

Would you work for you?



BY CHRIS SCHULTHIES

During a recent conversation with a dealer principal, he told me that he had just hired a new sales manager.

He said he was giving the new guy six months to turn things around or he was toast.

This young sales manager had three years' experience selling cars on the floor, one year in the business office and eight months as a sales manager at a smaller dealership. His career at this new dealership was doomed before it even began.

Often in my travels, I hear similar stern statements from dealer principals with respect to their managers, salespeople and other staff. This begs the question: Based on your management style, would you want to work for you?

Becoming a dealer principal requires ambition, hard work, discipline, tenacity, intelligence, shrewdness and an extraordinary entrepreneurial spirit. Don't those attributes also in-

clude managing, motivating, leading and developing your people to their full potential?

It is easy to be jovial and positive with staff when business is brisk and profitable. However, when business takes a downward turn, would your management style be best described as tyrannical?

Most employees do not respond positively and productively to a tyrannical management style, at least not on a long-term basis.

The tyrannical style ferrets out what employees do wrong as opposed to what they do right; chastises them for their every mistake and failure; fails to acknowledge and reward their successes; erupts into temper tantrums (in open showrooms) that embarrass and humiliate employees; threatens termination. A dark cloud hangs over the dealership. Tension, fear and pessimism are rampant.

There is no question that employees, from time to time, need to be disciplined. In doing so, they need to be told behind closed doors what they did wrong, what your expectations are, and a plan of action to ensure the mistake isn't repeated.

Mistakes are part of the learning and growing process. As a dealer principal, whether you came up from the sales side, the service operation or the OEM, you no doubt made many mistakes along the way, but also had the opportunity from mentors and teachers to help you get where you are today.

Do you, in turn, provide the same positive mentoring, coaching and teaching to your management and staff that were afforded to you as you made your way to your office?

As a dealer principal, you have tremendous knowledge and expertise to share with your managers and staff. Just because you hired a used-vehicle or new-vehicle manager with experience does not necessarily mean that they had proper coaching and training or understand your practical and philosophical approach to business.

In many dealerships, sales managers, service managers, business managers, etc. tell us that not only were they never given a written job description, but were never told specifically what the dealer considered poor, average, good or excellent performance in their positions.

Furthermore, many managers indicate that they have never had any formal training with respect to their position. Hence many managers feel that if the dealer has nothing to say to them, they must be performing at the very least at an average performance level. Unfortunately, in these environments, managers tend to operate and make decisions based on

fear, not confidence.

Employees want to be guided by enthusiastic and charismatic leaders with strong and determined personalities. They want to know that their leader has a clearly defined vision, direction and plan for their dealership.

During periods of business downturn, managers and staff look to their leader to re-enforce the dealership's vision, to reassure them that they are doing great work and to positively coach and motivate them to come up with strategies for a turnaround.

A positive and powerful message to the staff, coaching, mentoring and motivation creates a self-fulfilling prophecy. Optimism spreads.

In an industry that lives and dies by CSI ratings, consider this thought: If you focus on ESI (employee satisfaction), CSI will look after itself.

In an upbeat, exciting and rewarding environment lead by a dealer who is a coach, leader, teacher and motivator, employees always deliver outstanding customer service and job performance — not because they are ordered to — but because they want to. They like and respect their boss, take pride in their dealership and want to feel good doing the job well.

Ask yourself these questions:

- Do I provide my management and staff with a clearly defined vision and direction where I want to take my dealership?
- Do I provide clearly defined job descriptions and detailed benchmarks for performance?
- Do I provide my managers and staff with the proper training so they can meet and exceed my benchmark of excellent performance?
- Do I take the time to provide mentoring and coaching to my management team?
- Do I lead my staff with a positive voice through bad times as well as good times?
- Do I provide a positive, motivating and energetic work environment?
- Do managers and employees of other dealerships want to work at my dealership? Do they seek out my dealership or am I constantly seeking out new people?
- Do I offer compensation plans that are competitive, ones that truly recognize and reward excellent staff performance?
- Do my managers and staff describe me as approachable, open-minded, receptive to new ideas and positive in attitude?
- Would you work for you?

Chris Schulthies is a senior partner with The Wye Management Group. The Wye Management Group trains salespeople, F&I managers, used vehicle managers and sales managers throughout North America

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