

# ATI Shoptalk



Issue 4

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## Inspirational Leadership, The Dumbest Bunny In The Hutch

By John Lewis



How can you play the game or win if you don't know the rules? So...the very first rule/law of leadership in all businesses big or small is everyone must know the rules so they can adjust their behavior accordingly and play to win. That means letting everyone know in writing, not just in conversation how you want the game played and the rewards and consequences for doing or not doing; as you already know, there is no try.

It is also very important that your employees join you in creating the rules. What may be the greatest secret of great leadership is learning to become the "dumbest bunny in the hutch". One of the most misguided of beliefs is that as the leader you should be all knowing. Being all knowing in almost any subject or skill is a full time job.

As a business owner or leader, your responsibilities change considerably. The luxury of being an expert in one specific area is no longer yours. Now your success or failure is controlled by your ability to hire tough & ask the right questions (the dumbest bunny in the hutch) of the folks who work with you and your ATI coach to get the answers that will guide you in making wise business decisions.

One of the two most successful business leaders of the twentieth century, Harold Geneen who inherited ITT when it was doing \$766 million dollars per year in 1959 and turned it into a \$22 billion dollar per year power house by the time he retired in 1979, excelled at two things; being the dumbest bunny in the hutch and time management.

He operated his life out of a question, easygoing, always persistently moving forward, continuously asking his managers and customers question after question, probing ever deeper for that last nickel of profit and efficiency. His first rule for the managers of every one of his divisions was to increase gross profit dollars by a minimum of 10% every quarter or start looking for another place to hang your hat. He inspected this relentlessly and accomplished the above goal with the assistance of his managers for twenty straight years; a record no CEO has ever attained before or since.

He managed time by managing jobs, tasks and projects. He was ruthlessly selfish with his time in that he would not be interrupted by anything or anyone when he was working on something. **He cut the minutia out of his business life and focused solely on 'what matters most' (making**

**ITT prosper) and let others handle the rest.** If you had an appointment with him on Monday at 10 am and he was not finished with what he was working on you had better be prepared to stay the week because his assistant would politely tell you it would be a while before he could see you and it might be a long while.

Geneen learned at a very early age that focus and productivity go hand-in-hand. Interruptions cost dearly in

lost productivity because it takes time to focus on the cause of the interruption and more time to get re-focused on what you were doing and get back in the 'ZONE'. He knew how to make money and that it is impossible to make more time so he would not let anyone

use or steal his precious time. The message straight from his lips to our ears is, "Beware of time thieves."

I would not suggest to you that you do not keep appointments. I would certainly recommend you be very particular about whom you set appointments with and do what ever you are going to do with that individual or group until it gets done even if it means working until 3 am. You can take a lot more time off when



### Upcoming Courses and Events:

#### Mastermind Group

June 1-2 ..... 1

#### Shop Owners

June 7-9 ..... 1

June 14-16 ..... 1

#### Service Managers

June 5-6 ..... 1

June 12-13 ..... 1

June 26-27 ..... 1

June 28-29 ..... 1

#### Advanced Shop Owners

June 22-23 ..... 1

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you focus your attention on what you should be focused on (earning big profits) as the leader and owner of your business.

So listen to your staff and coach. They see things you do not see and experience things you do not experience. They have areas of expertise and talents you do not have. Ask them to help you in creating a business environment that is second to none for you, your employees and your customers. By doing this, you will create together a much better plan than you would come up with by yourself; plus your employees will feel it is 'their plan' and buy into the plan much more than if you had a meeting and told them, "These are the rules I want everyone to follow." So...let's follow Mr. Geneen's example; I suspect when you start taking your family on three or four vacations a year, you'll be glad you did.

The way you think, feel, act, & believe has an affect and impact on everyone who works with you and every customer/guest that comes through your door; do lead by enthusiastic example. You are responsible as the leader to make sure that the impact/affect is positive upon your staff and customers. The process looks like this: **Thoughts lead to feelings - Feelings lead to actions/in-action - Actions/in-action lead to results.**

What others see, hear, and experience when you are with them can have a huge positive impact on your business if you focus on keeping things positive all the time; making sure to celebrate others accomplishments no matter how small every time, when they occur, every day. For most of us this is a major challenge; especially when we are having "one of those days". It takes constant vigilance and focus and is a challenge every one of us must work at with passion every day if we are going to lead. Have a great big profitable month and lead on.

