CLEANING SERVICES
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INVO EXECUTIVE GUIDE SERIES

Executive Guide No. 9

When Should You Change Commercial Cleaning Companies?

A practical guide to deciding whether improvement or replacement is the better long-term business decision

Educational Resource • Complimentary Edition • Version 1.1

Published by INVO Cleaning Services

www.invocleaning.com

Executive Summary

Changing commercial cleaning companies should be a business decision—not an emotional reaction.

Replacing a commercial cleaning provider can restore confidence, improve accountability, and better align a cleaning program with an organization's needs. It can also introduce transition work, a new learning curve, temporary inconsistency, and uncertainty while a replacement provider becomes familiar with the facility.

The central question is not whether problems have occurred. Every long-term service relationship experiences challenges. The more useful question is whether those challenges are isolated, improving through corrective action, or continuing despite clear communication and reasonable opportunities to respond.

This guide provides a structured decision framework. It helps organizations evaluate evidence, relationship quality, improvement, risk, and the hidden costs of both staying and leaving. It is intentionally neutral: a reader may reasonably conclude that the current provider should remain, that a defined improvement period is appropriate, or that a provider change is justified.

EXECUTIVE INSIGHT

The goal is not to find a new cleaning company. The goal is to make the decision that best serves your facility over the long term.

At a glance

Decision question	What it tests
Is the concern supported by evidence?	Whether the decision rests on recurring, representative observations rather than one frustrating event.
Has the concern been clearly communicated?	Whether the provider understood the issue and had a meaningful opportunity to respond when circumstances allowed.
Is measurable improvement occurring?	Whether corrective action is producing results that remain effective over time.
What are the costs and risks of each path?	Whether staying, changing, or delaying the decision creates the greater long-term burden.

How to use this guide

Use this guide after evaluating the current program's quality. Guide No. 8 helps determine what is happening; Guide No. 9 helps determine whether the existing provider relationship remains the best long-term path. The companion Commercial Cleaning Provider Change Decision Review provides a structured record of the evidence, communication, improvement efforts, risks, and final decision.

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Introduction

Make the decision deliberately

Commercial cleaning relationships rarely succeed or fail because of one event. More often, confidence changes gradually. A few missed expectations become recurring concerns. Communication becomes less effective. Corrective actions become repetitive. Management spends more time thinking about cleaning than it once did.

At that point, organizations naturally begin asking whether another provider would produce a better result. That is a reasonable question—but it deserves the same care as selecting the provider in the first place.

Changing providers is not simply purchasing a different service. It changes an operating relationship that affects employees, visitors, customers, access, security, supplies, schedules, and the daily condition of the facility. The decision should therefore be based on evidence, accountability, long-term outcomes, and a realistic understanding of transition costs.

Some organizations discover that their current provider is communicating honestly, accepting responsibility, and producing measurable improvement. Others conclude that recurring concerns continue despite clear communication and reasonable opportunities to respond. Neither conclusion is inherently right or wrong. The objective is to identify which path is more likely to improve the cleaning program over time.

> **EXECUTIVE INSIGHT**
>
> Confidence in a decision comes from the quality of the evaluation that preceded it.

Chapter 1 - Separate Frustration from Evidence

A defensible decision begins with information that fairly represents the relationship.

A missed trash container, poorly prepared conference room, or disappointing restroom condition deserves attention. It does not automatically describe the entire cleaning program. Isolated events and recurring patterns are different management problems and should not receive the same response.

Document the pattern

Before considering replacement, describe the concern specifically. General statements such as “cleaning has gone downhill” may reflect a real decline, but they are difficult to investigate or correct. Stronger evidence identifies the area, expected result, observed condition, timing, recurrence, and response.

Weak description	Stronger decision evidence
The restrooms are always bad.	Three inspections over four weeks found the same fixtures below the agreed observable standard after service.
Communication is terrible.	Two documented concerns received no acknowledgment within the agreed communication window.
They keep missing things.	The same assigned task was missed on four service visits after the expectation was reconfirmed.

Consider representativeness

One highly visible failure can matter greatly, especially when safety, security, or customer experience is involved. But routine replacement decisions should normally consider more than one moment. Look across service visits, areas, task types, communications, and corrective actions. The goal is not to minimize the concern; it is to ensure the decision is based on the relationship as it actually exists.

Check whether expectations changed

Buildings change. Occupancy rises, departments move, events become more frequent, daytime traffic increases, and spaces take on new uses. A provider may be performing the original scope while the facility’s needs have outgrown it. Before classifying the relationship as unsuccessful, verify that current expectations are documented and reasonably aligned with current building use.

