtown Providence offers premium and modern hotel amenities and outstanding, personalized service.

Save The Date
AST 16 – July 17-18, 2015
Providence, RI
Renaissance Providence Downtown Hotel

Join the Residential Forum Team

We’re always looking for new members to join the Residential Forum team. If you’re interested in joining a committee (Painter’s Rag, AST, PDCA EXPO, etc...) or would like to learn more about what it’s like to serve on the board, please contact Tony Kozak for details. As a peer driven organization, we rely on our members to keep the forum moving in the right direction, and your contributions are essential to our success.
Reasons to Install GPS Tracking in Your Vehicles...

John Peek, John@PeekBrothersPainting.com

I have decided to put GPS tracking in my vehicles. Here is why:

1. It is always important to have a trusting environment...but is also important to verify. Those employees who are trustworthy don’t mind that there is a verification process, and those who may be tempted to cheat at some point will be discouraged from doing so, by the presence of GPS tracking.

2. As I juggle more vehicles and crews on the road, I can quickly look on line and see where the vehicles and crews are, in real time. As teams are spread out over town, this helps my production manager and I to get a handle on who is where when help, equipment or materials are needed.

3. Tracking tells me where the vehicles are, when they arrived and how long they have been there. This verifies that the truck is, or has been, where it should be. This forces our policy of planning ahead and keep trucks on the jobsite; not going to the paint store 3 times a day for items that could have been stocked on the truck at the shop.

4. Some contractors rely on phone based time keeping programs that use geo-tracking apps. An employee checks in and out using a code on the phone and, when they do, a geo-stamp is put on where they are at that moment...if it does not conform to an assigned project...it indicates a problem...but, it is easy to pass a phone between employees and cheat the system.

This may be rectified soon by requiring a biometric such as an iris scan or fingerprint just before checking in or off the time card.

5. By installing GPS tracking without telling the drivers, you can quickly find out who is truthful and who is gaming you. Some may think this is a sneaky thing to do but, over the years I have been snookered by some very effective "brownnosers" who had me thinking they were good and honest men, who I later came to find were ripping me off. These are my trucks, my equipment and my company gas. I do not want my trucks being used after hours and on weekends without authorization. This usually includes sundries and supplies being pilfered at company expense. The people who do this are also the ones who train new employees to do likewise, and before you know it you will have a group sucking the life out of the company and the good crew members who benefit when profits are good.

Bottom line, I want to be surrounded by good, honorable people. Verification insures only good and honorable people working for your company, and over a short period of time...the less than honorable people will find another place to work. What a relief to have GPS!
Vendor Spotlight

Meet our newest Forum Sponsor

Jack Hamilton, High Stepper

As managing partner and National Sales Manager of High Stepper, Jack Hamilton is dedicated to providing his customers with professional service and products. He joined High Stepper in its infancy. He actively works to build relationships with his distribution channel and spends a good portion of his day with residential paint contractors showing them the benefits of High Stepper’s products.

Prior to joining High Stepper, Jack held many management roles. He has worked for some of the largest distributors and building materials wholesalers. Jack’s partnership in other startup companies has provided him the experience to take High Stepper to the highest level.

Jack was born in Detroit Michigan. He later moved with his parents to Atlanta Georgia in 1978 where he spent most of his growing up years. He attending Georgia State University and obtained his Bachelor of Science in Business Administration in 1988. Upon completing his studies he went straight into business.

Jack now lives in Dallas Texas. He is currently working to secure an additional manufacturing and warehousing facility in Dallas. By doing this we will shorten production and transportation times to the mid-west and west coast regions.

For more information on High Stepper visit www.roofstep.com

As a member of many organizations and affiliated groups, I have the privilege of participating in many conventions and conferences.

This year I attended the most informative and productive conference to date, the PDCA Residential Forum AST15. This was truly a working and networking conference. The information presented during the workshops was “spot on” to my business and personal life. When I thought I was doing things the best way in my business, the conference gave me new ideas. And those ideas were turned into actions in my business with great results.

I must give a huge “kudos” to the Board of Directors. Their commitment to their members throughout the year is invaluable. And it shows when you attended an AST conference. Recently I was asked if the money I spent for the conference was worth it. All I could say was YES. Money well spent and I’ll do it again.
PDCA EXPO 2015 & The PIPP Awards

Have you completed a unique, historic, or just plain beautiful project this past year? If so, we encourage you to submit your work to the Annual PIPP Awards contest. This is not only an opportunity for your company to gain national recognition, but to also recognize the employees who helped to make it possible.

