

# ShopTalk



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May 2011

## Beating Self-Sabotage

Last month we talked about how our brains are programmed to protect us from getting injured. This injury can be physical, like drowning or falling from a tree. Or the injury can be emotional, such as getting disappointed as a result of creating an advertisement that is a waste of money, trying to make an upsell and having the customer call you a sleazy mechanic for trying to sell him service he doesn't need or having an employee meeting that goes badly.

What happens when you make another attempt at something that hurt you last time? Nothing. Let's say your last ad generated nothing. Now it's time to create another one. But your brain finds distractions for you. It makes you feel like creating that ad isn't important, and it keeps you busy doing things that are comfortable and safe. Like I said last month, for many, that's working on cars – because the cars don't talk back.

The real secret to overcoming your fear might surprise you. You may have been taught to fight

the fear or to try to power through it. But the best way to overcome self-defeating mental programming is to "feel the fear."

The next time you try to do a big new project and you feel a little scared, embrace the fear. Experience it. Fear is an abstract concept, so concentrate on what that fear is doing to your body. Where do you feel the fear? How intense is it, and what shape is it? Then, consider where the fear comes from. Is an earlier experience triggering this reaction?

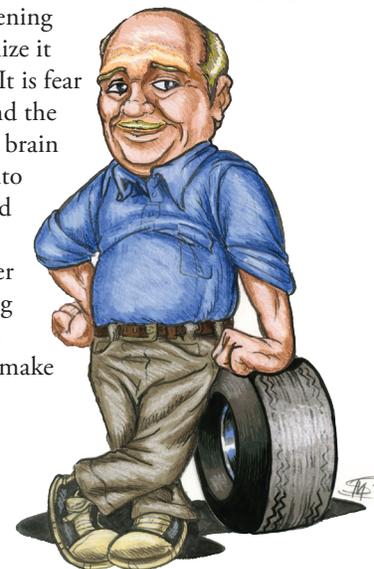
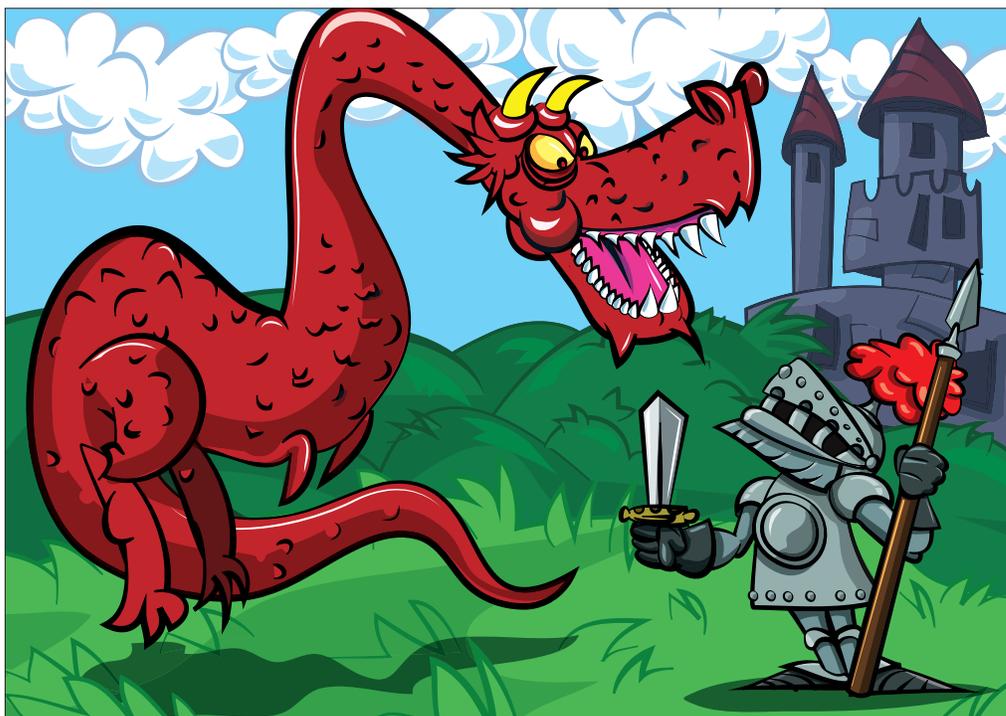
Yes, I know it sounds crazy. I was always taught to overcome fear; ignore fear; put fear in a little box, lock the lid and throw away the key. But then when it was time to work on a big, important project, other priorities always seemed to interfere. It wasn't until I experienced the feelings, analyzed the reactions my body was going through and spent time considering what was causing those feelings that the fear started to dissipate.

