

Teamwork, Motivation

And the Gopher Dance

By

Jim Metzger

About the Author (Me)

I started hanging out at a gas station at 14. Unpaid and probably unwanted but there I was. I guess you could say it's been a love affair of sorts but not what you'd expect. Looking back I realize I was enamored by the people and the culture more than just the cars. Some of these people were brilliant. Contrary to some of the stereotypes, they were creative, intelligent and educated. However, there was also something simple and basic there. You could spend a lifetime in an automotive shop and never hear "paradigm" or any of the other corporate buzzwords. No one complains about Biff in accounting and HR was almost unheard of (I'm still of the opinion that HR and middle management in general should be seen as crimes punishable by death). Our mistake was always assuming these people and the culture in my industry was primitive or backwards in some way, it's not. It's honest.

Perhaps we're not as polished as we could be. We can be outspoken, even profane at times. I personally have had to have "observers" in my early lectures to tally the number of obscenities during my speeches. The numbers were never small. The conversation usually went like this, "Jim, you used the "S word" 18 times in 3 hours". I'd say "really?, Holy Shit!". But with very few exceptions, no one was offended. It's how we talked. Open and Honest.

It's been a long journey. I have worked with and for some of the best people in the world (and a few of the worst). But everyone had a lesson for me. I've watched this industry struggle as our job gets harder. We are constantly asked to do more with less. We are getting old and there isn't enough new blood in the industry to keep up with our rate of attrition. It's pretty clear something needs to change.

I thought I could make a difference through training. Ours is a technical industry so my training was based on that. Endless hours of Fuel Trim, Block Learning, and EGR Functions. But despite my best efforts, the industry was still in crisis. Turns out I was training the wrong things. Not my first mistake and frankly not even in the top 10. There is very much a need for technical training but there are smarter people than me available to teach it and even the best training is pretty meaningless if no one attends. It turns out the issue was attitude, not knowledge.

Changing attitudes isn't easy. The way we do things and treat people has long been engrained but over the years I've had some success. There is truly nothing more gratifying than seeing the people you've worked with and admired finally see a return on their efforts. Not just financially but in almost every aspect of their lives. Having a financial cushion makes everyone feel better. Less conflict at work brings peace of mind (priceless). Running a business correctly means more time at home with the kids, the wife and the dogs. Happy families create better outcomes for all involved. Better vacations, safer cars, better schools, better life. There you go, that's the difference I was trying to make.

We mechanics are a tough bunch. We work impossible hours (my personal record is 104hrs in a week, 1/10 would not recommend). We routinely put our fingers back together with super glue or use duct tape to keep the blood from ruining the customer's upholstery. We remove shards of metal from places they should never be and treat our burns with whatever food was leftover in the freezer. But alas, even old mechanics eventually die. For me, that was last year. Ok, I didn't actually die but I came close. However, it made me realize that life is short and if I can do some good, now is the time.

I originally wrote most of this 20 some years ago but I think it's still valid and I'm hoping it helps. Further, I think everything in this book applies across most every business or endeavor out there. Our success lies not just in determination and hard work but also in each other. Live that and all your dreams can come true.



PUBLISHING INFORMATION

The manual was designed, written and edited by Jim Metzger. The manual and course development was written, underwritten, supported and administered by ABS.

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Overview

The goal of this book is not to impart specific technical insights or specific managerial techniques, but to promote a change of attitude and create a more profitable and attractive working environment.

Much of what you'll read may be new to you. While these concepts are innovative and require a change in mindset, they are proven to work – in automotive repair facilities and other business. However, these principles are not the old school, generally accepted post world-war II business practices that have permeated most industries for years. It's these accepted business practices that have brought us to this rather desperate point.

Some of what you'll read may sound odd or even like complete nonsense. Please, keep an open mind and try to grasp the reasoning behind the ideas we'll discuss. There is logic hidden within the madness.

The Economy is in crisis. Workers are offered tyrannical bosses, lack of training and dangerous working conditions. It's no wonder there's a shortage of qualified personnel.

It's time that drastic steps are taken to ensure the future of our economy and the financial future our country. You need to change the way you do business. Nothing is sacred, there is no portion of your operation that should not be scrutinized and changed accordingly.

This book embraces the heart of that change. Your attitudes and the attitudes of your employees must be the starting point. Only through change can you hope to survive and then to prosper.

The basis for this book, "The Rules", was developed through years of practical experience leading successful businesses. There has been a lot of time spent observing retail and service businesses and researching the factors that make them work or cause them to fail. What was discovered is that the principles utilized to help make businesses better, are sound practices that can be applied almost across the board.

One last thing, I am not the "expert" nor do I claim to be. I am a student but one who has learned a few lessons that deserve to be shared.

"The greatest discovery of my generation is that a human being can alter his life by altering his attitude." -William James

The Rules

Rule #1. Jerks: Fire them. It's that simple. Even the talented, seemingly irreplaceable ones. Never have I witnessed a circumstance where keeping the jerk was better than letting him (or her) go. Jerks do incredible damage to morale, productivity and the mood of the company in general. Make sure you identify the jerk as the genuine article and not just an unhappy employee. But, once the identification is certain, remove them as quickly and quietly as possible.

Rule #2. Teamwork: Let's just say this, it's nothing short of amazing what can be achieved when you assemble a group of people that can work together toward a common goal. Strive for this and watch miracles happen.

Rule #3. Threats: Don't make them, ever. There are times when such witty phrases as "my way or the highway" may seem the appropriate thing to say, but it never works. Managing people by fear or intimidation is counterproductive and only one of two things can come from it; either you eventually have to fire somebody or no one believes you and even your best threats no longer scare anyone.

Rule #4. Training: There can never be enough training, especially in today's industries. Pay for training. Pay the employee to attend. In short, do everything you can do to demonstrate your commitment to training and your commitment to your employees' future with your company.

Rule #5. Employees: All the mushy stuff you read about employees being your most important asset happens to be true. Without them you are lost. They make or break any business from a lemonade stand to Microsoft. Not only do you need to be receptive to employees' requests, you need to seek out ways to acknowledge and appreciate them, even if it costs money to do so. Making an employee feel valuable, noticed, and appreciated is the best investment an employer can make. Cutting corners with your employees is, essentially, cutting your own throat. If you don't appreciate them, someone else will.

Rule #6. Honesty: I say this not out of some over-active sense of morality, but rather from a purely business standpoint. There is no short-term financial gain that outweighs the long-term return of running an ethical business. Don't compromise your integrity for anyone.

Rule #7. Rules: In general, they are a bad idea. Too many rules do nothing but stifle creative thinking. Avoid them whenever possible. Of course, the responsibilities are still there. Everyone still needs to show up on time, do their best every day, and refrain from throwing sharp objects. But these are expected standards of behavior and should not require explanation from a supervisor. If they didn't learn these things from their mother, chances are they won't learn it from you. Rather than rules, spell out objectives and goals. Give employees the latitude to achieve (or even fail) in their own way. They will, more often than not, surprise you.

Rule #8. Leadership: Leadership is not established by policy or position. Lead by example and the lemmings will follow. True leaders demonstrate commitment and conviction in everything they do.

Rule #9. Happiness: Here is the big one. Happiness = Success. There is no clearer way to say it. If your employees are happy and your customers are happy, you have won the game. Financial success is inevitable. Don't ever forget this one. All other rules pale in comparison.

Rule #1. Jerks

Fire them. It's that simple. Even the talented, seemingly irreplaceable ones. Never have I witnessed a circumstance where keeping the jerk was better than letting him (or her) go. Jerks do incredible damage to morale, productivity and the mood of the company in general. Make sure you identify the jerk as the genuine article and not just an unhappy employee. But, once the identification is certain, remove them as quickly and quietly as possible

Bart Must Die

People are strange (apologies to Jim Morrison), or maybe they're just loyal. Regardless, their behavior sometimes makes no sense. Here's the pattern, after some negotiation and research, I'm hired to fix what is usually a pretty broken shop. I'm paid a significant amount of money and I make arrangements to travel to the aforementioned shop, I spend a couple weeks analyzing the books, studying the demographics and the local competition. Then comes the plane ride. Usually I'm in 32E, far enough forward to listen to the wailing toddler but still close enough to the back to enjoy the many fragrances emanating from the bathroom. After acquiring my rental car (a Nissan Cube in a lovely shade of teal) I make my way to the hotel and finally to the shop I'm here to see.

