

IS YOUR DEALERSHIP STAFFED “RIGHT” FOR THE BOUNCE-BACK?

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Though it may not be on the top of your list to think about optimizing your dealership's workforce right now, think again! When the auto-economy turns, dealers who will emerge ready to excel will be those who took the time now to position themselves for optimizing the future! This is the competitive edge!

Automotive dealerships are regarded for continuous process improvement. No stones go unturned in the name of optimizing the bottom-line. Unfortunately, one element, and maybe THE most important one that often gets overlooked, is our human resources. Our people are on the front line with the customer, they keep our shops flowing with productivity, they sell cars, they leave lasting impressions, they, quite simply, make the business happen. It doesn't matter if the employee is a receptionist or a sales manager; they have a distinct effect on our profit or loss, on our ability to optimize.

Consider your current staff. Are their times when you wished that you or your managers had taken a little more time in making that selection? Have you gone through a painful dismissal lately? Keep in mind that your next hire could be your best producer or your next project. Need another project right now? With plenty good people currently looking for jobs right now, your challenge is to hire the best ones and keep them.

Over the years, working with many businesses, several being auto dealerships, I have found that choosing our personnel is often times not given the level of importance it deserves. Give your business the following hiring quiz to see if you're doing enough:

1. Does your dealership consistently hire the right person for the job?
2. You have no experience with problem employees.
3. Do you have clear, well thought out job descriptions for your positions?
4. Have you ever really identified or profiled the critical success attributes of your best employees?
5. Do your interviewing managers and supervisors use consistent guidelines for conducting effective, legal interviews?
6. Have your interviewing managers and supervisors developed interviewing questions that will identify the crucial, necessary and desired skills traits and motivations of job candidates?
7. Have your managers and supervisors been trained in hiring the right people?
8. Do you have acceptable employee retention rates?

If you answered no to any one of the above questions you need to consider some changes. If you answered no to more than one— definitely get help! The selection of personnel can be the most productive or costly decision we make as managers. The costs can be staggering. It is conservatively estimated that the cost of a poor hiring decision, where the outcome is dismissal is 80% of that employee's annual salary.

Preparing your dealership for hiring right takes a definite commitment. It will take a team effort and disciplined implementation to assure that the new program will even work. The rewards, however, will pay off for years to come. One great “find”, that “productive individual”, that “perfect match”, the “team leader”, “future manager”, the “shooting star” will easily pay for the cost of making your business ready for quality hiring. Ready your self now, with available time, to make sure you have the best people possible when the recovery comes!

To prepare your dealership for quality hiring, consider the following process:

1. Analyze your Jobs - Analyze each of your jobs to determine the critical, important and desired, skills traits and motivations required in each to analyze the Profile of success.
2. Profile your Best - Develop high quality, accurate, comprehensive and realistic job descriptions for each position in the company reflecting the analysis.
3. Interview Well - Use the key attributes from the job description to derive behavioral interviewing questions, which will seek to identify evidence of successful past performance.
4. Know who is Right for this Job - Rate your candidate responses against the critical, important, and desired elements of the job, the Profile analysis.

Analyze your Jobs - A job analysis is a crucial element in quality hiring. This is where we wrongly start the whole process. We simply must define what we really need prior to our selection. We often spend more time detailing which new copier to buy than our next employee. Time spent here, targeting the attributes of the job, will allow us to describe the productive team member, not just randomly take a person to fill the position by gut feel. Take a detailed look at what will be needed in the job. This should be done with the first-line supervisor or manager. What key attributes will be needed to do the job correctly? We all have people who perform the job in a spectacular way...profile these people!

Profile your Best - What key attributes will be needed to do the job correctly? We all have people who perform the job in a spectacular way...profile these people! Key attributes like the skills, background, experience, education and traits like strong communicator, detail orientation, humor, easy-going, flexible multi-tasker, analytical problem solver, or customer orientation. Every time we hire we must remember that we are making the best of the opportunity to strengthen our team.

A strong job description reflects job analysis! It prepares us to start looking for the right person. It announces exactly what we are looking for, what's demanded by the job and what expectations there will be on the candidate. The job description/profile becomes the basis for performance management in the future. It serves as a basis for advertisements in recruitment efforts. Many companies already have job descriptions. You should be sure they reflect the profile of the best producer you've seen. Perhaps you simply need to dust them off and be sure that they truly describe what you need, but if you're going to hunt for an employee, a team member, someone you will be trusting your customers with,

your representative, don't overlook this step. Put the time into strong job descriptions/profiles it'll pay off in many ways.