# The Next Generation Of The Customer Drop - Here Today!

By Richard Menneg



At ATI, we believe that the Service Advisor/Manager is the most important position in the shop. He or she IS your business. The right balance of car count, service to repair mix, skill and knowledge, together with a sincere interest in the customer's needs, determine your front counter and shop success.

It's all about consistency; ensuring every customer gets the time, attention & relationship-building consideration they deserve. It can be a challenge in the heat of every day's battles. That's why you need a system.

Most write-ups take place between a customer and service advisor standing at the counter with a computer between them. How much warmer would be a trip to the parking lot to visit the patient, to look at the vehicle alongside the owner? Wouldn't it be great if the process could



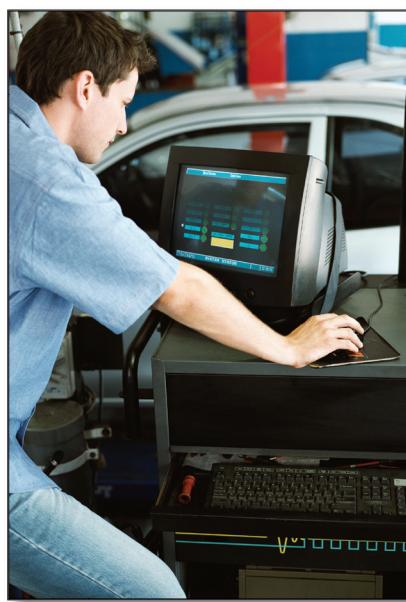
be efficient, yet allow ample time to be thorough while building customer confidence...all in that five minute encounter? It can be that easy!

Sarah brings her vehicle to your shop for service. Instead of interviewing her at the counter,

the service advisor takes a wireless laptop or tablet PC out to her car to check her in. The advisor asks her about the car's "symptoms," recording them on the device while it communicates directly with the shop management system inside. Scanning the vehicle identification number (VIN), pulls up the car's make, model, year, and engine size along with appropriate customer information. At this time, in front of the customer and at the vehicle, the preliminary courtesy check takes place. The service advisor

walks around the car, noting any body damage while reviewing the vehicle's maintenance history. The service advisor makes maintenance suggestions based on time/mileage service intervals and even discusses pertinent technical service bulletins. All that's left is customer approval. This structured process is not only right for the customer, it is right for your business (consider the customer's perception of your ability to effectively handle her needs).

In its simplest form, wireless networking and a Tablet PC could get you started. Moreover, many shop management systems are now equipped with add-ons for remote write-ups. Higher end solutions are also available from companies like Delphi. Check them out today to improve your efficiency, sales & customer satisfaction... all at the same time.



**ATTENTION SHOP OWNERS AND MANAGERS:**  
If you have something you would like to share, e-mail your coach or ATI at [office@autotraining.net](mailto:office@autotraining.net).

# Round As An Approach To Car Count

By Brian Canning



Since September, with Katrina and then Rita, we have seen and experienced a dramatic decline in our weekly car counts. In areas far distant from the Gulf Coast we experienced a sudden and long term impact on our sales and profitability. In the best of circumstance we were able to redouble our efforts on courtesy checks and maintenance services and were able to ride out these storms (pardon the pun) and are now more or less back to normal. Very few of us have had the benefit of the "best of circumstances" and are still suffering the negative down turn we suffered early last fall and are still struggling to get back to square one. Though I would still ask for more and better courtesy checks and still stress the importance of our getting into the maintenance business, tires might represent the best opportunity to regain our past glory and fame.

Tire business through all of these many months has been at least reliable and in many markets it has been down-right strong. Tires are a very visible wear item and just like brake pads and ball joints they need to be replaced from time to time. Unlike most of these other parts, they are much more susceptible to poor maintenance, bad roads, bad drivers and other environmental factors that hasten their decline. In the tire business, we must be aware of our customers' needs. We are presented with huge additional opportunities to serve our customers. By inspecting our customers' tires and merely rotating them, we have the opportunity to thoroughly in-

spect the major systems on their cars and make them aware of safety & maintenance items that our customers should know about. In this effort we are doing nothing more or less than what they would expect us to do and too often we are not living up to this obligation. Tires present us with huge opportunities to exceed the expectations of our customers.

Tire business will generate very poor margins as compared to mechanical services but it has great potential for creating cash flow and putting money in the bank. This is especially true if we are mounting, balancing and selling Tire Protection Policies. We very literally cannot sell enough brake jobs in an hour to compete with the dollars generated through tire sales. This, applies

as long as we can keep our bays full and our tire technicians productive. The other huge benefit, we often fail to realize, is the add-on service opportunities we have in just serving our customers' tire needs.