I meet with the owner, and he proceeds to show me around and introduce me to the staff. From the moment I arrive it's obvious his Service Manager, Bart (he likes his friends to call him "Diesel"), wasn't in favor of my visit as he already knows everything. It's hard to argue his level of expertise since he proudly displays his one ASE patch (he passed the parts specialist test on his second try).

Over the course of the next few hours, I witness Bart being short with customers and worse with the technicians. He's on his phone constantly (something involving tentacles), he ignores recommendations, overrides the owner's pricing guidelines and gives me side eye like I'm sleeping with his baby mama.

Further conversation reveals that Bart has been there 9 years, and he's well paid. The shop is cluttered and chaotic but that's only because they are "too busy to clean". As much as I'd like to continue the conversation, Bart has to leave for a while for his weekly drug test. He's had to do that ever since the second DUI but he assures me that only happened cuz the cops are jealous of his "bitchin' 84 Dodge pickup".

I think I see the problem.

I pull the owner into his office to share my findings and the conversation goes like this.

Jim: "Bart has to go."

Owner: He's been here 9 years!"

Jim: "I don't care."

Owner: "He knows all my customers."

Jim: "I don't care."

Owner: "He almost never drinks at work anymore."

Jim: Starts beating owner with clipboard.

You'd be surprised how often this same scenario plays out. I think, at its heart, it's a fear of change. The mystery of the unknown.

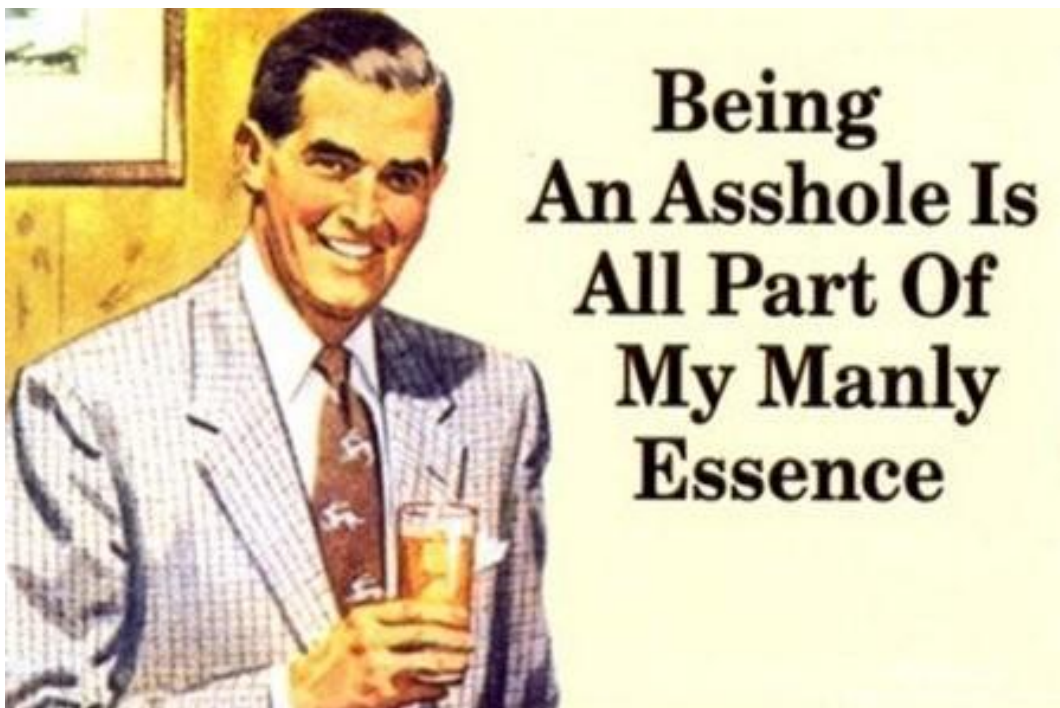
The challenge before you is to build a team. Having a business full of individuals may allow you to survive, but you'll never be truly successful. You didn't work this hard for this long just to survive. You want to prosper. You want a better life for your families, your employees and yourselves.

The first step is to make sure you have the right personnel in place to build your team. Ask yourself if your employees can work together. Can they support each other and strive for a common goal? If the answer is yes, then the burden is on management to clarify the objectives and motivate these individuals to function as a team. Motivation is discussed in a later chapter, so we'll skip over it for now.

In most cases, there will probably need to be some personnel changes before a team environment can really flourish. You may have to make some brave decisions at this point. In most businesses there is at least one Bart, an individual that must be let go in order to "fix" the business. As often as not, the person that needs to be fired is an irreplaceable, pivotal employee, someone with tenure, connections and experience (I never said this was going to be easy).

You would be amazed at the damage one person with a bad attitude can do to an entire business. This is especially true of a person in a position of authority. ***Be aware that sometimes the bad attitude is you.***

As you're reading this, you probably already know who I'm talking about. Simultaneously you're probably also making excuses why this can't work in your business. If that's the case, do yourself a favor. Put the book down and slowly back away. It does get easier from here but this first step is crucial.



Chances are you'll need to replace the person or persons you've removed so let's start with your recruiting and hiring program.

Recruiting

Expand your horizons. There's a tendency to limit the amount of people that will be considered for a position by putting too many qualifiers in a help wanted ad.

~~~~~  
**Wanted:** Certified Master Tech with 20 years Lamborghini experience.  
No felons, smokers, drinkers, flatulence, single parents, or pet owners  
need apply. Call Skip at 1:00PM. (555) 555-0000.  
~~~~~

With an ad like this you've effectively narrowed the field to about 8 people in the world. Of course this is an exaggeration, but the point is valid. There may be a hundred people close to you that could fill the position and be a vital part of your team, but you've eliminated them prior to even getting a chance to meet them.

Keep your ads open and upbeat. Better to choose from 30 people than to settle on the one individual that scored lowest on their drug test. Try something like this:

Rare opportunity to work in an upbeat, professional environment. Applicant must be passionate and have a strong work ethic. We believe in teamwork and training. Please call Mike to make an appointment for your interview. (555) 555-0000.

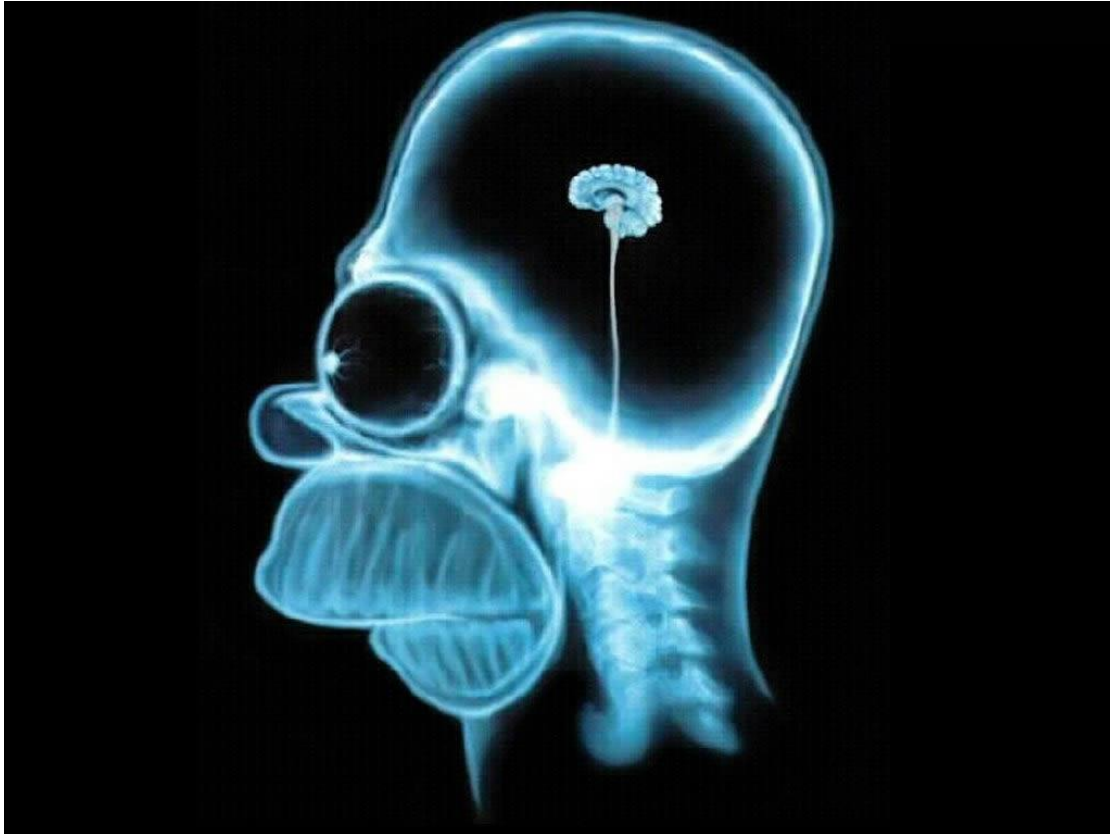
Typically, when you create an ad you provide a description of the type of person you are seeking to fill the job. What you really should be doing is just the opposite. You need to create an ad that describes an opportunity that appeals to the type of person you are trying to attract. The difference is subtle but important.