When you are confronted by fear (whether as in being scared or as in getting distracted), rather than fighting your fear, make it a dance partner. Imagine yourself embracing it, taking it to the dance floor and dancing together to a song. While you dance, consider how it makes you feel and what's causing this reaction to surface in your life. I've found when I do this, midway through the first song, the fear dissolves onto the floor, and I'm able to carry on without it.

Embracing works a lot better than confrontation. But you'll discover that your brain will attempt to protect you from this by rejecting the idea of embracing fear. Your brain will make you feel uncomfortable, trying to keep you from embracing your fear by giving you the thought "this is stupid." This is an indication it's working; you are dissipating your fear, and it's fighting back. So, keep dancing.

Too many shop owners have the knowledge, the resources and the ability to grow their businesses, but they are paralyzed by their fear. They don't recognize it as fear; instead they just can't seem to find the time. Some other priority comes up that keeps them away from the tasks that will really make their shops grow. If this is happening to you, recognize it for what it is. It is fear working behind the scenes in your brain to trick you into setting safe and comfortable priorities rather than the daring and ambitious ones that will make your dreams come true.

ATI



## Mitch Schneider: “Everyone Can Use a Coach”

Mitch Schneider is a well-known writer in the automotive business, having written for *Motor Age* and other industry publications. He’s also a fourth generation repair shop owner, so you might think he would have all the answers when it comes to running a profitable shop. Mitch’s response to that is simple: “If Tiger Woods can use a coach, I can use one, too!”

Mitch says he “backed into the family business” as a means to pay for college and to help out his dad when he opened a service station in the 1960s. It was also a way for the senior Schneider to keep his son from enlisting in the Marine Corps. “It didn’t work, by the way,” Mitch laughs. “It just delayed my enlistment for a couple of years.”

All told, Mitch and his father were partners in Schneider’s Auto Repair of Simi Valley, California, for 38 years, along with his mother and two brothers who were involved in the business at different times. Mitch says running a successful family business means doing things more or less “by committee.” He explains:

“Everybody has to have a voice, and it took a long time for us to figure out that you had to divide up responsibilities. Otherwise, things weren’t getting done, or everybody was doing the same thing redundantly. Plus, it’s all a matter of compromise, and nobody is ever completely satisfied with the result.”

All the while he was working in the family business, Mitch was also writing and doing training in the industry. And that’s how he discovered ATI. “One day a friend called me and told me this guy named Chris (Chubby) Frederick was doing seminars and teaching all my stuff,” Mitch recalls. “It was pretty cool, actually, because he was giving me editorial credit. I ended up doing a presentation for Chubby, and we’ve been good friends ever since.”

Mitch joined ATI’s coaching program in 2005, just a few months before his father passed away. When asked why he needed coaching, Mitch says, “Quite frankly, there are things we are all blind to. There are potholes we all stumble across or obstacles that get in our way that we don’t realize are in our way. All of us need the benefit of another set of eyes, another perspective, someone who’s an expert in the KPIs, in the numbers, and who can interpret them. You need someone to help you to keep addressing the parts of your business you would prefer to ignore.”

Over the five years of being in the ATI program, Mitch says he has worked on many issues in his business. “We keep addressing the staffing model. We keep addressing pricing. We keep addressing effective labor rate. We keep working on warranty issues. We are making sure the systems are in place so that I don’t have to be here every minute, although I choose to be for the most part,” he says.

Mitch credits his coach with helping to keep him from becoming overwhelmed by all the new things he needed to do. “Sometimes it just takes the confidence of somebody else saying other people have done it,” he says. “Knowing that other people have gone where you’re going lets you know it’s not impossible. ATI coaching is like having a weekly therapy session with a therapist I really respect.”

Transitioning from a partnership with his family members to shouldering the responsibility for all of the business decisions was also eased by his relationship with his coach. “Having a coach you respect gives you a different perspective on it as well as the confidence to implement the changes you need to make,” Mitch explains.

In fact, Mitch says he would give up many things in his business before he would give up his

ATI coach. “My coach’s help is invaluable, and the portal will show you how much more successful we are than we were before ATI,” Mitch says. “To a large degree, he gets a lot of credit for that. I may have been the feet on the street, but it was certainly my coach’s constant encouragement that’s helped.”

