



PROFIT MATTERS

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

Eating the Elephant

We have a way you can leave loose ends behind. One of our senior coaches, Brian Hunnicutt, has an easy and fast technique for implementing change called, "Eating the Elephant with a Notebook," otherwise called the Notebook Technique.

This simple technique requires the massive investment of a spiral-bound notebook for each employee, one for yourself and one for the shop in general.

After acquiring the notebooks, take them and walk your entire shop, starting from a street view, through the parking lot and front door path that a customer would take, through the front counter, waiting area, bathrooms, office area and entire shop. Do this all with an eye on what is good, as well as what needs work. Write down all that you see that looks good and right with the world on one list. The second list you will be making will include everything that needs improvement.

Nobody can function well in a lose/lose environment. Even if your shop is full of problems, you and your employees need to feel that there is something positive to base growth on. By acknowledging the good, you show them that wins are within reach.

Schedule Meetings

Now you need to conduct a meeting with all of your employees. The purpose of this meeting is to have your employees help you assess what your shop does well and what needs improvement.

You will be taking notes and will add only valid items to your shop notebook — valid meaning those comments that have a general consensus, not random ranting. Some items to consider: Is the communication between front and back effective? Is the courtesy check being done correctly? How is the phone answered?

At that time, take a look at the items and quickly prioritize the first two items that need to be worked on. At that meeting come to an agreement on what will need to be done in the next week to go about fixing these two items. It's important that actual action steps are decided upon, even if the problem cannot be addressed totally within a week. The elephant is eaten one bite at a time.

Have a quick follow-up shop meeting the next week. Start the meeting by once again reviewing (celebrating) what the shop does well, of course confirming that this is still the case. Then do a quick review of items that the shop needed to work on and give the team a pass or fail grade. If the items have been addressed satisfactorily, reiterate the win and focus everyone's attention on maintaining and/or improving the effort.



If the first two items pass, you can move them to the "What We Do Well" list.

Then you also can move on to the next two items that need to be addressed. At any point in time, you should have no more than two items that are being worked on. If one of those items takes weeks to address, you will be adding only one new item. If one of the items seems huge, you can choose to address only the new issue and just track progress on a previous item.

The idea here is to celebrate victories while addressing shortcomings at the same time. You will be sending a clear message of leadership, expectation and teamwork to your crew. This should feel like a group effort to move forward, not a firing squad.

You will want to date every meeting in your notebook, along with the items that you will be addressing, including any notes on specifics. This is your tool to track and measure the progress of your shop as a whole. You will now have in your possession a written report of where your shop

QUESTION OF THE MONTH

QUESTION:

When a lot of change is needed with your associates, where do you begin?

It's always the same: begin with praising them with what they do well!

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

stands and where you are headed! It's an amazing relief to put it all down on paper and feel that you have a doable action plan that will be addressed in a realistic manner.

Weekly One-on-Ones

For each employee, you will need to have a short weekly meeting. While this might seem time consuming, it is well worth the extra effort and need not be time intensive. The first meetings, or problem employees, will require the most effort. But then it is

the problems that we are aiming to weed out, which will lead to a much more productive and profitable business.

During the meetings, sit on the same side of the desk as the employee. Give a brief explanation that you are instituting a new way to track and measure the business in an effort to improve it.

Show them their notebook where you have written down a few items you feel they do very well. Ask them what they would like to add to the list and write it

down if you agree. Now turn the page and show them a few items that you think they need to work on. Ask them what they think they could improve on. They need to understand that you will be using this tool to manage your employees and that their cooperation is part of employment.

Pick one item of your choosing and one item that they choose to work on. Have them write down what they will do to work on these items and get their signature beside the description. For example: I understand that I need to work on my productivity. I will use my cell phone on breaks or for emergencies only. (Signature)

The following week, have a short meeting with them where you put a red or green mark next to the signed statements. After a few weeks of green marks, you will move this item to the front page of things that the employee does well. If it continues to be a problem, the many red marks will make it clear they are not meeting expectations.

A Notebook for You

Now comes your notebook. If you are interested in becoming a more successful owner, you will need to become a better leader. This is the ideal tool for the journey.

You know the routine: Write down what you do well as a business owner. Take a good look at that list and give yourself credit for where you are. Now you need to take a long hard look at yourself and come up with areas that you need to improve. This is much more comprehensive than putting down a cell phone. We may learn that we have to overcome our fears and bad habits, and when it's in black and white it becomes harder to ignore.

The Notebook Technique is a real-world method to help you develop skills to take control of your shop, manage employees and grow your ideal business. Our list of the 40 Productivity Robbers will help you create items to improve when you meet with employees. Send me your information at cfrederick@autotraining.net and I will forward it to you. 

Chris "Chubby" Frederick is CEO & president of Automotive Training Institute. He is thankful for assistance from George Zeeks, Brian Hunnicutt, Bryan Stasch and Matt Winslow in writing this monthly column.