Don't limit yourself to newspaper ads, local publications, Monster or Indeed. There are other ways of recruiting these days and you want to have as many applicants as possible to choose from. Try some of your trade magazines.



Tell your current employees what you're looking for. Even offer a headhunting bonus. Word of mouth can be as powerful in recruiting as it is in advertising your services. One of the nice things about employees bringing in prospects is that they automatically pick their buddies, people they enjoy being around, and that's half the battle. They also tend to take some level of accountability for their choices, even offering correction when the new hire strays from the path.

Spend some time on the Internet. If you can find your way past E-bay or the porn sites, you might actually find it to be an invaluable resource. There are industry specific websites and blogs galore. An ad posted on one of those might be seen by thousands rather than a few hundred.



Basically, try to keep an open mind. As I write this I am sitting on a beautiful beach in Mexico yet my companies are running full steam ahead. This is largely due to the hiring choices I've made; unconventional to say the least, but effective. When I'm not on the job, my organization is run largely by a group of misfits, people who were un-hirable by most standards. But these people have earned my trust and my respect. They are grateful for the chance to prove themselves, thankful for a stable income and appreciative of the trust they have been shown. Have I been burned a few times? You bet. But I'm willing to wager you have too by some snot-nosed wise-ass with a degree or two on the wall. People are people, we all make mistakes, we all have our weaknesses but everyone deserves a chance.

Bait

If you feel like you need to compete with other businesses or even steal an employee from them, you can use the same tricks they use. Specifically, you may want to consider a hiring bonus. How many times have you seen or heard “\$1000 signing bonus” or even “\$5000 signing bonus”? If you are unfamiliar with how these things actually work, here’s a brief summary. The employer does not hand the new hire a check for \$5000 when they show up to work the first day. This money is held in an account and is only dispersed after the technician has met the requirements of the agreement. Usually this arrangement requires that the technician remain an employee in good standing for a period of time (typically several years).



There is no reason you can’t offer the same type of incentive. Let’s say you offer a \$5000 signing bonus, here’s how you set it up. Let’s assume you are a reasonable business owner and you allow each employee two weeks’ vacation per year. That leaves 50 weeks per year the employee is actually on the job. Every week the new hire works you put \$20 into their fund. By the end of five years you’ve deposited \$5000 in to their fund. If your employee has met all reasonable obligations you’ll hand him a check for \$5000.

Maybe they get \$1000 per year instead. Maybe you deposit all the money in the first year and the tech becomes gradually more vested in this fund. Talk to your financial and tax consultants to make sure you stay within the legal requirements of your state, but there is always a way this can be done. And by the way, guess who gets to keep the interest?

Another great incentive is tools of the trade. Tools are a major expense for someone in a technical field and a major barrier to entering the workforce in an effective manner. The technician with the least experience and the lowest income potential is also the one that needs to buy the most tools.



Most major tool companies offer starter sets or can certainly design one within the restrictions of your budget. Essentially it works the same way as the cash signing bonus. The technician becomes vested in the tools after a period of time. In doing this, you overcome a major obstacle for someone who may be on the fence about becoming a technician. You also create a new customer for the tool vender. Most vendors realize the value of this type of arrangement and will price the starter set accordingly. If the technician fails to stay for the required period of time, the tools stay with the shop. Again, check with your tax professional, but the tools are normally a write off and may even create a tax advantage for the employee and the business.

Staffing Requirements

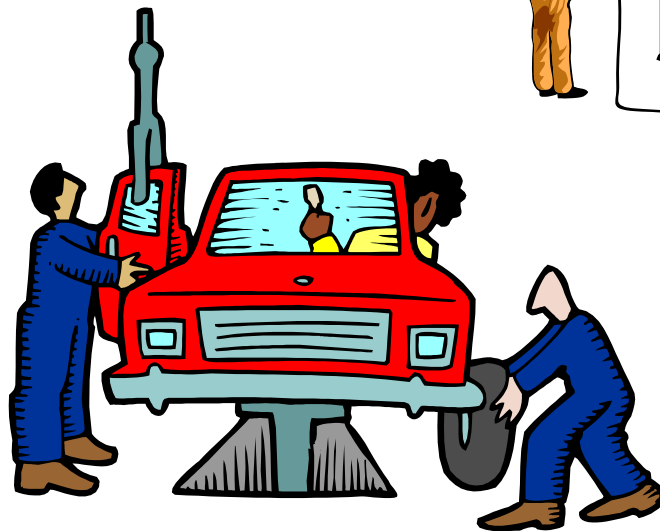
Remember, your goal here is to build a team. Count on the knowledge and experience of the team and not so much that of the individual. You'll find you need one truly talented technician to support four maintenance technicians. You need one technician to handle the truly complex repairs, to get you out of trouble, and most importantly to educate the less experienced technicians.



About 80% of the work performed in a typical shop can be handled by “B” and “C” level techs. The remaining 20% should be the exclusive domain of your hired gun. Having a Master Tech performing oil changes and brake jobs can be a waste of your most valuable resource.

The tendency has always been to hire the most qualified technician you can find. In reality, what you need is someone a bit further down the scale. If you have a skilled technician handling all of your drivability issues and your need is for someone to take care of the additional alignments and brake jobs, then hire the least skilled technician needed for that level of repair. Chances are you can get them for less money and you'll have a much larger pool to choose from.

Never forget that staffing choices are as much about character and personality as they are about experience and ability. Choose wisely.



Rule #2. Teamwork

It's nothing short of amazing what can be achieved when you assemble a group of people that can work together toward a common goal. Strive for this and watch miracles happen.

The Team Concept

In the interest of clarifying the idea and the importance of Teamwork I thought I'd insert a little piece explaining the history of the team concept. It's something I wrote a few years back but I think it still applies. I was asked to write this article for a company newsletter. A brave move, I must say.

In the beginning, there were no teams. Early cavemen would attempt to hunt wild mammoths with only a spear and the magic voodoo dust sold to them by the local witch doctor. This resulted in many dead cavemen and many rich witch doctors who, of course, moved to nicer caves by the beach.

Fortunately, due to the massive brain power of the early cavemen, they developed the team concept and began hunting the mammoths in teams. Unfortunately, the mammoths had also developed a team concept (they called them "herds") and were able to demonstrate the effectiveness of their team concept by trampling hundreds of cavemen who were now conveniently showing up in tightly packed groups. This clearly demonstrates Team Lesson #1: A Team is Only as Strong (or as large) as its Members.

Over time, the team concept was refined even further. Perhaps the clearest example is our military. General George S. Custer (it is rumored that the "S" stood for Squidward) took a ragged bunch of misfits and through training, discipline and teamwork, was able to hone them into a coordinated fighting machine prior to getting them all killed. In doing so, George was able to demonstrate Team Lesson #2: Sometimes a Bigger Team is Better.

