

What Award-Winning Dealerships Do Differently

By Tom McQueen

I've collaborated with more than 400 dealerships during the past 25 years. To say that I have seen the good, the bad, and the ugly during my travels would be an understatement.

The most significant discovery of my journey though, is that exceptionally great automobile dealerships do three key things differently than all of the others.

1 Leaders are Servants. With all due respect to their positive intentions, automobile manufacturers are neglectful in terms of providing any meaningful learning opportunities (other than product training) for their dealerships. It just doesn't happen.

Consequently, when it comes to things like organizational development, leadership training, and human resource management, for example, the typical dealer principal with no experience in those areas is simply content to manage their business in ways that are detrimental to long-term profitability.

Award-winning dealerships understand that it all begins with leadership, and not the top-down type.

Major General Karl Horst (US Army, RET), the Senior Leadership Executive of the Dimmitt Automotive Group in Clearwater, Florida had this to say:

Common sense leadership in the twenty-first century is concentric in nature, not hierarchical. Every employee is called upon to lead in their own way and to serve one another in the accomplishment of the dealership's mission.

And while that's great insight, very few dealers get it. The majority of them are plagued with top-down management, high turnover, disengaged workers, and difficulty recruiting millennials who seek more engagement in the workplace.

Although servant leadership isn't anything new, the demands of a multi-generational workforce in our country have made it an essential operational asset for dealerships desiring to improve performance, productivity and, ultimately, profit.

2 Information is King. No one does a worse job for having too much information. Unfortunately, the reality is that the information highway in most dealerships is a one-way street with many potholes.

Automobile dealers with a sustainable competitive advantage, however, clearly discern that communication is to an organization what blood is to the body. Information is the lifeblood of a dealership and sharing it at every opportunity breathes energy into the business.



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One of the key challenges for the automotive industry today is to engage their employees in the accomplishment of their business mission as well as with their co-workers. For the Proctor dealership group in Tallahassee, information-sharing has taken on a whole new look.

Collaborating with PDP Auto in Mankato, MN, (www.pdpauto.com, a branch of PDP Solutions, www.pdpsolutions.com), Proctor adopted a communication platform that allows their employees at three separate locations to access important dealership information with a click of their computer, hand-held device, or strategically placed kiosk.

Pamela Grimes, Executive Director of Operations at the Proctor group noted that,

With the speed of business today, delivering key information to employees in a timely manner is critical for keeping them in touch with and supportive of our business goals.

Gone are the days when dealership information was typed on a monthly employee newsletter and stuffed in an envelope with their paychecks. The Proctor news magazine keeps staff members apprised of goals, customer satisfaction information, and employee news and accomplishments on a daily basis.

3 Trust Is Key. If we could only purchase trust, workplaces would be so much healthier. Unfortunately, trust isn't for sale; it has to be nurtured.

The fact of the matter is that without trust, all meaningful relationships are eventually doomed to destruction. When your employees don't trust their managers, they become disengaged. When they don't trust one another, departmental performance is less than optimal. And when customers don't trust your business, they go elsewhere.

Walk into any automobile dealership today and ask the HR department (if they have one) what training they offer in trust-building, or what they do to recruit and hire trustworthy job applicants.

Trust starts at the top and for the Nimnicht dealership group in Jacksonville, Florida, Billie Nimnicht, III leads his team. Most importantly, Billie understands the importance of creating and growing a trustworthy workplace.

In order to help managers foster trusting relationships, the Nimnicht group employs 360-degree feedback tools and other assessments so that dealership leaders keep a clear focus on their strengths and challenges. According to Mr. Nimnicht,

Trust is the backbone of a healthy and vibrant organization. In addition, when our customers observe that our employees collaborate and work well together, that inspires them to do business with us.

There's no question that award-winning dealerships behave differently. They serve one another as well as their customers; their communication platform engages team members; and, trust forms the cornerstone of the team's leadership character. It sounds simple enough; it isn't. But the absence of any one of those three key success factors cripples the dealership's ability to earn and maintain an ongoing competitive advantage in their market.