Each year, PDCA members are recognized for their outstanding achievements in the industry. In 2015, these awards will be announced during the second annual Paintball.

KILZ® Picture it Painted Professionally Awards (PIPP)

The KILZ® PIPP Awards, the very first national awards to honor the very best of the painting industry, is PDCA’s way of paying tribute to the work of professional painting and decorating contractor. This National recognition for a company’s best work also honors craftsmen by showcasing their stellar work among their industry peers from across the nation. For submission and guideline questions, please call Beth Thompson at 800-332-7322.

Download the application for the 2015 KILZ PIPP Awards
The Best of Gmail™
by Google™

Mike Kelly, mike@crestwoodpainting.com

GMail is fast, cheap and relentless with spam - I haven’t seen the Nigerian Prince scam in years. It’s also loaded with powerful features; here is a brief overview of three of the best - Keyboard Shortcuts, Labels and Filters.

Keyboard Shortcuts

First, enable them - Gear icon top right | Settings. About mid-way down on the General tab you can turn Keyboard Shortcuts on, Save Changes at the bottom. Now, while in GMail type Shift+? and you’ll see a pop-up window. Yes, it’s too much to learn - but you really only need to know these 8:

1. g then i: Go to Inbox
2. g then t: Go to Sent messages
3. c: Compose new message
4. <Tab> then <Enter>: Send message
5. x: Select conversation
6. k/j: newer/older conversation
7. e: Archive (save message but move out of the Inbox)
8. #: Delete

(The last four are key to quickly processing messages to be archived or deleted.)

Filters

I stumbled on filters after learning about inbox zero - a movement aimed at emptying your inbox. (An email is generally more a task to be completed rather than a message, when processed with that in mind, your work automatically becomes more effective.) We process a small but growing number of credit card payments and have found that, in addition to the “You’ve got money!” messages, we also get a flood of fluff emails from our friends at PayPal or Square.

As we had been forwarding all emails from PayPal and Square to our bookkeeper we were duplicating the fluff. So now we filter: all emails that specifically reference payment from either service are sent to our bookkeeper.

1. Gear icon top right | Settings | Filters tab
2. At the bottom of the Filters tab, click the link Create a new filter.
3. Enter the exact phrase(s) (distinguished by quotation marks) and/or word(s) you would like to filter into the appropriate field. If you would like to filter by any of multiple terms, separate each term with AND or OR (note all caps). Note that entering terms into multiple fields will be treated as an AND, not an OR, so if you want to filter something that has a particular sender OR a particular subject, create separate filters.
4. Optionally: Click the magnifying glass to do a test search on the new filter. To get back to filter creation, click the drop-down arrow in the Gmail search bar.
5. Once you’re satisfied with the settings, click Create filter with this search.
6. Select the various options for what should happen when a message matches the criteria you have set.
7. If you want to essentially back-date the filter (which works for everything but forwarding), be sure to check the Also apply filter to matching conversations box. If you only want the filter to apply to email going forward, leave it unchecked.
8. Click Create filter.

You will be returned to the Filters tab and see a Your filter was created message at the top of the page.

To update a filter (e.g., if you find an email that should go under Orders but wasn’t caught by one of your previous terms), simply follow steps 1–3 to get to the Filters tab, then click the edit link next to the particular filter you want to update.

We use 17 filters that are revised pretty regularly. Amazon shipping announcements, newsletters, RRP confirmations - they’re all filtered. While the Inbox is rarely at Zero, today it is at a comfortable 20 messages.
Homeowner Pulse Q3 Insights from Sherwin-Williams

Exteriors, ceilings and multi-room jobs prompt a professional hire

The top three painting projects for which homeowners seek professional help are:
- Exteriors (71%)
- Ceilings (30%)

A project that encompasses more than one interior room (24%)

Many projects planned weeks, days in advance

While 38% of homeowners plan painting projects in a few months' time, 57% of homeowners only plan a few weeks or days in advance.

Color updates and renovations prompt projects

More than half (59%) of homeowners tackle a painting project because they want a color or design change and 28% take on a project with home renovation as the motivation.

The Homeowner Pulse survey was completed online by 1,056 members of Sherwin-Williams Consumer Insights Panel in June 2014.
2014-2015
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