The most clear example of the team concept available today can be found in our professional sports organizations. For instance, could John Elway have lost four Super bowls without the help of the rest of the Broncos organization? The answer is "yes" but the scores probably would have been much closer. Illustrating Team Lesson #3: Sometimes Only One Exceptional Team Member Can Raise the Level of the Entire Team – enabling them all to be humiliated in front of millions.

Interviewing

In various capacities I've had the opportunity to perform hundreds, maybe thousands of interviews. It can be a frustrating process. Lies, exaggerations and omissions are rampant. You can believe about half of what you hear. However, you can believe almost all of what you feel. Pay attention to your gut. If you think, "this person is a flake", you're probably right.

Allow me to offer a few guidelines for interviewing that may surprise you. Keep an informal mental scoreboard. Award your candidates points for things like bringing a pen or a résumé. Subtract points for being late for the interview or calling you "Bro" too many times.

During the course of the interview, limit yourself to only a few technical questions. Spend the rest of the time trying to discover who this person is, what their motivation is and what they have to offer. The things to look for might surprise you. The primary concern should be whether or not this person will fit into your team. Can they get along with the personnel you have and how will they affect the dynamic of the group?

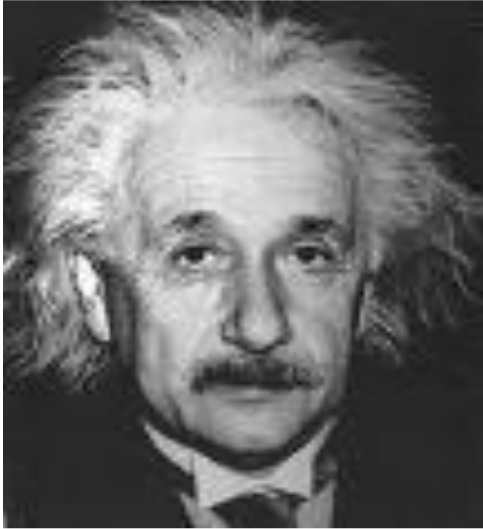
Try to ask open-ended questions and let them do the majority of the talking. Find out what they liked about their last job and what they like to do. Get a feeling for their work ethic and their attendance. Find out why they take pride in what they do. Find out why they chose your industry and your company in the first place.

Make time for your existing people to meet with the prospective employee. Allow them time to visit so that your current employees have the opportunity to get a feel for what type of person they are. Ask your current employees for their feedback and make them part of the hiring process. After all, they are the ones that will be working side by side with this new employee.

Degrees, Certifications and past accomplishments are wonderful and you should never downplay their importance, but don't make judgments based solely on them. There are far too many "Gurus" that can't actually do a damn thing and just as many faceless lemmings that are truly astounding.

An untrained diamond in the rough can be polished, experience can be gained over time but someone with a bad attitude or lousy work ethic will most likely always be that way. Look for someone with good manners, respect, a high energy level and a willingness to learn. In a nutshell, hire for character, train for skills.





“There is a tendency among supervisors to hire individuals who will not challenge their authority or influence.” -Anonymous

Another common pitfall in the hiring process is to avoid hiring those that may seem a threat to your position or authority. Think about this, if we all continue hiring people less intelligent than ourselves, eventually the only reasonable hiring choices will be single celled amoeba or the guy who scrapes up road kill.

Spend too much time protecting your throne and it will be yours, forever. You’ll spend all eternity as a mid-level, mid pay associate undersecretary to the special assistant junior toner replacement technician. Again, if this is your goal, put the book down and slowly back away.

Look for people who will raise the level of your division even those that can push you to be better. If they get your job, chances are, you’ll be one step closer to the corner office.

When you hire people who are smarter than you are, you prove you are smarter than they are.” -R.H. Grant

Interviewing has become an art form. There are classes, seminars and lectures teaching prospective hires what to say, how to dress and generally what portion of the interviewer's ass is the most appropriate area to kiss. In an effort to clarify and eliminate some of the confusion I've included some tips to get through the confusion.

What They Say:

- "I can start right away!"



What They Really Mean:

- "I have \$1.48 left in my checking account."



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What They Say:

- “I’m an entrepreneur”



29

What They Really Mean:

- “I’m way too flaky to work for anyone else.”



30

What They Say:

- "I'm willing to relocate."



31

What They Really Mean:

- "I'm sleeping on my Mother's couch."



32

What They Say:

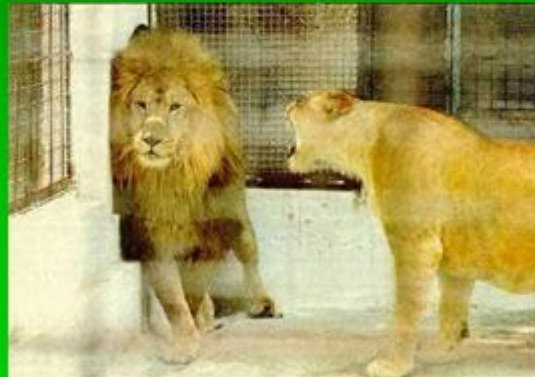
- “I really want to work here.”



33

What They Really Mean:

- “My wife said I couldn't come home until I have a job.”



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Rule #3. Threats

Don't make them, ever. There are times when such witty phrases as "my way or the highway" may seem the appropriate thing to say, but it never works. Managing people by fear or intimidation is counterproductive and only one of two things can come from it. Either you eventually have to fire somebody or no one believes you and even your best threats no longer scare anyone.

De-Motivational Tools or How to Kill Any Glimmer of Hope

If you are determined *not* to change, and you want to continue to be miserable, here are a few tricks of the trade that might help.

- Try disciplining your staff in front of everyone, other employees and even a customer or two. Be derogatory and be sure to raise your voice a few decibels.

It probably goes without saying but we'll do it anyway. Praise in public, counsel in private. We've asked a lot of people the following question. "What was the most damaging blow to your morale ever performed by a supervisor?"

Overwhelmingly, the above "suggestion" was the number one response. Most of you have probably had this happen to you. Try to think back and remember how lousy it made you feel.

Everyone is human and tempers come into play. In the heat of the moment, you might be tempted to holler out some unmentionables when faced with your second "oil out" of the month. But don't do it. It won't resolve anything and it can truly break the morale of the shop.



- **Make promises you have no intention of keeping.**

This one is more dangerous than perhaps any other. I witnessed a Business in Colorado that suffered a mass exodus because of one broken promise – 7 out of 9 employees walked out the door. No notice. No warning. They just left one morning. It's hard enough to find one employee. Imagine needing 7, all at once.

“Always do what you say you’re going to do. It’s the glue and fiber that binds relationships.”

–Jeffery A Timmons



- Charge them for their uniforms or parking spaces or office supplies.

Who thought of this? Some of you might strongly disagree with this one, but this is a hot topic of conversation in and around the water cooler, something you might never hear. The amount of money you save isn't worth the resentment it generates.



- Make them work 60 hours a week but allow them to flag only 20.

This is a rather unique experience in this industry. Here's how it works: The new person joins the team. They have less experience, less training and less tools than the other techs. As if that wasn't bad enough, they have yet to establish themselves with the management and service writers. Some of the team has been together for years and they've made some pretty strong friendships so guess where the gravy goes? The inexperienced "newbie" with limited tools gets stuck with the tickets straight from the bottom of the barrel. It's going to be real challenging to make a motivated employee out of this new hire.

So try something like this – create a pay plan where this poor kid can make a living. You don't have to make him or her rich, but make sure they can pay their bills and provide a decent income for their family while learning the trade. This may take the form of a guaranteed minimum or an hourly plan with commission or bonuses based on flat rate production. Talk to your accountant or tax professional to keep it legal, but find a way that this new tech can afford to stay in the industry.



- Save a little money, skip the benefits.

Never has there been an industry (with the possible exception of agriculture) where this practice is so widespread and so accepted. It has improved over the past few years but it's still a problem. This is a dangerous industry. Protect your people and your investment in them by providing an adequate health plan.