> **DECISION POINT**
>
> Can you describe a recurring pattern using specific observations, dates, expectations, and responses? If not, continue gathering information before treating replacement as the solution.

Chapter 2 - Evaluate the Relationship—Not Just the Cleaning

Long-term service quality depends on both performance and the working relationship supporting it.

A commercial cleaning provider should be evaluated on the service delivered and on how the organization responds when service falls short. Cleaning quality matters. So do communication, accountability, honesty, accessibility, and follow-through.

Evaluate two dimensions

Performance	Relationship
Consistency across representative areas and visits	Timely, clear, and professional communication
Completion of the agreed scope	Acknowledgment of mistakes and concerns
Reliability of staffing and scheduled service	Credible corrective-action commitments
Responsiveness to deficiencies	Follow-through and verification
Ability to maintain priorities over time	Honesty about limitations, staffing, or temporary difficulties

Ask whether the concern was actually communicated

It is easy to assume that a cleaning company should notice every developing issue on its own. Well-managed providers should inspect their work and identify problems proactively. Even so, some concerns appear mainly during business hours, affect a small group, or become visible only after service. A provider cannot reasonably correct a recurring concern it has never been told about.

EXECUTIVE INSIGHT

Imagine a conference room that gradually becomes one of the busiest spaces in the building. Trash fills more quickly, fingerprints become more noticeable, and supplies are used faster, but no one tells the cleaning provider that expectations have changed. The provider may continue delivering the original service, unaware that the room now requires a different priority or frequency.

Evaluate your own side of the relationship

Before concluding that the provider cannot improve, ask whether your organization clearly communicated the concern, provided specific examples, confirmed the applicable expectation, allowed a meaningful response when circumstances permitted, and followed up after corrective action.

FIELD OBSERVATION

An organization had maintained a generally positive relationship with its cleaning provider for several years. The client began documenting minor concerns but did not communicate them as they occurred. The accumulated concerns were eventually presented all at once together with notice of termination. The relationship may have been recoverable, but the provider had not been given a timely opportunity to understand the pattern, investigate it, or demonstrate improvement. Practical lesson: documentation without communication does not create corrective action.

This anonymized field observation illustrates a practical principle observed in commercial cleaning work. It does not establish that the same outcome applies to every service relationship.

DECISION POINT

Has the relationship been tested through clear communication and follow-through—or has dissatisfaction accumulated without a complete feedback loop?

Chapter 3 - Determine Whether Improvement Is Still Realistically Possible

The most useful question is often not whether mistakes occurred, but what happened after they occurred.

No service organization performs perfectly forever. Long-term relationships are distinguished by how problems are acknowledged, investigated, corrected, verified, and prevented from becoming normal.

Evaluate the improvement cycle

Stage	Evidence to look for
Observe	The concern is described objectively and tied to an agreed expectation.
Communicate	The provider receives timely, specific information and acknowledges it.
Correct	An action is assigned, completed, and appropriate to the issue.
Verify	The condition is reviewed again after correction.
Improve	The concern becomes less frequent or disappears rather than returning unchanged.

Distinguish explanation from resolution

Economic conditions, staffing shortages, illness, turnover, or other internal difficulties may help explain a temporary decline. An honest explanation can be an important sign of accountability. It is not the same as a solution. Continued confidence should depend on whether the provider presents a credible recovery plan, follows through, communicates progress, and produces measurable improvement.

Use a defined improvement period when appropriate

There is no universal period that every provider should receive. The appropriate timeframe depends on severity, service frequency, staffing changes, the corrective action required, and how quickly improvement can reasonably be observed. When there is no immediate safety, security, integrity, or serious operational concern, several weeks to roughly three months may provide enough evidence to distinguish a temporary rough patch from a persistent pattern. This is an experience-based planning range, not a rule.

Some circumstances justify faster decisions

Organizations do not need to prolong evaluation when circumstances fundamentally change the risk. Significant dishonesty, serious security concerns, unauthorized access, substantial safety issues, or material contractual violations may justify a faster response. The guide does not prescribe legal action or termination procedures; applicable contracts and professional advice should govern those decisions.

EXECUTIVE INSIGHT

Temporary difficulty should not automatically end an otherwise healthy relationship. A positive history should not require an organization to tolerate continuing poor performance, repeated failed commitments, or declining accountability indefinitely.

