

The Squeegee Squad The first drop is the hardest



Troy Rodgers charged by his fear in an 8-story building's window-wash room after Steve Crank told him that the first 25 stories of the building were the most terrifying. He added: after that, repelling down the wall isn't so bad.



A bit of fear went into washing the windows of a 25-story building as the Squeegee Squad's Steve Crank, the job's coordinator, and Dan Gates told safety supervisor Troy Rodgers about the job.

Franchisors and franchisees aren't the only risk takers—sometimes their employees have to take a leap of faith, too, at least if they're cleaning windows 25 stories above terra firma.

The apartment building which overlooks Lake Calhoun in Minneapolis was the tallest building the Squeegee Squad had serviced to date, and 21-year-old Troy Rodgers admitted he was "a little nervous ... but I've been trained, thanks to Jack (Rueggeger, founder of the company) and I'm ready to go." The first drop of the day is the most terrifying, he added; after that, repelling down the wall isn't so bad.

The building, built in 1973, didn't have modern conveniences conducive to window-washing gear, so Steve Crank, trainer and job supervisor, had to rig an "improvised anchorage system." The safety line—the orange line, which is "fresh"—and the working line were both anchored to a rooftop "penthouse," or mechanical room. Previous window-washers had used the air conditioner units as anchors, Crank said with disdain. Before Rodgers climbed into the washer's seat, the squad held a safety briefing, which resembled a prayer meeting. The three—including Dan Gates, a high-rise window-washing apprentice who was there to learn—huddled. Crank assured Rodgers he had personally checked all the ropes and the tie-backs were solid. Here's the emergency plan, he said, "If you can get yourself down, do it; if not, 911 is definitely an option." "This is residents' glass," Crank reminded him. "We'll take our time." (Homeowners are more picky about their windows than landlords.) A fist-bump for solidarity and they dispersed. "Godspeed," Rodgers deadpanned.

The rig was anchored by what resembled heavy yellow note pads. To compensate for Rodgers' "buck-fifty" weight, the counter weight was 500-plus pounds. There was no hesitation as Rodgers attached the descender clip from his harness to the main rope and climbed into the trapeze of a seat. He then repelled down the building, washing three windows before lowering himself to the next set. To compensate for the winds at that altitude, he suction-cupped himself to the window. One full drop resulted in 60 clean windows. The night before this job, Crank said he had trouble sleeping: "It's nerve-wracking. I keep checking and double-checking. Troy's hanging by my set-up."

Squeegee Squad is positioning itself to take over the high-rise niche, Rueggeger said. While a residential job may pay \$400, a large corporate headquarters could garner as much as \$45,000. Training for high-rise window cleaning isn't prolific. Rueggeger had to hire an independent contractor to certify his staff. Crank will train franchisees and their staffs, which may cause more sleepless nights. "Training franchisees is a bigger responsibility," he said. "I can watch Troy," but at the rate Squeegee Squad is growing—10-plus franchises this year alone—Crank can't be on every rooftop. Good thing most franchisees get their feet wet in residential work. ☐

—Nancy Weingartner

Trust Me, There Are Stupid Questions

Everything comes out OK in the wash

The first time I met Jack Rueggeger in Gray Plant Mootty's box at the Twins baseball game (See! In franchising, we use baseball games to impress clients and the media, not interns), I knew I wanted to wash windows for him.

During a slow inning, he told me the company he and his brother founded, Squeegee Squad, was preparing to specialize in high-rise buildings, along with residential. I thought it would be exciting to be a window-washer for a day (or an hour, to be more exact). I have already been a doggy day-care provider and a participant in a children's art class. How hard could cleaning windows be? I'm asking because I didn't know. I once lived in a house for a year before I discovered it had a sliding glass door leading to the deck, not a brown wall. (I always wondered why the previous tenant had placed curtains in that particular spot. I thought it was because the wall was such a dirty-looking color.)

My first appointment with the Squad had to be cancelled because I decided I'd rather have my gall bladder removed—it was dying. The

second time, Jack had to cancel because the Mall of America had an after-hours event that required the glass elevators to be in service. That was OK by me. The job started at 10 p.m., which is close to my bedtime.

The third time was charming. The aging, luxury high-rise overlooked one of Minnesota's 10,000 lakes, where white sailboats dotted the sun-splashed Persian-blue waters. (If you've ever wondered why I'm a business writer as opposed to a lifestyle writer, reread the previous sentence.)

I foolishly had envisioned donning a harness and being lowered down the side of the building to wash the first set of windows while Jack took my picture. Jack—and OSHA, of course—knew I was going nowhere near that ledge. And, once I walked out on the roof of the 25-story building, I knew the only part of me going down the side would be my lunch. If you're a rock climber, feel free to turn the page because this article will seem overly dramatic to you. However, for those of us with a fear of heights, standing on a roof with just a small lip of a barricade between you and a messy death is terrifying.

I obviously had not thought this assignment through: **1.** I wore high heels. **2.** In order to ensure the rig doesn't join you over the side of the building, you have to give your weight to everyone on the crew so they can provide the appropriate counter-weight. The only thing I lie about is my weight—and the number of times a week I play golf. For some reason, when you tell people you average four rounds a week, they expect you to be good. It's just easier to tell strangers I'm paired up with for a round that it's my first time out this year.

In order to take photos of the brave man being hung out to wash, 21-year-old Troy Rodgers, I had to lie on my stomach, sideling my way through a layer of gravel to the edge. Jack ended up taking the great full-length shot of Troy on page 26. I would have, but I was afraid that in

order to lean out far enough to get the shot, I might drop the camera. I figured if it fell 25 stories it might break.

I have on a rare occasion complained about my job. But I can not imagine being in a position like trainer/supervisor Steve Crank. Nothing in my day-to-day workload might put a coworker's life in danger. When I misspell someone's name in an article, or on the cover, they may think I've ruined their life, but in actuality they're still alive—just a little less happy to be so. But Steve has to tie knots that won't slip, devise set-ups that will keep a grown man slowly repelling down a wall—and ensure the windows are streak-free. But Steve's job is not completely thankless. Often when he is the one repelling down the side of office buildings, his feet will tap the glass and a startled office worker will turn and stare at him in disbelief. Some will grab a pad of paper and write "THANKS" in big letters and hold it up to the window for him to see. That spells success in my book.

And you wonder why I want to be invited back to the ball park by the lawyers at Gray Plant Mootty. ☐

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