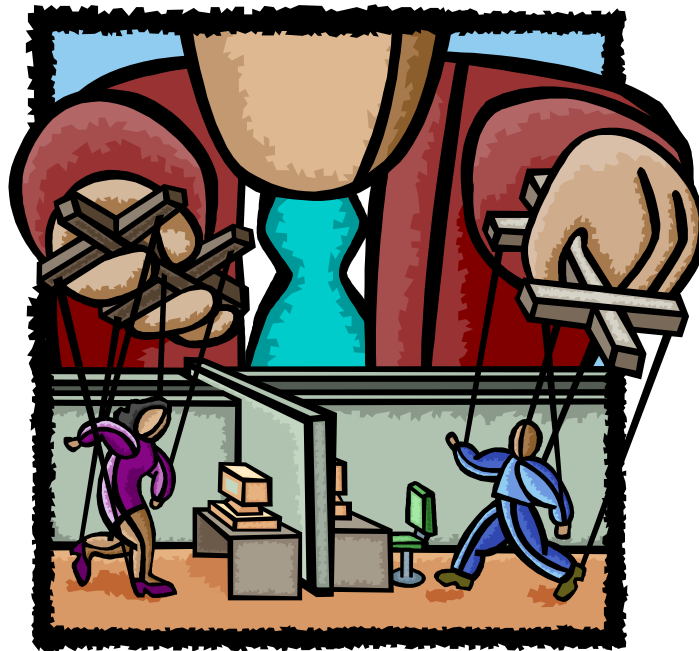
Remember the “mass exodus” we talked about earlier? That was over a health plan. As the workforce ages, this becomes an increasingly important topic.



- **Micromanage.**

This is one of our pet peeves. Refer to Rule #7: *“Spell out objectives and goals. Give employees the latitude to achieve (or even fail) in their own way. They will, more often than not, surprise you.”* In short, manage the results, not the method.

There is a technician who uses a lab scope for everything. If he were asked to check the air pressure on a set of tires, he would report back with a waveform. He gets teased about it endlessly, but the truth is he is one of the finest technicians in the business. It wouldn't matter if he were using witchcraft and a toilet brush. He fixes cars no one else can fix and he is a pleasure to be around.



- Allow vacations only on alternating Wednesdays.

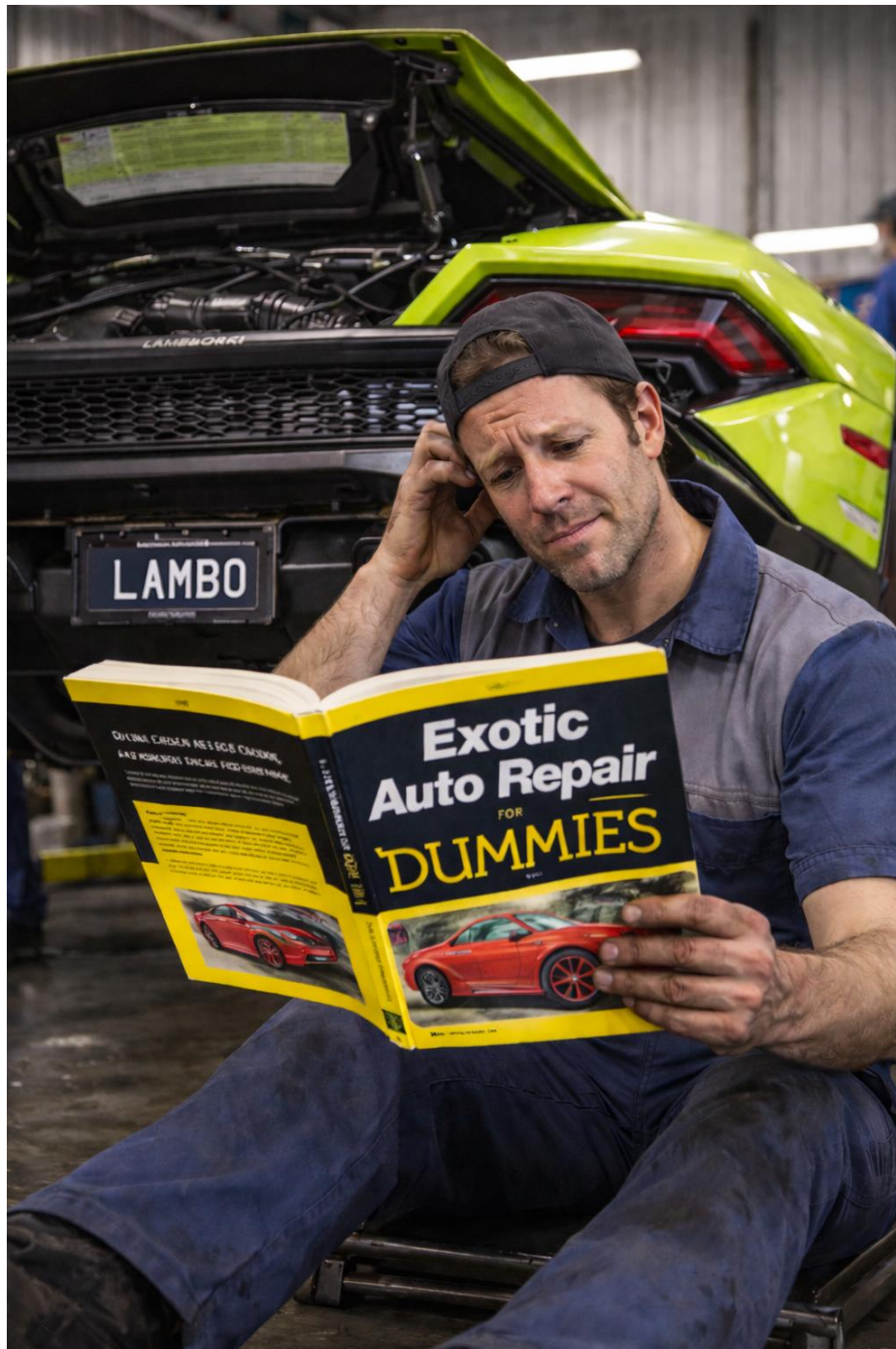
I have been in your shoes. We've all had our people on vacation in the busiest part of the year. Sometimes employees insist on taking vacation time together. Granted, it can be a real strain on the rest of the crew but the reward of having your top people refreshed, happy and grateful, far outweighs the hassle of that one awkward week each year.

Vacations are one of the ways you show your appreciation for the hard work and sacrifice your employees and their families make for the benefit of your bank accounts. Allow them the latitude to take vacation when it works for them. Let them plan ahead with you. Make the process a two-way street and show them you'll do whatever you can to accommodate their needs.



- Ignore training needs.

Let your staff wallow in inability and outdated knowledge, then yell at them when they have a comeback. You may even want to deduct the cost of a comeback from their paychecks. [Sounds like another rule coming on . . .



#4. Training

There can never be enough training. Especially in a field that is so technical and rapidly changing. Pay for training. Pay the employee to attend. In short, do everything you can do to demonstrate your commitment to training and your commitment to that employee and his (or her) future with your company.

More About Training

As trainers, we might be a bit jaded on this subject, but it probably deserves one more tip to the top of the soapbox. Training is an investment that a shop can't afford NOT to make.

Here's more about the Motorola study and a quick example of the impact training can have on your bottom line: Motorola did a study to examine their return on investments. They found that for each \$1.00 they spent on advertising they received about \$1.30 in return. For each \$1.00 invested in training they received nearly \$30.00 in return. Show us any other investment that regularly returns at a 30 to 1 ratio!

**Advertising: \$1 =
\$1.30**

Training: \$1 = \$30

Training can be a powerful motivator in recruiting and growing your employees. If an employee is willing to make a commitment to you, then you have to make an equal commitment to them. Help them reach their personal and professional potential.

There is no substitute for training. Encourage your people to attend as much training as possible. Pay for their training and their training time, or provide it as an employee benefit. This industry requires at least 40 hours training per year for every employee.

And by the way, deductions for comebacks are not only damaging, in many states they are illegal. Find another way to discourage comebacks. Better yet, find a way to encourage the absence of comebacks.

*"Tell me and I'll forget, Show me and I may remember, **involve me and I'll understand.**"*

-Chinese Proverb

Rule #5. Employees

All the mushy stuff you read about employees being your most important asset happens to be true. Without them you are lost. They make or break any business from a lemonade stand to Microsoft. Not only do you need to be receptive to employees' requests, you need to seek out ways to acknowledge and appreciate them, even if it costs money to do so. Making an employee feel valuable, noticed, and appreciated is the best investment an employer can make. Cutting corners with your employees is, essentially, cutting your own throat. If you don't appreciate them, someone else will.