DECISION POINT

Is the provider producing measurable, sustained improvement—or mainly repeating explanations and promises without a different result?

Chapter 4 - Compare the Costs and Risks of Staying, Leaving, and Delaying

Changing providers should solve more problems than it creates.

Organizations often evaluate only the visible service problem. A stronger business decision compares the broader operational, financial, relationship, and transition consequences of each path.

The cost of staying

- recurring complaints and management attention;
- employee or occupant frustration;
- declining confidence in inspections and commitments;
- service failures that affect operations or customer-facing areas;
- the opportunity cost of repeatedly managing the same unresolved concerns; and
- the risk that gradual decline becomes accepted as normal.

The hidden cost of leaving

- management time for procurement, walkthroughs, scope confirmation, and onboarding;
- contract notice requirements or other obligations;
- a learning period while the new provider understands access, priorities, people, and routines;
- temporary inconsistency during staffing and process stabilization;
- rebuilding communication habits and institutional knowledge; and
- the risk that unclear expectations or weak oversight follow the organization into the new relationship.

The cost of delaying

Indecision is not neutral. Continuing to evaluate after the evidence is clear can prolong risk, consume management attention, and make a later transition more difficult. Deciding too quickly can end a recoverable relationship and create avoidable disruption. The appropriate objective is not speed; it is a timely decision supported by sufficient evidence.

Path	Appropriate when	Primary risk
Continue	Performance is broadly acceptable and concerns are isolated or improving.	Complacency or weak follow-up allows problems to return.
Continue with defined improvement expectations	The relationship is recoverable and measurable corrective action is underway.	The period becomes open-ended without deadlines or verification.
Begin evaluating alternatives	Recurring issues persist and confidence is declining, but immediate replacement is not yet required.	The organization delays action even if the evidence continues worsening.
Change providers	Material concerns remain unresolved and another provider is reasonably more likely to meet long-term needs.	Transition disruption and repetition of unresolved management-process weaknesses.

EXECUTIVE INSIGHT

Changing providers may solve provider-specific failures. It will not automatically solve unclear expectations, inconsistent communication, infrequent inspections, or weak follow-up. A different provider operating under the same management conditions may eventually produce similar frustration.

DECISION POINT

Which path creates the lower long-term risk after considering service performance, relationship quality, transition work, and the organization's own management process?

Chapter 5 - Recognize When the Relationship Has Changed

Most service relationships do not end because of one event. They change gradually.

Communication becomes less effective. Confidence becomes harder to restore. Corrective actions become increasingly repetitive. What once felt like a partnership begins to feel like ongoing management. Recognizing that trajectory is often more useful than focusing on any single cleaning issue.

Four relationship trajectories

Trajectory	What the evidence shows	Reasonable direction
Healthy partnership	Problems are communicated, corrected, verified, and less likely to return. Trust is stable or increasing.	Continue the relationship and maintain normal oversight.
Recoverable relationship	Performance declined, but both organizations acknowledge it and measurable improvement is underway.	Continue with defined expectations, timing, and follow-up.
Stagnant relationship	The same concerns and conversations repeat with little lasting improvement. Confidence is declining.	Evaluate alternatives while maintaining professional communication and documentation.
Unsustainable relationship	Material concerns persist despite clear communication and reasonable opportunities to respond. Accountability or trust is substantially impaired.	A provider change may be the lower-risk long-term decision.

Do not let history substitute for evidence

A provider should not earn unlimited additional opportunities simply because the relationship has existed for many years. Likewise, a provider should not lose a long-standing relationship because of one disappointing week. History provides context; it should not control the conclusion.

EXECUTIVE INSIGHT

Time should never replace evidence.

Before you decide

If communication has been open, accountability has been demonstrated, and measurable improvement continues, maintaining the relationship may remain the better long-term decision. If recurring concerns continue despite reasonable opportunities to improve, confidence continues to decline, and the relationship no longer supports operational needs, a provider change may be justified.

> **DECISION POINT**
>
> What trajectory does the complete record show—not just the most recent event?

Chapter 6 - Make a Decision You Can Defend

The final decision should be clear enough that leadership can explain it later.

A sound decision does not require certainty about the future. It requires a fair evaluation of the information available, the alternatives considered, and the outcome each path is reasonably expected to produce.

If you decide to continue

Continue intentionally. Confirm the expectations, improvement actions, responsible parties, review period, and evidence that will demonstrate progress. Remaining with the provider should not mean returning to informal hope.

