



MANAGING For Success

Four key qualities can make or break whether you succeed as a leader.

OVER THE NEXT SEVERAL MONTHS, I am going to focus my articles on a challenge I am seeing more and more in dealerships—inexperienced management. Most of the issues that dealerships are facing today can be traced back to management. From poor performance in service departments, bad customer experiences at parts counters and low margins on wholegoods, management, or the lack of it, seems to be a common theme I end up working with owners on how to move their dealerships into a positive direction.

Most people, when they move into a management role, don't see it with the complexity that it has. To be a manager in today's dealerships, you have to be able to cast a clear vision for both the department that is being managed and people being managed that aligns with the goals of the dealership. Managers have to search for, interview, hire and then lead, coach, encourage, motivate and, at times, discipline those they are responsible for. While succeeding as a manager requires working to master a skill set that involves working with others, it is just as much about understanding who you are and how you behave when working with those you are responsible for.

While there are many qualities that managers must have to achieve success, there are four that I believe are critical and make the difference between managers that succeed and those that simply exist.

Integrity

Managers are constantly put into situations that are filled with problems and challenges, being forced to make tough choices with both employees and customers. Having integrity and being true to themselves is one of the most important attributes of successful managers today. Employees want a manager they can follow that consistently exhibits honesty and integrity in their lives and in how they deal with the day-to-day issues of their jobs. There will be times, especially when under pressure, where a manager might be tempted to slide to the "dark side" and breach his own standards.

Successful managers know that their integrity is what sets them apart from all the others, and for that reason can be counted on by their employees and the owners to act in a way that breeds confidence in the people they manage and the customers they deal with on a day-to-day basis.

Accountability

From customers, employees and numbers, managers are accountable for the success of their department. The customers look to the managers to solve their problems.

The employees look to managers to lead them in a way that helps them grow personally and financially, and will be there for them in both the good and the bad times. And the owners look to managers to be accountable to produce the numbers they need from the department to help the dealership grow, prosper and expand.

Resilience

Running a department in a dealership is a tough business. In the service department, managers do battle with manufacturers for warranty claims, customers who have misused their equipment and "need it now" and employees who at times underperform or simply don't show up for any number of reasons. In the parts department, managers fight back orders, customers who don't know their model numbers or even the manufacturer of their equipment, but need parts because "they are all the same." And then there are the Internet parts price shoppers, who want to see if you can give them a better deal. In the sales department, managers have to deal with competitors who drop their margins to get a sale at any price, and some salespeople don't follow through with customers or drop the ball on their "get ready" paperwork to the service department. Successful managers have the uncanny ability to spring back from setbacks, problems and unplanned events. They are confident in who they are and see opportunities in obstacles.

Common Sense

We live in a politically correct world, so common sense is no longer common, but it is one of the critical traits that great managers possess. As a manager who is faced with multiple challenges, it becomes easy to overlook the simple solutions to problems. That's where common sense comes into play.

Great managers have a unique ability to see both the "forest and the trees," and look for simple solutions to what appear to be unsolvable issues. All managers have challenges—it's a part of what the job offers—but it's the managers who are willing to embrace the importance of their positions and who are willing to continue to grow, learn and embrace the value of integrity, accountability, resilience and common sense that will rise to the top and help themselves, their people and the dealership achieve new levels of performance. ■

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