Motivation & Appreciation

OK, at this point you should have all your personnel in place. Now the burden switches to you. How do you make this group of individuals function as a team?

Let's start with common goals. Too often managers and owners feel their goals should be kept secret. They keep their monthly sales figures locked away in some desk drawer. How can you expect your team to accomplish its goals if they're not even told what they are?



Better to post your figures and goals in plain sight. This is a really good time to experiment with some of the charting capabilities of your spreadsheet programs. Charts make these things very visual and simple to understand. Your people need to know your objectives for them to get where you want them to be. It becomes a matter of pride.

Keeping your team aware of current figures is only part of the picture. It doesn't do any good for them to know the figures if they don't care about what they mean.

The goals of the company must have some common ground with the personal goals of the employees. If Larry wants to take his family on vacation, show him how the new bonus structure will help him get there. In the real world, the way to motivate an employee is to show them how the company can help them achieve their personal goals. Let's face it "improving shareholder value" doesn't motivate anyone except shareholders.

Take the time to discover the personal goals of your team members. If you don't know what their goals are, you have no way of helping your people reach them.

So, your next task is to create an environment where these figures have some effect on everyone on the team. The most obvious way is to attach some type of financial reward to achieving the team goals. Whenever possible, get your employee's input in designing pay programs. Make sure the employees' pay or bonus program allows them the possibility of reaching their personal financial goals.

There are some shops that base pay or bonuses on production. There is one extremely successful shop whose technician's elected to pool their pay. At the end of every pay period the total technician payroll was split three ways (by the way, this shop typically did 3 or 4 times the industry average for a shop that size).

Lets point out a few interesting things about this shop. Only one technician is capable of doing any advanced drivability work. The other two are solid "B" techs. But here is why it works: First and foremost, the three technicians have learned to function as team.

The ability of the team is greater than the sum of its members.

There is a deliberate separation of duties. If a drivability vehicle comes in, the “A” tech is assigned to it. There is no discussion. The “B” techs continue doing brake jobs and water pumps, while the drivability man is free to take the necessary time to perform the correct diagnosis and repair on the complicated drivability matter. He’s not concerned about who gets the “gravy” work because they all share equally in the rewards.

In this shop, everyone is utilized to the maximum benefit of the team. Egos don’t enter into the equation. The technicians are all equally appreciated and valuable even though their skills are different.

A few more points about this shop then we’ll move on. Remember, the technicians were allowed to choose this pay method. Their decision was valued and honored. Believe it or not, it’s the teamwork and cooperation that makes this particular shop excel. The money is certainly a part of the equation, but perhaps the most powerful motivational tools are less obvious and far less expensive.

Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success. --Henry Ford

For too long people have been under the impression that money is the sole motivator. Nothing could be further from the truth. It has been proven in many tests in all types of industries that the real motivators are recognition, appreciation and an occasional pat on the back. Here's an example:

Years ago someone developed something called a "Thumbs Up Award". The award amounted to a simple piece of plain white paper with some writing on it, total investment of maybe 3 cents. The employees handed out this award to each other whenever they noticed a fellow employee doing something they appreciated.

“Thumbs Up”



Award



Finally, the recognition you deserve!

Given this day of _____, 20_____

To: _____

From: _____

For: _____

You can redeem this award for
one of our many prizes*

Keep up the good work!

*Not valid in some states. Void in Minnesota. Penalty for perjury. Winner may be responsible for any and all applicable sales taxes. Do not fold, spindle or mutilate. Do not taunt Happy Fun Ball. Management may not be held responsible for any paper cuts or subsequent infection caused by the use or misuse of this certificate. In the unlikely event of a water landing your seat cushion will act as a flotation device. The white zone is for immediate loading and unloading of passengers only. Consequential and incidental damages are excluded. Your mileage may vary.

It was a small acknowledgment of a job well done; a simple way of showing a little appreciation. Initially, some people thought this award would have no merit unless there was some type of cash value attached. So the management agreed that an employee could turn in a Thumbs Up Award for a \$5.00 gift certificate. Guess what? No one turned in their awards. Instead, they hung them proudly over their workstations and started tracking who had the most awards and even plotting ways to get more. Imagine your shop with all your employees looking for ways to excel!

The most amazing change this brought about was a fundamental change in attitude. Not only were they finding ways to be the recipient of the award, even more importantly, they were finding reasons to give this award. Simply put, **they were looking for and finding the things people were doing right instead of complaining about what they were doing wrong.**

*“Treat everyone as an equal.
Treat everyone with dignity
and respect. That gives you a
huge advantage over your
competitors.” – H. Ross Perot*

Simple Courtesies

Simple courtesies go a long way. Asking a technician to take care of something instead of barking orders changes the feel of working hard. If you are asking a technician or anyone else on your team to handle a crisis or do something above and beyond the normal expectations, they deserve an explanation: “Hey Larry, this customer really needs to get out of here by 5:00. Can you get this one done before the alignment?” In the best shops, the technicians know as much as the management about the ever-changing priorities during the course of a busy workday.



Let's face it, you spend as much or more time with these people than you do with your families. Extend them the same courtesies. Say things like “Thank you,” “Good morning,” “Have a good night,” “Great job,” or “I appreciate your hard work today.” And smile once in a while, even when the world is falling apart around you. Keep a positive attitude and a civil tongue and your employees are likely to do the same.

You need to remember these people have a choice. They can work with you toward a common goal or they can tell you to take a flying leap and work elsewhere.

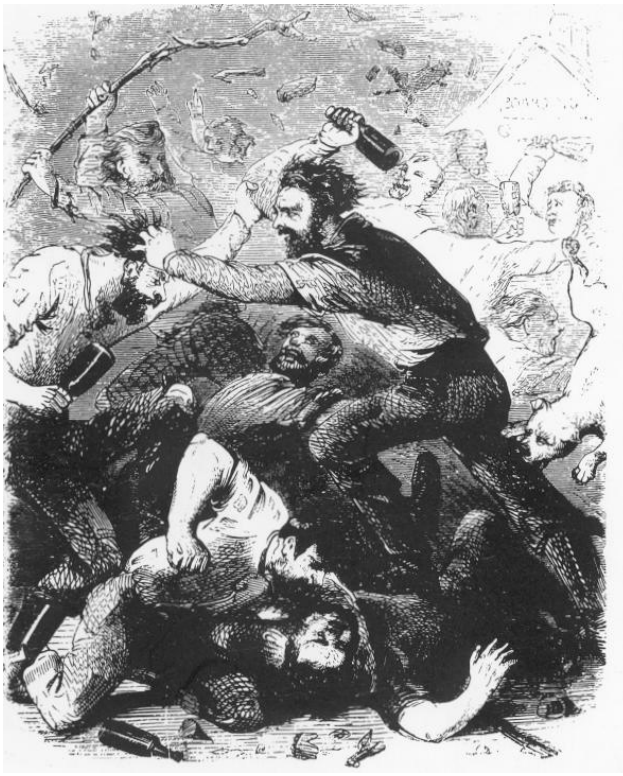
It's absolutely true -- what every person desires more than anything else is to simply feel appreciated. They want to feel important. Learn how to accomplish this and you will earn the loyalty and respect of the people around you. You want your employees as well as your customers to feel that they are important to you. They want to know that you appreciate their hard work or the business they bring to you.

Communication & Meetings

Communication is the key to smooth operations. It is impossible to manage and control every aspect of a busy shop by yourself. It's a team effort that requires good communication.

Meetings are a great way to improve overall communication, but they're a double-edged sword. Do them right and you'll have the entire team with their eyes on the prize. Do them wrong and you've done far more damage than good.

Another brief example from the past, it has been the policy of some of the larger companies in the industry to use meetings as a form of punishment. Meetings were more like a trip to the principal's office than a forum for communication. The roles were as follows. Staff would be seated, berated, belittled, taunted, threatened and humiliated while management would vent and rant for an hour or two. When management finally ran out of breath, the meeting would end on a truly inspirational note like "Let's try not to screw up any more". Knute Rockne would be rolling over in his grave if he could have heard these guys.