Today, Schneider’s Auto Repair is closer to where Mitch wants it to be, “but we’re not there yet,” he says. “The systems are in place, and it’s running the way it’s supposed to run. We’re more profitable, and I have time to do more things.”

By “things,” Mitch actually means work. “I love to work!” he laughs. “Now I have time to do different kinds of work. I can do more writing, and I may start training again. But the truth is I like being in the shop. I like being hands on in the business.”

Still, Mitch stresses the value of having an outside perspective when it comes to making needed changes within his business: “Chubby likes to say you can’t work on the business if you’re working in the business. I think you can work in the business if you choose to, but you’ve got to have the perspective of being outside the business to make the changes you need to make; otherwise, you won’t see them. Your coach has the insight to look at your numbers, and he can pretty much tell you what’s going on in the shop without having to be there. And that’s a tremendous advantage.”

Mitch continues on his journey in the automotive business by implementing all the needed changes along the way. “As difficult as it seems to make these changes, and as uncomfortable as the change may be, you’re more likely to get where you want to be than if you just sit around moaning and groaning that it doesn’t work,” he says. “It’s never going to work unless you try to make it work.” **ATI**

## SuperConference 2011 – Dare we say our best ever?



Based on the reaction of our attendees, all throughout the conference it certainly seemed to be the case. But I wanted to wait for all the hundreds of survey responses to come in to tell the true story. Having read each and every survey for the past five years, I think it is very safe to say – this was in fact our best SuperConference EVER! For those who attended, we sincerely thank you not only for supporting this important industry event but for the continued trust you put in ATI year after year.

Last June, immediately after we announced San Diego and the Hotel del Coronado as our 2011 location, we began the lengthy search for speakers and content worthy of our SuperConference stage. Literally thousands of man and woman hours later, we found ourselves at the Welcome Reception on Wednesday evening, meeting and greeting all of our eager guests with the beautiful Pacific Ocean as a backdrop. Then, in the blink of an eye, we were packing up, wishing everyone safe travels, and heading home.

### SuperConference 2011 by the numbers:

Client Shops	127
Additional Attendees	133
Children 12 and Under	25
Sponsors/Vendors	53
ATI Staff	22
<b>Total Attendance</b>	<b>360</b>

Hard to believe it has already been 60 days since San Diego. No rest for the weary as we are deep into the planning of SuperConference 2012 – “whenever and wherever” it may be. SuperConference is a true labor of love for all of us at ATI. You make it all worthwhile. See you next year.

Richard Menneg



# Top Five Takeaways

By Mike Haley



For the second year in a row ATI had the pleasure of bringing the 20-Group members that attended the Superconference together the day before the official kick-off to share ideas on “What

are you doing today to succeed in our current economic condition?” We broke the 20-Group members into small teams to share ideas and tasks they were currently performing and then asked them to select the best idea from their group. After the breakout session we then brought everyone together and shared the information. Once all the ideas were discussed we voted on the most popular ideas. Below are the top five takeaways from the meeting.

1. **Be In Front** – The message encompasses many parts of the business. The group felt strongly that to succeed in today’s environment it is imperative you as a shop owner are in front of every aspect of your business: keeping in front of technology so you are not chasing to catch up with the competition; staying in front of marketing with a marketing plan and not just reacting to what the current needs are; making sure you are in front of staffing and ensuring you have the best players in your game. The theme of “Be in Front” was really about being proactive as the leader of your business, and not being reactive which we are all guilty of at one time or another.

2. **Rebranding Your Company** – In today’s market it is more difficult than ever before to grab the attention of current and potential customers. It’s even more difficult once you get their attention to have them move to action. For this reason it is important you have the correct branding for your market. Is it current, does it describe who you are and what you stand for? Is it used consistently in all your marketing? Do your employees believe in it and live it?

3. **Vendor Relationships** – Of course our customers and employees are very important to the success of our company. The vendors are also very critical in these economic times. It was brought to the attention of the group we should not take this relationship for granted, but should make sure we have strong relationships with the vendors that make our shops productive and successful. This acknowledgement can take many forms. The most popular was buying lunch. Other suggestions were including them in team buildings and community events you are participating in. The groups felt this is a very important relationship to maintain.

