

# Delta Sky #B-Travel

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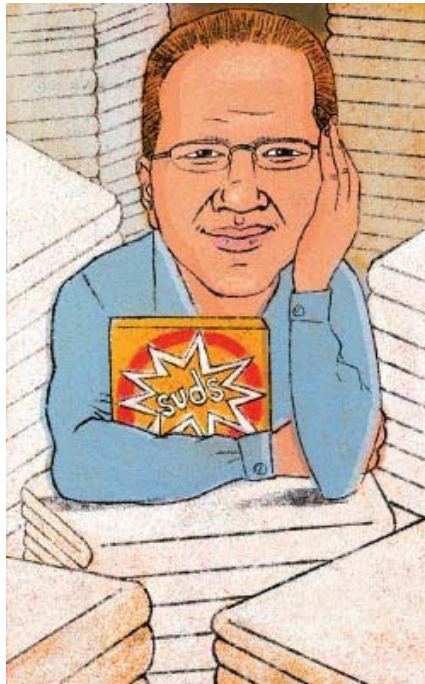
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## TRAVELER

# The Laundry Guy down and dirty with Ed Kwasnick

➔ "Not too many people get as excited about laundry as I do," Ed Kwasnick confesses.

No, he's no fetishist for the aroma of human life. Kwasnick is the founder and chief principal of Turn-Key Industrial Engineering Services, a consulting company based in Charlottesville, Virginia. More to the point, the 36-year-old Delta Gold Medallion flyer is "the laundry guy."

He's a mechanical engineer by training who turned industrial engineer when he saw in himself a natural

aptitude for designing spaces for systems. In his case, the systems are very large laundries.

How large?

Walt Disney World, he explains, was planning a major expansion of its resort facilities in 2000. "As they were growing," he says of his client, "they were running out of capacity in the hospitality laundry. That refers to sheets, pillowcases, towels, anything in the room that has nothing to do with the restaurant. They wanted to grow that facility by 30 percent, so we helped them design a master plant to add that capability.

"That facility today," he reports, "does 1.2 million pounds of just those categories a week."

You'll forgive Kwasnick if he doesn't look at Disney World through quite the same lens that you do. Referring to the behind-the-scenes tour that visitors to Disney World can take, he notes fondly that it includes the laundry. "What's interesting about the tour," he says, "is that as you look down over the laundry operation, they have tidbits of information. One of them says, if you took all the sheets that they process in a week and tied them end to end, they'd stretch from Orlando to Key West."

That's a lot of sheets. And more dirty laundry than Matt Drudge could even dream of.

As a traveler, you probably never give much thought to your sheets and towels. As a motorist, you probably don't pay much attention to your car mechanic's uniform. As a patient, probably the last thing on your mind is your physician's lab coat. But Kwasnick thinks about all those items—because each of them needs laundering on a regular basis, and each is part of a national laundry industry that generates an estimated \$12 billion to \$17 billion of business per year.

There are giants in the industry, he says, naming Aramark and Cintas as two. But most, he says, are mom-and-pop operations: "The company that was just running doormats to a couple of companies grows to be a uniform provider, healthcare provider, linen provider. From a couple of million dollars a year, soon they're \$20 million. There are still 1,700 independent laundries in the United States, companies which are much larger than your corner dry cleaner." And they're natural clients for Turn-Key.

In some ways the laundries that Kwasnick designs for are similar to yours, just immensely larger. You probably have what's called an "open pocket washer system" at home, in which you load clothing through the front or top, select a length of time for the cycle, and a cylindrical agitation activates water and detergent to dislodge the dirt, or what Kwasnick categorically refers to as "soil." Many of his washers work

the same way, except yours will typically hold 20 pounds of laundry per load, and his will typically hold 400 to 900 pounds. It's more or less the same with the dryers, which will hold 200 to 600 pounds of laundry per load.

