



# PROFIT MATTERS

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

## Effective Discipline Without the Pain

Why is it that building the right staff and keeping them is so difficult for many business owners? We all know that one of the key elements to a smooth running and profitable shop is getting the team members to follow the same script. Talking to shop owners over the years, it has become obvious that the three biggest problems to maintaining discipline effectively are on-time attendance, smoking in the shop and excessive cell phone use. Holding people accountable for following the rules is one of the most challenging things a shop owner must do.

"This will be harder on me than it is on you," is absolutely true when it comes to people who would rather avoid confrontation. Others don't mind or enjoy confrontation, so it easily can go past discipline into punishment that damages the family bond that you should be striving for. Let's explore some fundamental steps to avoid the pain for the owner and the team member.

I would like you to listen to our Leadership Instructor at ATI, George Zeeks, explain how to handle the big three problems. His dad was a fanatic of discipline. He began his army career with almost no education and rose to the highest enlisted rank, a command sergeant major. His rules for leading people were so simple that George missed the point for years.

His biggest rule was to make sure his people knew what he wanted. Nothing fancy, he just wanted to make sure everyone knew the rules to the game. When we bring on new staff members, we need to make sure they know how this shop works. If you don't explain that, the new member of your family will act based on what the rules were at their last place of employment.

Next, lay out the game's rules. That means everything that you are going to expect from them, not just some of the things but everything. Here is where an employee handbook comes in ... well, handy. Make sure they know how to dress, how to interact with customers and each other, when to come to work, when they can use their cell phone and when and where they are able to smoke.

### Lay Down The Rules

In the leadership class, we have an extended session on these problems and how to solve them. The main concern that we hear all the time is that no real rules have been laid down. We get mad at them, and ourselves, when things don't go the way we want, when all along we haven't laid the groundwork for success.

Here is where knowing yourself and your personality comes in. If you do not like confrontation, you will tend to put off saying anything until the frustration builds up and then you blow up. Imagine trying to raise a puppy like that. The puppy mistakes the carpet for an out-house and we say "no" but not "NO," so the puppy does not really get the point.

A puppy can get away with it because they are cute and fun but once they get bigger, things change. Now we are fed up and the next time the mess is on the floor, we take the dog out back and shoot it. Sounds ridiculous, right? That is what happens to employees when we try to avoid confrontation and then we just can't take it anymore. Maybe they get fired or maybe not, but they could be left wondering what just happened.

Those of you who are the more aggressive type might have the opposite problem. You need to be careful that you do not attack your employees for their indiscretions. The tendency to come on too strong can alienate your employees and make it harder to build a stable crew.

### QUESTION OF THE MONTH

#### QUESTION:

**What is the first mistake most shop owners make trying to implement discipline?**

**Having rules laid down with a process to consistently manage them!**

*Do you have a question for Chubby? E-mail him at [cfrederick@autotraining.net](mailto:cfrederick@autotraining.net).*

The key to both of these personalities is the second rule: Separate the person from the problem. The behavior is what you want changed, deal with that. Remember that there is a specific issue you want to deal with and it cannot be viewed as a character flaw if you want to keep the person.

### Create a Response Process

So what happens if we have established clear rules and we are able to keep the sin separate from the sinner, what is the next step? Zeeks' dad always said that you should know how you are going to respond before you ever have to. What does that mean? Have a process in place that you are going to use when you have a discipline problem and then use it the same way every time.

Here's a real story from Zeeks: I was in independent shops for years in the automotive industry and had never used a write-up form until I was working at one of the national corporations. I always thought that "writing someone up" was silly. The first time I had someone sign a warning statement and I saw the reaction in the employee, I became a believer.

A progressive discipline system can be an incredibly effective tool, when it is used properly. It allows you to move slowly, but surely, cranking up the pain level to change the behavior that you do not want. This helps to reduce the under or overreaction to the situation at hand. Having this process in place removes the uncertainty in everyone's mind as to what is going to happen. That is, of course, if you want to save the employee. If not, then this will give you the necessary paperwork to avoid wrongful dismissal, unemployment and other little legal nastiness that can come up.

### Behave Consistently

A big first mistake is not to acknowledge every violation. I don't care if it's the first time that an employee is late, always make eye contact and say something like, "I'm glad you got that extra beauty sleep, because you really needed it." It is a low stress way to let them know that you know. The second time we have a breach of the rules, pull them into the office and offer feedback on the purpose of the rule they have broken.

They must agree with you that the

rule is important and that they understand its purpose or you will not get anywhere. Remember to always "package" the conversation so that you start with something positive, then the problem at hand and then end on a positive note. This keeps the focus on the problem.

The third offense becomes much more serious and this is where you start the write-up process. It is important to have this conversation fairly scripted ahead of time so you don't get sidetracked or deflected by the employee. You must remain in control of the situation. You also must have the write-up paperwork already filled out and ready to go before you start the conversation.

You lead your employees through your words and actions, but you manage them by having processes in place to deal with different situations. If you do not have a predetermined plan for discipline, you are much more likely to have problems. The time that you invest in developing your process will help keep your blood pressure down and create a better environment for your staff. Everyone does better when they know and understand the rules and it will

help keep the puppy alive longer.

If you need help in developing this process for your shop, send me your contact information at cfrederick@autotraining.net and I will send you an example process to get you started. It will include an example of a write-up form and five questions for accountability to guide you through the conversation with the employee and help keep you in control of the management process. *TLZ*

**Chris "Chubby" Frederick** is the CEO and founder of The Automotive Training Institute. He is an AMI instructor conducting over 250 AMI approved courses every year with the help of his 80 associates in North America. He is thankful for assistance in writing these articles from coaches George Zeeks, Brian Hunnicut, Bryan Stasch, Matt Winslow, Eric Twiggs and Steve Privette whom are part of the team that coaches over 1,000 shop owners every week.

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