4. **Fuel Consumption Calculator** – With gas prices on the rise and no end in sight, more and more conversations at the service desk are about whether it makes more sense to keep their vehicle or to purchase a vehicle that gets better fuel economy. The spreadsheet called “Fuel Consumption Calculations” was created to break

down the actual costs. This spread sheet allows you to input the current number of miles you drive per year, current gas price and the miles per gallon your vehicle performs at. With this information the spreadsheet will show you your weekly and yearly cost for fuel if the current cost of fuel continues to climb in increments of \$0.50, \$0.75 and \$1.00. The reason for building the spreadsheet was to show customers that yes it is an increase in cost but on average the cost is around \$9.00 to \$15.00 a week. Once customers realize the weekly breakdown versus the monthly increase in a car payment it becomes clearer to customers that maintaining the current vehicle makes more economical sense.

5. **Promotional Items** – It was also brought to the group that in these trying times customers enjoy receiving free promotional items with no strings attached. One of the samples given was a reusable grocery bag. This is an item that is used weekly if not daily and is friendly for the environment. With your company logo and branding it is also a constant reminder of your business. If the correct item and labeling of the item is used, it will help in the promoting of your company. **ATI**



## Making a List & Checking it Twice – Summer Edition

The summer time is usually a busier time of year for most shops. The biggest problem they can have is that they aren’t prepared to take advantage of it. The up & down nature of the business can be smoothed out but that will be the topic for another article. Today let’s look at what are the key items you need to know to be ready for the busy season.

One of the biggest things you have to know is When does my busy season start. Some shops may find that the summer is not their busiest season but for most of the country; vacations = driving = maintenance and repair = \$\$\$ for the shop. Knowing when the season starts helps you prepare ahead of time. The difference in having your shop ready is the difference between having a profitable summer or running around putting out fires.

Keep in mind that your doors are open and the Customers can see inside your shop ... Is the shop Clean? How do your techs look? To the right is a checklist that will help you be Summertime ready.

Start of Season	When does our busy season start?
Staffing	How many people will you need?
Skill Set	What services will we be selling during the busy season?
Summertime Hours	Will we need to change the schedule & hours to accommodate Customers? Technicians? (Early hours to beat the heat of the day?)
Vacation Staffing	Is the vacation schedule set to be able to handle the Customers?
Marketing	Special offerings for the season?
Equipment	Is all of the equipment that you will be using inspected and ready to roll?
Inventory	Are Summertime items inventoried & stocked?
Facility	Is the shop clean and inviting?
Shop Bays	Are they clean and inviting, since they will be open?
Employee Uniforms	Company uniforms that display Brand but are also comfortable for the summertime?
Employee Care	Process to keep the staff Hydrated and ready to work?
Front Desk	Proper coverage for desk & proper signage?

# Your Available Training Programs for May and June

## May 2011

Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday/Sunday

					1
2 <b>Service Advisor</b> 1 of 4	3 <b>Service Advisor</b> 2 of 4	4 <b>Shop Owner</b> 1 of 9	5 <b>Shop Owner</b> 2 of 9	6 <b>Shop Owner</b> 3 of 9	7/8 Mother's Day
9	10	11	12	13	14/15
16 <b>Shop Owner</b> 7 of 9	17 <b>Shop Owner</b> 8 of 9	18 <b>Shop Owner</b> 9 of 9	19 <b>California S.A.</b> 3 of 4	20 <b>California S.A.</b> 4 of 4	21/22
23 <b>Service Advisor</b> 3 of 4	24 <b>Service Advisor</b> 4 of 4	25	26	27	28/29
30 Memorial Day	31				

## June 2011

Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday/Sunday

		1 <b>Shop Owner</b> 4 of 9	2 <b>Shop Owner</b> 5 of 9	3 <b>Shop Owner</b> 6 of 9	4/5
6 <b>Service Advisor</b> 1 of 4	7 <b>Service Advisor</b> 2 of 4	8 <b>Shop Owner</b> 1 of 9	9 <b>Shop Owner</b> 2 of 9	10 <b>Shop Owner</b> 3 of 9	11/12
13 <b>Service Manager</b> 1 of 2	14 <b>Service Manager</b> 2 of 2	15	16	17	18/19 Father's Day
20	21	22 <b>Shop Owner</b> 7 of 9	23 <b>Shop Owner</b> 8 of 9	24 <b>Shop Owner</b> 9 of 9	25/26
27 <b>Service Advisor</b> 3 of 4	28 <b>Service Advisor</b> 4 of 4	29	30		



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