



PROFIT MATTERS

HOW DO YOUR NUMBERS LINE UP? | BY CHRIS "CHUBBY" FREDERICK

Making Friends With the Shop Operations Mirror

One of our senior coaches, Brian Canning, told me there is no doubt that in writing this we are going to upset many of you. But if we can get you to take a close look at your shop operation, I think a little of your wrath is well worth my effort. I will apologize in advance to those very rare shops that are doing the things they should be. But for many of you, I am truthfully hoping that the truth hurts enough to get you to act and to correct what is going on in your shop, because that will put you in the best possible position to thrive in this challenging market.

Lead or Get Someone Who Will

Before I get into the operational issues, I want to talk to you about leadership and accountability. The other items I will talk about are little more than process, but they cannot occur until you take on the role of leader or until you pay somebody to take it on for you. Having the best, most effective procedures will mean little if your people are not doing the things they are supposed to be doing. That can happen only if we have leadership, accountability and someone insisting our staff do the things we ask.

Most owners are reluctant and even scared to take on that role. I would say

it again: The best people performing the best plan will fail in their efforts unless somebody is leading them. They will not go by themselves and if we are not



leading, they arrive as a pack, usually far from where we want them. Leadership ensures that our people perform and are doing the things we want them to do as we would have it done.

Stop making the assumption that your people are doing and saying the things you think they are as they interact with existing and potential customers. We in the automotive repair industry live and die by the relationships we have with our customers and how well we use the telephone. You would be amazed and likely embarrassed by how poorly our customers are being treated and likely angry at how unwelcoming and unfriendly we are on the phone.

40 Productivity Robbers

Do not be afraid to ask your technicians to improve. Productivity numbers across the U.S. are unacceptably low, but this is much more a leadership issue than a reflection on the quality of our techs. Get to where you can accurately measure an individual tech's productivity, set high expectations, build a process that supports productivity and provide incentives that drive individual and team productivity. If your techs are productive and you are maximizing the selling opportunities that are coming into your shop, you very likely are profitable. That is why we are here, right?

QUESTION OF THE MONTH

QUESTION:

What is the fastest way to improve shop operations and productivity?

Review my Forty Productivity Robber list and eliminate them by holding everyone accountable. Lead or find someone who will!

Do you have a question for Chubby? E-mail him at cfrederick@autotraining.net.

Verify your inspection process. This one is a sore spot with me. We have no chance of exceeding our customers' expectations unless we are willing to commit ourselves to doing thorough and consistent inspections that include recommendations for maintenance services. But very few of us are doing anything to ensure that this is happening.

How often are we looking at the hard copies our techs are generating to verify what they are doing, and how often are we looking to see what items are failing to make it from the inspection sheet to the estimate and the finalized repair order? I will give you the most frequent answer: almost never. That is more of the unsupervised process and the hands-off leadership that is sinking our business and our industry. You need to do something very different here and actually lead and make sure you are finding the repairs and services that are there to be found.

Ask for the business. Too often we and our service advisors are looking at what our techs are recommending as though it


were our car and our wallet and neglecting to let our customers know what our techs are finding. As long as we can stand on the ethical altar and truthfully say that a repair or service is needed, due or will be needed or due before the next service interval, we need to let our customers know. And let them know not just to make a sale but because we care about them and their car.

Looking in the Mirror

The economy now is just about as good as it gets for us. Nobody is buying new cars. Our customers are nervous but know their cars need to be maintained and repaired. If you are not looking or recommending, then this is a terrible economy. I think it is the best selling opportunity we have seen in the automotive repair industry in at least 20 years. How are your sales?

Look at your business operation very critically. I think you will find things that will shock you and things that will explain why you are falling short of what you had expected and what it will take to retain existing customers and to attract

new ones. I would then ask you to commit to something better and lead to that promised land. If, on the other hand, you are satisfied and not willing to take that critical look and not willing to make the necessary changes, well I think you are assuming that everything is OK. We all know about that "assume" word, right?

Look into that mirror. If you would like a list of the "Forty Biggest Productivity Robbers," send me an e-mail at cfrederick@autotraining.net and I would be happy to give you a place to start improving your shop operations. 

Chris "Chubby" Frederick is CEO and president of the Automotive Training Institute. He is thankful for assistance from George Zeeks and Brian Canning in preparing his monthly column. Contact Chubby at cfrederick@autotraining.net.