If you decide to change

Change intentionally. Document why the current relationship is no longer the strongest path, what the organization learned, and which management conditions must improve so the next relationship has a better chance of succeeding. Guide No. 10 begins after this decision and addresses transition preparation.

Use the one-year test

Ask: If we make this decision today, what evidence would make it still appear reasonable one year from now? This question moves the discussion away from immediate frustration and toward the long-term operating result.

> **DECISION POINT**
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> The goal is not to change cleaning companies. The goal is to make the decision most likely to improve your facility for years to come.

Conclusion - Choose the Path Most Likely to Improve the Program

Every commercial cleaning relationship experiences challenges. The question is not whether problems have occurred, but whether they are understood, communicated, addressed, and improving over time.

A provider that communicates honestly, accepts responsibility, follows through, and produces measurable improvement may remain the better long-term partner even after a difficult period. A provider that repeatedly fails to meet material expectations, breaks commitments, or allows confidence to deteriorate despite clear communication may no longer represent the lower-risk choice.

The costs of staying and leaving both matter. So do transition effort, management process, institutional knowledge, and the possibility that unclear expectations could follow the organization into a new relationship.

Make the decision deliberately. Base it on representative evidence, accountability, realistic improvement, and the outcome most likely to serve the organization over time.

> **FINAL THOUGHT**
>
> A good decision is not defined by whether you stayed or changed. It is defined by whether the evaluation was fair, the reasoning was clear, and the chosen path was more likely to improve the program.

Frequently Asked Questions

Does one serious complaint justify changing companies?

It can justify immediate investigation. Whether it justifies replacement depends on severity, evidence, risk, contractual obligations, the provider's response, and whether the event fundamentally affects safety, security, integrity, or trust.

How many chances should a provider receive?

There is no universal number. Evaluate the seriousness of the problem, prior history, clarity of communication, corrective actions, follow-through, and whether improvement is measurable. Repeated opportunities without a different result should not become an indefinite process.

Should a long positive history carry weight?

Yes, as context. A strong history can support confidence that a temporary decline is recoverable. It should not require an organization to tolerate continuing material failures or broken commitments indefinitely.

What if we never clearly communicated the problem?

Communicate it promptly and specifically when circumstances allow. Confirm the expectation, provide examples, agree on follow-up, and evaluate the response before concluding that the provider cannot improve.

Is a lower price a good reason to change?

Price may be relevant, but it should be compared with scope, frequency, staffing, oversight, transition costs, service risk, and the value of a stable relationship. A lower monthly price does not automatically create a better long-term outcome.

What if the provider is honest about staffing difficulties?

Honesty is a positive relationship indicator, but explanation does not replace resolution. Evaluate the recovery plan, communication, follow-through, and measurable improvement.

How long should an improvement period last?

It depends on the issue and service context. In routine situations without immediate serious risk, several weeks to roughly three months may provide useful evidence. This is an experience-based range, not a mandatory rule.

When should we begin looking at alternatives?

When recurring concerns, repetitive corrective actions, declining confidence, and limited improvement suggest the relationship may be becoming stagnant. Evaluating alternatives does not require immediate termination.

What should we improve internally before changing?

Clarify the scope, expectations, communication process, inspection approach, decision ownership, and follow-up controls. These management conditions influence the success of both the current and any future provider.

Companion Resource

Commercial Cleaning Provider Change Decision Review

The companion resource is a four-part Executive Assessment designed to document the reasoning behind the decision without reducing it to a simplistic score.

- Current Relationship Profile - records the service history, scope, expectations, priorities, current concerns, and decision owner.
- Evidence and Communication - documents representative concerns, communication, provider response, corrective actions, and verification.
- Cost and Risk Comparison - compares the operational and transition consequences of continuing, improving, delaying, evaluating alternatives, or changing providers.
- Executive Decision Summary - records the chosen path, evidence, alternatives considered, rationale, conditions, ownership, and review date.

The assessment is educational. It does not replace contract review, legal advice, procurement procedures, security requirements, or facility-specific professional judgment.

Methodology and Evidence Boundaries

This guide combines authoritative quality-management principles, official contract and supplier-management guidance, professional procurement resources, prior certified INVO publications, and a clearly bounded anonymous Field Observation.

