

# ARE YOU PLAYING CHECKERS OR CHESS?

ANTICIPATE YOUR SHOP'S NEED FOR FUTURE TECHNICIANS AND SERVICE ADVISORS

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**AS** I reflect on the topic of finding the right people, I am reminded of something that happened to a guy that I know. He was the district manager for a chain of video stores back in 2005. He had one store in particular that was staffed with the following four positions: store manager, assistant manager, shift leader and salesperson. Let's listen to Coach Eric Twigg's tell the story.

One day, the district manager had to fire the shift leader for violating the dress code policy and for consistent tardiness. This set off a negative series of events at this location. The assistant manager was close friends with the shift leader and gave his two weeks' notice when he got the news. The store manager was so upset that his assistant was quitting that he decided to quit as well. The salesperson got word that the manager was leaving and didn't bother showing up for work the following Monday. The district manager was stuck in the store with no employees. He was stuck working in the business instead of on it, spending most of the next three months opening and closing the store.

This story has an interesting twist that I have yet to mention. The "guy" that I refer to was me. When this first happened, I placed all the blame on bad luck. How was I supposed to know that everyone would quit?

Then one day I looked in the mirror and came to the realization that there are two types of bad luck. First, there is random bad luck that eventually happens to everyone who owns or manages a business. A good person



leaving for reasons beyond your control would be an example. Then there is residual bad luck that occurs when you don't take the necessary steps to prepare for the random misfortune that's coming. Since I didn't take the steps to prepare for the worst case scenario, I was to blame. I was stuck, and it was my fault. My primary goal for writing this article is to make sure you don't become the victim of the bad breaks that come from the failure to prepare.

After taking ownership of my failure, I was able to move forward. I started reading a book by Jim Collins titled *Good to Great*. There is a chapter in the book titled "First Who, Then What." Collins points out that great leaders approach business situations by first ensuring they have the right people in place. He uses the analogy of a bus, stating that these leaders get

the right people on the bus, the wrong ones off the bus, and the right people in the right seats. As you read on, you will learn my three-step plan that will help you to find the right people for your "bus," better known as the shop.

## 1. Anticipate the need

Anticipation is like playing chess as opposed to playing checkers. The chess player thinks two to three moves ahead compared to the checkers player who is only focused on the move in front of him or her. Which game are you playing?

Most shop owners are playing checkers when it comes to finding help. Their recruitment efforts don't begin until they have an immediate opening. The problem with this approach is that you tend to be more desperate and less discerning when attempting

to fill a pressing need. Think about it: if you have a backlog of cars and angry customers, your natural instinct is to hire the first “warm body” that can get you caught up. Hiring the first warm body is easy, but the damage that “Mr. Warm Body” can do to your reputation is hard to recover from.

Having a written succession plan where you identify who on your present team can fill a future opening is a great example of playing chess. Implementing an apprentice program where you mentor and groom an entry-level technician over a specified period of time is another way to do it. The best way to play chess is to always be recruiting regardless of your current staffing levels. French general Napoleon Bonaparte said it best: “A leader has the right to be beaten, but never the right to be surprised.” The result of anticipating the need is that you will feel prepared instead of surprised when a good person decides to leave.

## 2. Specify the job

Clarity is the starting point of success. In other words, the clearer you are on who you are looking for and how much you are willing to pay, the better your chances of finding the right person. Let's start with who you're looking for.

Do you have a written job description for every job at your shop? This will give you a picture of who you're looking for and help to attract candidates that fit the description. For example, when looking for a service writer, I find it best to look for individuals who have the right attitude and personality instead of just automotive experience. Some of the best service

writers that I have ever worked with had no prior automotive background, but had friendly personalities that were complemented by successful sales and customer service experience. If I hadn't taken the time to get clear on who I was looking for, I might have passed on the right candidate without realizing it. It's hard to find the right person if you don't have a clear picture of what “right” means to you.

Next we will address what to pay. There are several websites that allow you access to local wage surveys by typing in the name of the job that you are hiring for and your zip code. Two of my favorites are simplyhired.com and salary.com. These types of sites will give you information concerning what the average person in that job is making in your area. Having an awareness of the market wages and knowing what you can afford to pay will help you to create a compensation plan that is fair for both you and the candidate. If you have questions on what you can afford to pay, I recommend partnering with your accountant or business coach.

## 3. Build a candidate pool

In 2008 I was a multiunit district manager for a national automotive service corporation. I had learned the lesson from my failures in the video store business, so in spite of being fully staffed, I let my managers know that we were always hiring. Since I had already anticipated my needs and specified the jobs, I was ready to build a candidate pool. I started by implementing a referral bonus program that rewarded employees for referring people that they had worked

with in previous jobs. I extended this bonus opportunity to my vendors as well. Signs were posted at the counters of each location advertising my career opportunities. I also used recruitment websites such as indeed.com and ziprecruiter.com to post openings. One of the candidates who was referred was a young man named William.

William was the best service manager in the market, and I called and met with him several times over a six-month span. He always declined my offer saying that he was happy where he was working and uninterested in changing jobs. Everything changed one day, when he called me out of the blue letting me know that he was now ready to join my team. This was perfect timing, because I had just lost a manager unexpectedly in a shop that was five minutes away from William's house. I hired him and continued working *on*, instead of *in*, the business.

When I began pursuing William, I didn't have an immediate opening. As a result of anticipating the need, specifying the job and building a candidate pool, I avoided becoming the victim of the residual bad luck that comes from not being prepared.

If you commit to implementing these three steps, you will position yourself to stop working in the business and to start working on your dream. Are you doing everything you can to find the right people? To find out, go to [www.atonlinetraining.com/2016-03](http://www.atonlinetraining.com/2016-03) for a limited time and download the ATI Great People Finder Checklist. 



Chris “Chubby” Frederick is the CEO and founder of the Automotive Training Institute. ATI's 115 associates train and coach more than 1,400 shop owners every week across North America to drive profits and dreams home to their families. Our associates love helping shop owners who are having the same struggle as many of them have had, and who are looking for the same answers — and in some cases looking for a lifeline. This month's article was written with the help of Coach Eric Twiggs.

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