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Flip Those Floors for a New Look

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I don't watch much TV, but I'll confess there is one new series of shows that I have my TiVo diligently tracking. Maybe you've seen them - those in which we follow a realty group that "flips" a house. They purchase a home in desperate need of repair, fix it up, repaint it and put the newly renovated house back on the market as quickly as possible. It's amazing to see how in a week or two's time, they can resurrect a home that was an eyesore and make it look new, nearly doubling its value in many cases.

One thing consistently done on all of these shows that seems to make an immediate difference is refinishing the hardwood flooring. It's astounding how much a newly finished hardwood floor adds to the look of a room. Its ability to reflect light brightens and opens up space considerably and gives the area a roomier look. Of course, the other reason that they regularly do this is because the process can usually be done fairly quickly and inexpensively.

In fact, this process can be done on the wood floors in your facility as well. It's an inexpensive maintenance procedure that, along with a new coat of paint, can make an older, well-used area look new and inviting again.

As long as the wear hasn't been severe on your floor and there is no exposed or damaged wood to contend with, you can usually do what is referred to as a "screen and recoat." You can ask a local hardwood flooring professional to do it for you or, if you have someone at your club who has some experience using a buffing machine, they can even do it for you.

Most people believe that the only way to refinish a floor is to do a complete sanding and refinishing of the floor, in which all of the finish is sanded off as well as a thin layer of the wood. True, if you have damage to your flooring or scratches through the finish, this is the best way to make a floor look like new. The problem is that the sanding and finishing process is best left to a professional and it is a noisy, dusty, and time-consuming project. In fact, if you have laminate flooring, in which the actual hardwood surface is only about an eighth of an inch thick, sanding and finishing is not an option at all as it will remove most of the hardwood top layer.

By contrast, the screen and recoat process is relatively quiet and can be done often. That's because this process simply removes the topcoat of finish and abrades the subsequent layer so that a new coat of finish can be applied, allowing good adherence.

It simply utilizes what is referred to as an abrasive screen. These can be purchased at most hardwood flooring stores or wherever you have gotten the buffer you are using. For this procedure, you use a fine screen - typically a 120- grit screen. This is placed under the pad of your buffing machine and the floor is gently buffed until all the topcoat of finish has been removed. After this, you simply vacuum up the dust on the floor and tack it with a damp cloth to remove fine particles.

Once that's done, it's as simple as spreading a new coat of finish with a lambs wool applicator. The finish should be a high quality polyurethane finish made for sports floors, and not something you would typically pick up at your hardware store. Still, any flooring supply house should have what you're looking for and they should be able to recommend procedures and finishes that are best for you. Most flooring companies use an oil-based semi-gloss product when the floor is first finished, but you may want to opt for a higher or lower gloss depending upon your tastes.

Many floor refinishers prefer to use oilbased finish, but be aware that it typically has more odor to it and takes at least a day to dry. Water-based finishes should work well too - they typically carry considerably less odor and usually dry overnight. Either way, it's important to let the floor fully dry, according to the manufacturer's recommendations, or else you'll surely have footprints throughout your floor. It may also be preferable to do two coats by repeating the procedure after the first coat dries.

One other great tip is that if you're also planning on doing any painting in that room, make sure to do that before you screen the floor. It's tough getting up paint when it drips on the floor after the finish is applied, but paint drips easily come off in the buffing process when screening the floor. So go ahead, flip those floors. It's an easy way to make an old area new again.

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