What's different is that you probably use a store-bought detergent designed to handle all types of stains and soil. In Kwasnick-designed facilities, he says, "all of the chemicals that go into the detergent we have on site, but they're not mixed. If it's a hospital facility and we have to remove blood, for example, that's a completely different type of chemistry than if we're trying to remove grease from a mechanic's uniform. We take the surfactants, binders and alkali, and we mix them specific to the type of soil we're trying to remove."

Once, he says, large laundry facilities employed scores of people to sort, load and fold: "Now, we can handle hundreds of thousands of pounds through a wash floor and never have a human being touch it. It's physically transferred automatically by conveyors, and it comes out perfectly clean, the way you want it."

Even the folding?

"Ah! Folding!" he says. "Bath towels and larger products are actually fed into a folding machine, and then that folding machine can fold it any way you want. With towels, we can do primary and secondary folds, quarter folds, French folds [for a French fold, the towel edges are folded toward the center by thirds, then the piece is folded in half].

"At a resort you typically go with a French fold in the room because the presentation is so much prettier." And it's at resorts in particular that towels become so critical. "You live and die by the amount of towels you have in a hotel," Kwasnick says.

**E**very hotel has what is called "a par," a term that refers to an inventory level for a 24-hour period. At a better resort, it's likely that the par of pool towels is four, meaning that the hotel maintains, or tries to, four pool towels per guest per day. At any particular point, you, the guest, will be using one or two, with a third being laundered and a fourth ready to be disbursed.

That's usually enough, unless weather interferes. Every hotel manager dreads unexpected rainstorms that have guests grabbing towels at will to use as raincoats and umbrellas. Then housekeeping services may not be able to keep up with the demand for pool towels, which are typically lighter weight and have shorter, more snag-resistant plush than bath towels—and, because of what Kwasnick calls their "soil," are usually laundered separately.

Then the smooth functioning of a hotel housekeeping service can go awry. Bath towels have to be substituted for proper pool towels, and dirty ones become commingled in the towel stream. And this exposes the entire laundry operation to its worst enemy: sand.

"Sand is a very abrasive product," Kwasnick says darkly. "Sand is not a thing we like to deal with in the laundry industry, but we have to because people like to go to the beach." Not only does sand take more rinsing to remove from a towel, it also jeopardizes towel life. "When you're mixing them," he explains, "you tend to tear up your bath towels. You're cleaning for the optimal level of cleanliness for the pool towel, which means that you're overcleaning the bath towel."

He concedes that no guest ever thinks about this—until there aren't sufficient towels. At which points guests usually go ballistic.

It's meeting this type of demand, and avoiding this type of crisis, that led the splashy Atlantis Resorts in the Bahamas to hire Turn-Key recently. Atlantis is planning a significant expansion over the next five to eight years. Management would prefer that guests pay attention to new rooms and attractions, not to shortages of towels and tablecloths. "The laundry they built on site is incapable of handling that new level of laundry," Kwasnick says.

Atlantis and Disney World are two better-known clients of Turn-Key, now a company of six employees that has grown billings 83 percent in 2004. Kwasnick's work takes him all over North America and the Caribbean, and his travel regimen is precise. "I'm an industrial engineer through and through," he says, "so I'm all about efficiency." This begins with a master checklist of travel items posted in his closet, and while

## Tell Us Your Story!

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he doesn't forgo pleasantries with his fellow passengers on Delta, he relies upon travel time for hard work, planning and thought.

That there is a Turn-Key at all he freely attributes to his wife Nicole's support and belief in him. Six years ago Kwasnick came home from work disgruntled. He had left a job designing and building laundry facilities for a national uniform service and didn't like it. "We had saved up \$10,000 for a rainy day," he remembers. "And I said, 'That's it. We're going to start a company. We're going to take our \$10,000, and we're going to throw it out there.'

"It would have been very easy for someone to say, 'What if it doesn't work?'" But his wife's reaction was, "Fantastic! What can I do to help you?"

Apparently the answer was to understand and accept what Ed Kwasnick says is true of him and others like him in his trade: "You get soap bubbles in your blood." —*Duncan Christy*

ILLUSTRATION BY EDEL RODRIGUEZ

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