

No excuses!

Make the *right* training a priority

By Paul Chizeck

There is a strong parallel between making sure your children get a college degree and providing an on-going training program for your employees.

Once the college graduate gets that piece of paper, the foundation has been laid for landing a better job, earning a higher salary and achieving greater overall happiness. The same things can be said about training — except the return on investment is more direct!

Earning a reputation for having employees who really know their stuff does so many things for your business. High caliber people will want to work for you because everyone wants to be associated with the best. The training you make available will help build a strong team that is self motivated, fresh and excited about their jobs. There's not much doubt that if you have an average crew, they will get you average results. But if you have a great crew, you'll get fantastic results.

Providing training isn't all that different from many of your other business activities, such as buying the right equipment, having the appropriate insurance, hiring a good accountant,



Training in customer relations pays off every day.

marketing your business and collecting your receivables. All of these are critical to a healthy bottom line, in the short term or the long term.

Stop making excuses. Two of the most common are, "I'm

"INTERMITTENT"

DATA COLLECTION SHEET			
CUSTOMER # 0012543	ADVISOR CZ	TAG # 00255	
MODEL Ford Ranger 4.0	VIN/VEHID FV R00345WJT10035	YEAR 1999	DATE 05/19/05
MILEAGE 97053 miles	CONCERN: Intermittent bucking of engine		
ESTIMATE	ESTIMATE TBD		
CONCERN:	ESTIMATE		
CONCERN:	ESTIMATE		
CONCERN:	ESTIMATE		

Is this a "four letter word" in your shop?

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IDENTIFIX SOLUTION:

1999 Ford Ranger 4.0

Symptom: Intermittent bucking of engine

Hotline Archive Fix: Replace Wire Harness

Omar's Auto Service used this Hotline Archive & said:

"Found wire harness under cab had chaffed through and was arcing causing the truck to shut off and die.

Repaired wires as needed. All set — You Bet!!!"



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No excuses!

short-handed and I just can't spare the guy today," and, "If I train them, then they'll just leave me anyway."

I say you need to make training a priority. Plan ahead to make sure you have coverage while you are down a person.

You can't predict the future. Sure, they may leave you after you've trained them. But they may not. You can't use that as an excuse for not continuing their education.

The right training

Sometimes finding the right training can be a challenge. No one wants to send their people to a seminar where vendors take valuable time to do their own commercials rather than teach. So here's what you do.

1. Before you send an employee to a training seminar, confirm ahead of time what the agenda is and make sure the time dedicated is for training and not solicitation.

There actually are people out there who care about your success first and your purchases second — they know that if you are successful, your purchases will come over time.

2. Talk to your peers, your suppliers and even local business associates about where they source their training. Look to industry organizations like the Tire Industry Association (TIA) and M.A.P. (Motorist Assurance Program) for their programs, standards and recommendations.

3. Build a culture within your business which fosters the importance of training. Start with new employees. Have a plan to manage their orientation and then continue with on-going classes so they will stay updated.

This will show your people that you value them and that you are willing to make an investment to help them keep current.

You should require your technicians to be certified by respected organizations like the National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence (ASE), the Specialty Equipment Market Association or TIA, and you should encourage them to continually increase their number of certifications. Sure, there is a personal responsibility for individuals to grow their knowledge, but stressing the importance of training is a win-win-win opportunity. Consumers receive professional service, employees become more proficient and you benefit from increased customer satisfaction, employee loyalty and more sales.

Moves to improve Find out how your employees treat customers

How well do your counter people treat customers? Here are three ways to identify what training your people need.

1. Observe them in action. You need to step back a bit and be the critic here. For example, listen to your people when they're on the phone. If you were the customer calling, would *you* come to your store to buy? (Tip: Record incoming calls, then play them back and ask your staff to critique the conversations. Call your competitors to see how well they handle phone calls, too!)

2. Review customer comment cards. If you don't have a program in place, you should create one.

3. Ask your customers. Don't be afraid of what they'll say. You can tell them you are always trying to improve your service to the customer and ask for some candid feedback about your people and your operation.

The last thing you want to do is spend a ton of money marketing your business and then not be adequately prepared to satisfy your customers and bring them back again and again. — Paul Chizeck

Train everyone

Training includes your sales and counter people, too. They should know about new products, new technology and everything your business provides to the customer. They also should be experts in how to effectively manage their time *and* your shop time to maximize every opportunity you get through the day.

And don't forget to provide training on customer relations so they know how to handle even the most difficult customers (see sidebar). You want a reputation as being the very best at every aspect of the business, from write-up to checkout.

Here are some simple steps that will help you build a training mentality among you and your employees.

- Identify an area that needs to be improved.
- Engage your people for input and commitment to change.
- Put a plan together to make it happen.

It's OK to start slowly, but once you have that plan in place, follow through. Think long term, think reputation, think sales and profits. Make a commitment to training once and for all. ■

Paul Chizeck recently joined Dealer Strategic Planning Inc. (DSP) as vice president of operations following his retirement from Bridgestone Americas Tire Operations LLC Inc. as director of consumer tire training. He will provide training and education expertise to the growing number of successful tire dealers who belong to DSP 20 groups.

For more information on how to join a tire and service 20 group, contact Chizeck at (910) 409-7291 or paul@dsp-20group.com.

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