Become Interviewing Experts - Know em' once you've interviewed em'. Don't guess at such an important decision. Now that we understand the job and know the key attributes that will make a new employee productive and successful, we can move on to the development of interviewing questions. Many managers who conduct interviews routinely use a set of questions that has worked for them or has been given to them from other managers or HR. Often, however, these questions don't probe for behavioral examples of success. It stands to reason that if a candidate can convince you that they were successful in another job doing what it is you need done, and liked it, you've achieved what an interview is all about, getting evidence of relevant success.

Question development can be tricky however. It is situational, sometimes depending on the responses and the tone of the interview. There are legal constraints. That is why it is crucial to have the questions ready, prepared before an interview is even scheduled. You can prepare a set of questions prepared in advance for all positions for which you commonly hire. All of these questions should be based on a solid job description derived from a good job analysis and the resultant profile. If a file existed for each job you hire for, in advance, you could relax when you need to interview candidates, again knowing that you can reference your good preparation. This "best practice" of human resources management makes it much easier to delegate some or all of the interviewing in the future or to prepare a panel to interview and make well reasoned hire decisions.

A variety of question types exist and some help may be required to best focus on the type of question that will work best in your situation. Behavioral questioning is based on asking questions that seek to find evidence of successful use of skills and traits that are required. Remember, because of your earlier good work on profiling the position, you are well prepared for this step. Behavioral questions are open-ended questions, meaning that they cannot be answered by a Yes or a No. They almost always begin with a, "*Tell me about a time*", or "*Give me a specific example of when you*". It is crucial to work toward detailed specificity on the example of work related experience. In doing so, you stay in control of what information you are getting and the information you need. You get evidence of past success and achievement. These questions also keep you away from illegal questions that are subjective or not related to the job description. Again, this is the one area where it is advisable to get help to insure a clear understanding of the questions you will be asking and are staying legal. There are many training and consulting firms who specialize in this area.

Once the questions are ready, the interviews may be scheduled. Be sure to know which day and the times you will need to set aside for this important task. Give yourself time to refresh yourself on the job description/profile and previously crafted behavioral questions. Schedule at least an hour for a thorough interview. Also, give yourself time in-between interviews to collect your evaluation thoughts and review your notes. Make your notes on each candidate before you begin reviewing the resume of the next.

Set serious time aside for the interviewing activity. Don't allow the interview to be interrupted if at all possible. Forward the phones, turn off the cell, and really concentrate on this crucial session of information flow. After greeting the candidate, make a comment about a common subject to ease the candidate, recognizing that they are nervous. A relaxed candidate is much more likely to open up and give you the information you need. Next, get right to the most important questions. You do this so that if time runs out you will at least get to the most important questions. Be sure to clear up any questions you may have about the resume information. Always ask the candidate if they have any questions about the job or the company. An interested, prepared candidate will have questions, even if they are only about hours, benefits or salary. After the interview is the time to show a candidate around or tell them about the company. If the candidate looks promising, you can really do it up right, if not the post-interview information can be brief. Be ready to dazzle if the situation demands!

Grade Tough - In the final step only you can choose. Some companies use quantified rating systems, others throughout the interview get all the information they need to make the decision without numbers. If you desire, your questions can be assigned a numerical value based on a weighted value of the skill or trait identified in the job analysis. The level of importance, i.e. - critical, important, desired. In doing so it is even more necessary to have time in between interviews in order to rate each response. Here too a panel is a great normalizing method to get a fair analysis.

These steps may seem daunting now, but don't forget how important this task is. Just consider the significant cost in dollars and time of a poor hire. While there is no perfect system, instituting this hiring procedure will pay benefits for your dealership in the long run. There is some work here for everyone in management. Your HR department, provided you have one, can work with your department to get the job analysis and job descriptions done. The managers can work together to develop interviewing questions. Perhaps some training will help in these areas as well. Help is available for these aspects from job analysis to question development to actual interview help. The general management should commit the procedures to policy for the company, solidifying in everyone's mind that it is the company's intent to institute quality hiring, to guess less, to be consistent, to stay legal, to make your first choice the right choice.

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