

CONTINUOUS LEARNING

FIND TECHNICIANS AND MANAGERS WHO CONTINUALLY SEEK OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN

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IF YOU want good people on your team you better learn how to grow them! Unless you have talented associates, you will never be able to enjoy much free time with family or your own interests. Not to mention, the shops we see that are the most successful have better talent than their competitors. So, if you want to stay the best shop in your area, you might want to download our Employee Appraisal Checklist after you listen to our youngest coach, Kevin Chzaszcz, explain how he did it and how you can grow your team to watch your back!

Entering the automotive world straight out of college, I took what is seen as a nontraditional career path. After moving up to service manager within a couple of years, I was persuaded to go back to school part time to get my MBA. That was when I truly learned about hard work; I worked 60 to 80 hours a week on the counter and then had another six hours a week of class. Most days off I spent writing papers and doing research. Not an easy or fun task, but in the end I accomplished my goal. I would recommend continuing education to anyone looking to further their career or improve their business. Too often education is only seen as degrees and certificates, but it is so much more.

Running or managing a small business is more than a full-time job; it requires going out of the way to take care of customers, our employees and our facilities, leaving little time for continuing education. Staying till midnight to finish a repair or getting that call late at night that the security alarm has gone off is nothing new. Yet, while all this is happening the world is changing, cars are changing, the employees we are hiring seem to be getting younger and younger and demanding new benefits.



Continuous learning

How can we keep up with the changes when the business overwhelms our life so that we can barely keep up the day-to-day activities? To be a successful business, we must stay ahead. This means continuous learning. Some people think continuous learning means classes, studying and huge piles of debt. But there are other ways to learn. We live in a time where we have more information than we know what to do with. Case in point: how many times has your newbie technician been stuck on a job and asked for help and you said, “Did you look it up on YouTube?” I am sure this has happened dozens of times. If it hasn't, you now have a new way to free up dozens of hours a year by not having to give step-by-step directions. On top of that, we have the pay services Identifix, Mitchell 1, MOTOSHOP and so on that are packed with information, trouble trees, TSBs and wiring diagrams. It is

also important to point out the rise of MOOC (massive open online courses); these are both credit and noncredit courses on a range of topics. The most prestigious colleges in the country offer many courses for free in this format, and the best part is that you can take them for free in the comfort of your home on your own schedule. Can these new tools replace traditional classroom and hands-on education? No, but they can certainly supplement them.

What does education represent in a potential employee? Of course as shop manager, we have different things we are looking for in a service advisor/manager or a technician. Traditionally, a technician is taught through experience only and picks up some ASE certifications or dealer certifications along the way. Our current system says that if a person is not fit or not able to go to college then you have to go into a trade. We need to look at this. The tech's ability to do an

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alignment, replace shocks and hook up a scanner, plus 20 years' experience would traditionally make him or her a master technician.

We need to question this because even with the wisdom of the years and excellent parts replacement capability, a technician is no longer a master technician. Becoming a true diagnostic master technician takes a lot of research, persistence and continual learning. For example, a great technician I worked with took a calculus class for fun to support his friend and received an A. This technician clearly has a desire to learn, no matter the topic. This desire will give him great diagnostic ability, and he will be able to keep up with the changing technology. It's not the fact that he can do calculus but the fact that he can comprehend it and that he would be willing to learn it. This ability showed itself every day when he faced a difficult problem: he would be all over the forums, the paid services and Google searching to find the solution to the problem. This is the technician of the future and he or she may come with a four-year degree or just a strong desire to learn.

Your road to retirement

With businesses becoming harder and harder to sell, is it really possible to work in your business your whole career and then sell it and retire? Probably not, so this means that you will need your business to run without you and turn it into passive income. So what does this have to do with education? Well, it's going to take a dynamic person to run and improve your business in your absence. This person will have to be able to manage all the day-

to-day tasks as well as try to grow the business so they can improve their own income. When we are looking to entrust this much responsibility to a single person, a strong educational background will show they have the ability to act independently and have the desire to improve themselves. If an employee has been doing night classes over the last four years earning a degree, then they had to balance school, family and a full-time career. This is the kind of person that can move your business forward and can put in the extra work to do so. They are not looking to do a clear set of tasks and clock out when the day is done. They will want to be an active participant in your business. Make sure you are able to give this to them.

Grow minority partners

Many automotive business owners feel intimidated about hiring people with degrees and higher education. They believe their employees should work their way up from the shop, or they steal employees fully trained from their competitors — bad habits and all. In addition, they can't imagine that a person with a degree would want to be a manager for them, assuming they would prefer an office job. Running a small business offers those with education the security of a traditional job while having the opportunity to hone their skills and try their ideas. Just because they took the time to get educated does not mean they want to take the risk of trying to start their own business or be stuck in a cubicle all day. Maybe they are sick of working in some big corporation, or want some say in what they do. People change careers

all the time, especially now, so why can't our industry attract some of these people? Other retail establishments certainly are. You could also offer them a non-controlling minority partnership with a built-in buy-back provision if you felt strongly about their ability.

Employee appraisal checklist

No matter the quantity of resources out there, there is no substitute for having the right attitude and a hunger for learning. When you find an apprentice technician or service advisor who wants to learn and advance, this may become his or her strongest attribute. The walls of seniority, bureaucracy and career tracks are coming down quickly. We are currently 65,000 short on technicians and this gap keeps growing. The opportunity is there for anyone willing to enter this industry. Dealerships are making fast-track programs to rapidly train technicians to become master techs because their pool is so small.

Why not try to grow our own and support the good employees we already have? We have the amazing opportunity to offer stability, growth and community in each of our shops. Do you have an in-house employee feedback program? It's a great place to start and the cost is very small. Everyone wants to feel like they are learning, growing and moving forward. Having an in-house program, with a checklist for the employee and management to monitor the results, can be a huge boost for the staff. For a copy of our ATI employee appraisal checklist, download it at www.ationlinetraining.com/2016-04 for a limited time. 



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 Kevin Chzaszcz.

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