The other thing that seems to commonly occur in meetings is a complete loss of crowd control. The "Jerk" you decided not to fire usually goes off on some agenda of his own. Complaints get lots of airtime, but you never hear any solutions. This type of meeting always gets out of control and everyone goes away frustrated.

Think about taking a far more informal approach to meetings. Instead of a formal meeting, buy them lunch on a Saturday. Sit around, eat a ridiculous amount of pizza and talk about what's going on. For more personal meetings when you need to talk to only one or two staff members, keep a Frisbee or a football in your desk (right next to the fake brain, but we'll leave that for another class). Grab a couple of the techs and sneak into the back parking lot and start tossing the Frisbee and talking. No desk, no clipboard, none of the barriers you typically put between your team and yourselves. Just a couple people tossing a football around and sharing some ideas.

By the way, when you are having your meetings, make sure you are actually listening as well as getting your point across. You'd be amazed what can be learned from the people on the front line. There are some fantastic solutions just waiting for your ear if you really listen.

There are infinite variations on this same theme. A wonderful lady who owned a successful shop used cookies in the same way. If she needed to talk to someone or even just calm them down, she'd hand them a cookie and they'd talk for a few minutes. It's hard to understand the deep psychological reason behind the calming effect of a cookie, but it sure seemed to work for her. She also used this trick on customers with equal success.

The point here is to try and avoid confrontational meetings. Whether they're in the form of a meeting or a more private encounter. When tempers and pride get involved you lose control of the situation and say things you might regret later.



Rule #6. Honesty

We say this not out of some over-active sense of morality, but rather from a purely business standpoint. There is no short-term financial gain that outweighs the long-term return of running an ethical business. Don't compromise your integrity for anyone.

Integrity

This industry presents lots of opportunities. You all know someone who has sold a few muffler bearings and some blinker fluid. Here's a story as told by one of our trainers. "I even sold an upgrade to the new Chrome Moly piston return springs to one of my store managers. Thankfully, his original equipment return springs were still under warranty, so I had him call the dealership. He still won't talk to me. Of course, it was all in good fun and I never collected any money for these dubious repairs, but still, the opportunity was there to take advantage of someone's trust."

Let's face it, not everyone knows what a CID Sensor is. Your customers purchase these mysterious repairs on trust alone. Don't ever abuse that. The standard in the industry is still fairly low. One of the easiest ways to set your business apart from the competition is to be honest. Completely honest, even if it hurts. Sometimes you'll take a hit to your bottom line because you chose to be honest with a customer and stand behind your work, but if you handle these situations in the right way, you'll win a customer for life. You'll more than make up for the small amount spent being honest from the customers' future business and goodwill.

Your customers are always glad to tell others about the way they were treated – good or bad. How many times do you recall being in a conversation about the way some moron at a store or on the phone gave bad service and just didn't care? It's prevalent in every industry today, but it's up to you to ensure integrity, honesty, and genuine customer concern is evident in your shop.

This industry suffers for a lack of a good, positive image – we all know that. It's up to each one of you to do your part to change the public's perception. Remember before when we said "it really IS rocket science?" Why wouldn't we want to spread the word about how the industry and technology has changed for the better and how each of you are more sophisticated in your business operations, in your services, and in the way you treat your customers?

You all have had customers who had a bad experience in your shop. That's just a fact of life. And you know what? It doesn't matter who's fault it is; don't start by trying to fix blame anywhere. Start by trying to find out what you can do to make it right with your customer! Period.

You'll be amazed at the number of great reports this customer will share with their family, friends and co-workers about how you went out of your way to fix a problem. You've spent a little extra time and money to save a customer. However, if you don't fix the problem right now, you will have lost that customer forever and the amount of bad press will grow and grow.

It's always better and cheaper to save a customer than try to win a new one. Keeping repeat customers who want to tell others about your shop is very cheap and very effective marketing. It means better sales and higher profits for you.

This is not a sales class (however, we do offer a few), so we'll stop talking about how honesty affects your sales and start talking about how it affects your staff. In simple terms, your employees will see your honesty and respond in the same way. Let everyone know that honesty is expected and nothing short of it will be tolerated. Remember, integrity throughout your operation means better employees, better work ethics, and better customer relations – all of which mean greater success for your business.

Rule #7. Rules

In general, they are a bad idea. Too many rules do nothing but stifle creative thinking. Avoid them whenever possible. Of course, the responsibilities are still there. Everyone still needs to show up on time, do their best every day, and refrain from throwing sharp objects. But these are expected standards of behavior and should not require explanation from a supervisor. If they didn't learn these things from their mother, chances are they won't learn them from you. Rather than rules, spell out objectives and goals. Give employees the latitude to achieve (or even fail) in their own way. They will, more often than not, surprise you.

Stand By Your Man

One of the most difficult things you can do, but also one of the most powerful, is to allow people to make their own decisions. Basically what you are really doing is empowering them. In order to accomplish this you have to have trust in your employees. If you are able to demonstrate that trust to an employee, you will have a dependable and loyal employee. How is this accomplished? The first step is relatively easy. Find an aspect of the business in which you are willing to let them become a part of the decision making process.



Here's a scenario: A customer has their vehicle serviced at your facility. Let's say something occurred that caused them to be dissatisfied. Maybe it was grease left on the steering wheel. It's late in the afternoon, the owner or manager have left for the day and are unavailable. The customer is demanding some sort of action be taken to remedy the problem to their satisfaction. Let's just say the person dealing with this customer decides to take matters into their own hands.

- ✓ First, they listen to the customer's concern.
- ✓ Second, they offer a sincere apology.
- ✓ Third, they make sure the customer's car has been cleaned to their satisfaction.
- ✓ And finally, they issue a refund on the oil change.

The customer is very satisfied with the actions and the decision of the employee. They leave your facility feeling good about the outcome and the ability of your company to make a decision and turn around a negative situation.

The employee, although not feeling too good about the grease that was left on the steering wheel, feels good that they did the right thing and ultimately helped create a satisfied customer.

So now what happens? How would you respond? Do you have a process in place for an employee to know how to handle a situation such as this? If not, you should.

The next morning you come to work and as you're reviewing the previous days business, you see the invoice where the customer was given a refund, and you knew nothing about it. You immediately decide this was wrong and should not have been done. How do most people respond to a situation such as this? You march out of your office and get into the employee's face and immediately ask them, "What the hell is this? Why did you give this customer a discount on their service? Who told you that you could do this?"

Have you ever actually done something like this? Did you happen to notice the look on the person's face as you spoke to them this way? Did you notice how defensive the person became in their response to you?

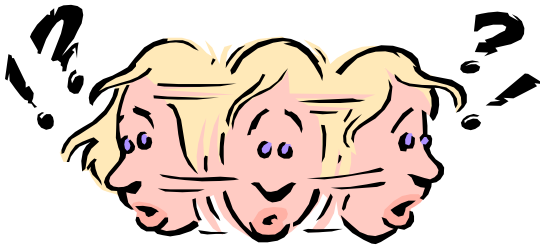
If you handle the situation this way, you can completely deflate an individual. The same person, that hours before had felt good about confronting the issue, making a decision, and doing what they felt was the right thing, suddenly feels demoralized and uncertain about ever making a decision again. More importantly, they take exception towards you and the process of creating distrust towards each other has begun.

How could you handle this situation differently? What would be the proper way of handling this type of situation?

There will always be instances where an employee is thrust into a situation where they must make a decision. That decision could be about anything. There will be those times when you do not agree with the decision the employee made. How you respond to that disagreement is what builds loyalty and trust, or tears it apart.

The first thing you need to realize is that there are always two sides to a situation or a story. Typically you see or hear one side of a story, make a snap judgment, and react. The first thing you should do is gather all the facts before deciding the correctness or incorrectness of the situation or decision.

Let's take the scenario above. You come across the invoice, see the discount had been applied, and you question why such a thing occurred. You call the employee into your office, explain that you ran across this invoice showing where a refund had been given to this customer and politely ask, "What happened that caused you to apply this refund on the customer's invoice?"

