

Communication is Key- Where Did I Leave My Keys?

By Valerie Ziebron

We all know that it's important to clearly communicate at the dealership but getting it to actually happen consistently in the shop can be a challenge. I reached out to busy managers to get their take on why it's important, how to best do it, and how to stick with it. Their thoughts were insightful and provide good direction for others.

Why do you think dealership communication is key?

"Communication is instrumental in keeping your team tracking in a straight line towards meeting daily, monthly and yearly budgets. Without it, each team member has their own perception of what the goals are and run an individual line towards them. At the end, the lines don't match up – making us less profitable." - Chris Olson

Why is shop communication essential?

"It is absolutely essential to success. All shop workers know they need to do good work fast. But how fast? What is good work? How much work in a day? What should they do when they have a problem or don't have the right tool? The communication is critical for the feedback management gets as well as the information they give." – Carrie Stacey

Do you change how you communicate based on who you're reaching out to?

"Technicians have a tendency to bottle their feelings and thoughts – they also tend to speak laterally when they have a problem. I teach them that when they do that they tell people who cannot help them and encourage them to come to management instead. I also try to stay ahead of it by practicing MBWA – Management By Walking Around. Which keeps me in the loop. Technicians are tough to find and they must be cultivated like flowers you water every day!" - Jim Sabia

When do you find the time to communicate?

"We have a meeting every Thursday at 10am to exchange information. It really helps to bring everyone in the loop and makes me aware of anything I need to know or can help with. This was our first attempt at regular organized communication 15 years ago and today we couldn't do without it." - Bill Gilbert

Do you have suggestions for making communication easier?

"Pick a day and a time for weekly meetings and stick to it! Have it someplace quiet, come with a hard copy agenda to hand out and keep it positive and constructive. And of

course...doughnuts! Once you start the meeting regimen, your team expects them. It is our duty as managers to keep our teams informed, motivated and tracking that straight line to success!" - Chris Olsen

How can you tell when dealership communication is lacking?

"I firmly believe that most people get up every morning and intend to do their best. When there is little communication from above, each person takes it upon themselves to allocate their own time and talent how they see fit. Recently, I was in a dealership where even the most junior detailer was deciding what he should be working on, when and how. Not surprisingly, this place was losing money." – Carrie Stacey

Besides direct communication with your team, is any other communication important to your success?

"I never miss an opportunity to thank a spouse for sharing their husband or wife with my business." – Jim Sabia

What would you say to a dealer or manager who doesn't work at actively improving communication?

"Every August, millions of little kids go out for football. Kids as young as six go to daily practices with detailed drills, practiced plays and in-depth video analysis. We parents pour time, effort and money into training these little fellas when it is a long shot and no one is actually depending on the success of these kids. Yet, a dealer principal doesn't do the same for his own skills in communicating and yet, all of his staff and all of their families, and his own family are depending on his success."

- Carrie Stacey

Developing and practicing solid communication with our internal team pays big dividends in job satisfaction, employee retention, profitability and ultimately customer loyalty.