Evidence classes

Evidence class	Use in this guide
International quality-management principles	Support evidence-based decisions, relationship management, process thinking, and continual improvement.
Government contract-management guidance	Supports structured supplier-performance review, corrective action, proportionate oversight, and transition awareness. Government procedures are not presented as requirements for private commercial facilities.
Professional procurement guidance	Supports clear expectations, consistent communication, risk evaluation, and supplier relationship management.
Certified INVO publications	Guide No. 8 supports program evaluation; Guides Nos. 4 and 5 support provider-selection and scope boundaries.
Field Observation	Illustrates the importance of timely communication through anonymized firsthand experience; it is not universal evidence.

Important boundaries

- The guide does not establish a mandatory number of warnings, corrective actions, or days before replacement.
- The several-weeks-to-roughly-three-months improvement range is experience-based and applies only when serious immediate risks do not require faster action.
- Government procurement and contract-management processes are used for general management principles, not as legal requirements for ordinary private organizations.
- The guide does not interpret termination clauses, notice requirements, damages, confidentiality, employment issues, or other legal rights.
- Guide No. 9 determines whether a change may be justified; Guide No. 10 addresses transition preparation after that decision.

Sources and References

1. International Organization for Standardization (ISO). Quality management principles.

Available from: https://www.iso.org/quality-management/principles

Use: Supports evidence-based decision-making, relationship management, process approach, and improvement.

2. International Organization for Standardization (ISO). Quality management principles brochure.

Available from: https://www.iso.org/iso/pub100080.pdf

Use: Primary-source explanation of the seven quality-management principles.

3. UK Government. Government Functional Standard GovS 008: Commercial.

Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-functional-standard-govs-008-commercial-and-commercial-continuous-improvement-assessment-framework/government-functional-standard-govs-008-commercial-html

Use: Supports proportionate supplier-performance review, information availability, audits, and sample testing. Used as guidance, not a private-sector requirement.

4. UK Government. Module 9: Contract governance.

Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-official-procurement-act-2023-e-learning/module-9-contract-governance

Use: Supports the general principle that poor performance should be addressed through appropriate contractual measures and an opportunity to improve when circumstances permit.

5. UK Government. General Terms v1.0.

Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-public-sector-contract-core-terms/general-terms-v10-html

Use: Supports clear notice, reasons, corrective action, deadlines, self-audit, issue documentation, and remedial action in formal contract management.

6. Chartered Institute of Procurement & Supply (CIPS). Supplier Relationship Management.

Available from: https://www.cips.org/intelligence-hub/supplier-relationship-management

Use: Supports managing and maintaining buyer-supplier relationships based on the service's criticality.

7. CIPS. Top Tips for Managing Supplier Relationships.

Available from: https://www.cips.org/intelligence-hub/supplier-relationship-management/managing-supplier-relationships

Use: Supports consistent communication, process discipline, risk evaluation, and clear achievable goals.

8. Government Commercial Function. Effective contract management in procurement.

Available from: https://www.gca.gov.uk/news/effective-contract-management-procurement-ccs

Use: Supports performance review, end-of-contract activities, records, security, and transition planning.

9. INVO Cleaning Services. Executive Guide No. 8 - How to Evaluate the Quality of Your Commercial Cleaning Program.

Location: Certified INVO Executive Guide

Use: Supports representative evidence, defined expectations, corrective action, and bounded conclusions.

10. INVO Cleaning Services. Executive Guide No. 5 - What Should Be Included in a Commercial Cleaning Scope of Work?

Location: Certified INVO Executive Guide

Use: Supports confirming scope, responsibility, frequency, and expected outcomes before evaluating provider performance.

11. INVO Cleaning Services. Executive Guide No. 4 - Choosing the Right Commercial Cleaning Partner.

Location: Certified INVO Executive Guide

Use: Supports provider-fit and relationship considerations without duplicating replacement decisions.

SOURCE NOTE

External source links were reviewed and verified on August 6, 2026. Government and professional guidance is used only within the stated scope; internal INVO publications are identified separately.

About INVO Cleaning Services

INVO Cleaning Services provides commercial janitorial service to organizations in the South Bend regional market. The company's educational resources are designed to help facility decision-makers understand cleaning scope, frequency, quality, cost, risk, and service-management choices without requiring them to select INVO.

About the Executive Guide Series

The INVO Executive Guide Series replaces assumptions with informed decisions. Each guide addresses a practical commercial-cleaning question using plain language, evidence-qualified research, professional judgment, and clearly bounded field observations. Every guide is written so that an objective reader would consider it valuable even if they never become an INVO customer.

Educational-use notice

This publication is provided for general educational purposes. Facility-specific decisions should consider the applicable contract, scope of work, building conditions, operating risk, legal and regulatory requirements, security procedures, procurement policies, and qualified professional guidance.

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