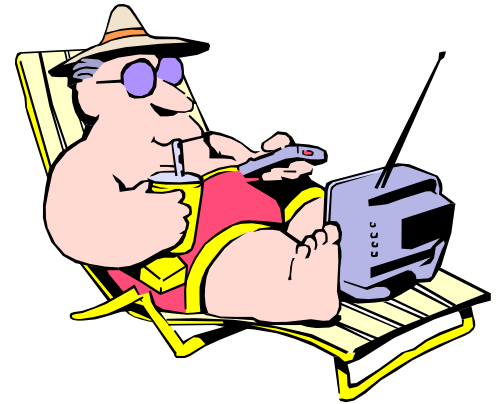


Can you see how a question such as this will not cause the employee to become defensive? There is no feeling of accusation or of having done something wrong. There is only the simple question of "what happened"? The second part is that either you will agree or disagree with the way they handled the situation. If you agree with it, great! Be sure to pat them on the back for doing a good job.

Even if you disagree, don't get angry and yell. Instead, thank them for being willing to face the situation and for trying to help a customer. Explain how they may have handled the situation differently or more appropriately. Help them to learn. Assure them that you want them to continue to step up when this kind of situation occurs again, because you trust them to represent you and your business.

By doing so, you will help them to not only be willing to make decisions, but to make better, more educated decisions. In the process you will help them to become more confident. They will also learn to respect and trust you. They will become more loyal and dependable. You will learn to respect and trust them.

How good would it feel for you to take a vacation for a week and feel totally confident that the people working for you have the ability to take care of things and handle any situation that may arise, and that their decisions are in the best interest of the customer and your business. With enough coaching and patience, you'll find they will make the same decisions you would. That's a pretty comforting place to be.



We've all been on both sides of this fence. Do not berate people for the decisions they make. Teach them! Help them learn how to make better decisions. The effectiveness of this process is amazing. It can also be very difficult to learn and master. Persistence is the key. It's not easy to respond in appropriate manner 100% of the time. If you can do so 90% of the time, you'll have accomplished a great deal. There will be a time when you forget, and you will respond to something in an inappropriate manner, don't ever be above saying you're sorry.



“Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do and they will surprise you with their ingenuity.”

-George S Patton

Rule #8. Leadership

Leadership is not established by policy or position. Lead by example and the lemmings will follow. True leaders demonstrate commitment and conviction in everything they do.

Leadership

Leadership is almost a quality rather than a practice. There are a thousand quotes used to describe leaders but they all say essentially the same thing. Leadership is about integrity and actions. Being an owner or manager doesn't make you a leader. As often as not the real leader in a shop environment is the service manager or the technician that bails out the other guys when they are involved in a difficult repair.

Regardless of the industry or the circumstance, leaders always seem to demonstrate the same qualities.

Leaders are decisive. In the words of an old Air Force Colonel, "If you're standing at a crossroads, make a decision. If you've made the wrong choice you'll find out soon enough and you can back track and correct your mistake but if you're just standing there, you aren't doing anyone any good."



Leaders demonstrate commitment through action. Leaders are always the first to take action. Memos and meetings do not make leaders. They establish leadership through action and participation. Leaders can't lead from beyond closed doors. Their actions must be obvious to those they're trying to lead.

Leaders foster optimism. Even in the face of overwhelming odds leaders will find a way to see the positive side. This may be the most important quality of a leader. Leaders are susceptible to the same frustrations and defeats that we all face but leaders separate themselves by the way they deal with adversity. They'll face it, acknowledge it and pick themselves up off the ground and try again.

Leaders provide the tools for their team to prosper. A big part of a leader's job is to clear the obstacles so that others might succeed. Leaders will keep the goals of the company and the goals of their people in clear sight and strive to make reaching those goals possible.

Leaders listen. Good leaders understand the value of listening to their team members. It's a crucial source of information and ideas. And it's an inexpensive way of letting your people know they matter to you and the company.

Leaders are respectful. Leaders understand that you have to give respect in order to receive it. A title doesn't guarantee respect. You earn it through your actions, your character and how you treat those around you.

The Tao of Leadership

A Leader is best when people barely know he exists.

Not so good when people obey and acclaim him,

Worse when they despise him.

“Fail to honor people, they fail to honor you,”

But of a good leader, who talks little,
When his work is done, his aim fulfilled,

They will say, “We did it ourselves.”

Rule #9. Happiness

Here is the big one. Happiness = Success. There is no clearer way to say it. If your employees are happy and your customers are happy, you have won the game. Financial success is inevitable. Don't ever forget this one, as all other rules pale in comparison.

General Nonsense and the Gopher Dance

“You can make yourself happy or make yourself miserable, the amount of work is the same.” -Carlos Castenada, Don Juan

This may be a little hard to swallow, but perhaps the most important thing you can do to improve the overall efficiency of your organization is to make it a fun place to work. It goes without saying that everyone needs to earn a fair wage, have an opportunity for advancement and an adequate benefit package. But successful employment goes beyond that, way beyond that. You need to remember you have people working for you, not employees.

Make work a team effort. Make sure every one believes and feels that their contribution to the team is crucial and appreciated. Lend a helping hand on occasion so they know you’re an active part of the team.

Provide a sound system or allow technicians to set up their own. Countless studies show people are more productive when they have music than when they are without. If your company policy forbids music in the shop, consider changing the policy.

It’s amazing what a little fun can do for everyone. In one shop, everyone who had a birthday got two pies. One was for eating and one was hurled directly at their face. If you’ve never hit someone in the face with a pie, you’ve missed one of the joys of life. It is extremely therapeutic.

If you have a public address system, page someone to the “white courtesy phone”. Especially if you don’t have a white courtesy phone. At the end of the day thank them for flying with you and advise them to return their tray tables to the full upright position.

Play music trivia with the songs on the radio. “Name the guitarist, and the lead singer, and for the bonus round, who was the walrus?”

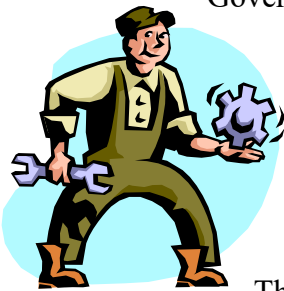
Start your memos with “...and then, one time at band camp....”

In short, find little ways to create a more fun environment to help break up the monotony of the daily grind.

OK, here's the part about the gopher dance. There are times when even the best shops need a tension breaker; something to let off a little steam and get a little silly and relaxed; something to escape the rigors of the day. For one shop, the solution was obvious: the gopher dance.

Let us explain. At the very end of the movie Caddy Shack, as the golf course is exploding all around him, there is an overweight gopher doing a rather subdued version of the twist to Kenny Loggins' "I'm Alright". This is the gopher dance. In this shop, anytime that particular song came on the radio (or the CD player if management sensed terminal tension build-up) it was required (it was even in the employee manual) that every one undulate in a particularly gopher-like fashion. Technicians, store managers, sales people and occasionally, even a customer or two would join in.

Somehow this silly little idea worked its way into several shops and eventually made its way into training classes and other industries. Even as we speak, there is at least one branch of our Federal Government that are firm supporters of the Gopher Dance Movement.



It's hard to say why this works so well, but it is impossible to be in a bad mood while performing the gopher dance. If you're ever lucky enough to be in a shop that does the gopher dance, you'll see. There is something magical about a grumpy technician with a wrench in one hand and a work order in the other doing his best to emulate a robotic gopher with an enormous grin on his face.

The idea is not only catching on, it's even being expanded. There is an exceptional import service shop in Las Vegas that not only does the gopher dance but they also do the crab dance. When someone gets a little moody, they would extend both arms and open and close their hands in a claw like fashion. Pretty hard to stay angry when surrounded by a herd of human crabs.

So what comes from all this nonsense? Loyalty. You get loyalty, the kind of loyalty that money can't buy. You get employees that never miss work and start showing up early because they know it's the service manager's birthday and he's gonna get a lemon meringue pie in the face before the day's out. You get people who will walk through fire if you asked them and a team that would never produce a bad month because they know you're counting on them. You get a pleasant place to work, where people help each other and every one pulls toward the common goal.

.....

Thank You