We have great opportunities to do courtesy checks, to make maintenance service recommendations and to be the full service provider our customers expect us to be. Too often we fail to take advantage of these opportunities and too often our businesses are suffering as a result our neglect.

There is no doubt that car counts have suffered since last fall and nearly all the clients I talk to would attest to the very rough sales conditions we are seeing out there. Marketing has been an equal challenge through this period with big bucks being spent on seemingly great pieces that produced tiny, unexpectedly,

poor results. Marketing, in many of these cases, was not the issue. It was market condition. A nervous public and high gas prices will produce a very tough selling environment.

I think courtesy checks and maintenance services are more important than ever. I would implore any of my clients to do more and better courtesy checks and look for every opportunity to educate our customers and sell maintenance services (K Services & Flushes). This will allow us to maximize our existing selling opportunities. Along with this I would suggest that all of our tire shops do a better job of converting tire only customers to the mechanical side and not forget to do thorough courtesy checks on cars coming into the tire bays. Make recommendations for alignments, offer free alignment checks and make sure your customers are aware of pending maintenance services. Remind them to bring in their vehicles for tire rotations and balancing & thoroughly check these vehicles on every visit.

For those of you who are not in the tire business, I might suggest that you consider getting into it. As discussed above, it provides unparalleled cash flow opportunities and offers enhanced service opportunities on the mechanical side. Better than any flyer, better than any discount or giveaway, tire business can be the answer to the car count you have missed these many months. Tire business and all that goes with it can revive your business in the face of a market condition that has left your bays empty these many months. When cars are at a premium, tires and the increased opportunities they provide, can assist you in

moving your business forward.

There are a lot of deals and consignments and dating options out there. There would be significant equipment requirements & even additional staffing to think about. There are many tire wholesalers and distributors that would be happy to talk to you and help you explore the tire world. Assuming you have the space, tires might just be the ticket to your regaining that car count and driving your business forward. If you are in the tire business, use it to drive mechanical sales & profitability by looking at these cars and making recommendations for repairs and service. If you are not in the tire business, you might give it some serious thought. Your existing customers will appreciate it, you give potential new customers reasons to give you a shot and your bottom line will have little trouble in finding the benefits. In a market that has been decidedly sluggish and unfriendly, tire business and the opportunities it presents could have a very positive impact on your business. Round can be sweet and have nothing to do with doughnuts.



Car count, more than any other aspect is a continual challenge. We cannot always count on our lot being full or our customers doing all the things that they should. As we explore a solution, it is very important that we maximize existing selling opportunities. Doing courtesy checks, making recommendations for maintenance services and doing this as we pursue the tire side of our business will allow us to enjoy the benefit without our having to see even one more car. Tires can be the answer, but only if we seize the opportunity.

# Sam's Corner: Pony Rides At ATI!!

By Chubby

New clients at April's Shop Owner's class got to ride in my new Corvette! Several even drove it while I crossed my fingers, watched smoking tires and smelled burning rubber. This latest addition to my collection has even put fishing on hold so I can relive my childhood!

Since we received no emails last month about your cars, I'll show you mine. The 427cu in, 435 hp original engine has 26,000 miles. The car is

unbelievably fast and drives like new with no squeaks or rattles.

Housed in a chicken coupe in Havre de Grace, MD for most of its life, the car was owned by a Baltimore shop owner who has quite the collection of beautiful cars. Recently, he has been investing in NASCAR race-winning cars from Dale Earnhardt's Charlotte, NC garage. These cars are expensive, so he was anxious to raise some cash and, fortunately for me, knew I was looking.

If you have a passion for cars, next January's annual client appreciation event at the Barrett-Jackson auction in AZ will be for you! We will have great speakers you may not yet have heard discussing topics not typically taught at ATI. Following two days of learning how to work on your business, a shuttle will take us to the car show and auction. We have



to limit the event to 110 shops and forty-three have already signed up. So, call or email **Julie (1.888.471.5800 x 9156, jcasey@autotraining.net)** or visit our website at **www.autotraining.net** to get on the list. Reserve your spot today!!

## Seven At the Top, *Congratulations to All!*

### This Month's Winners are:

#### Dave and Ruth Erb

Dave's Ultimate Automotive Inc.  
2711 West Howard Lane  
Austin, TX 78728

#### David Taylor

David Taylor Automotive  
1007 Hawkins Ave.  
Sanford, NC 27330

#### Don and Gretchen Haynes

D & G Automotive  
610 Foresight Circle E  
Grand Junction, CO 81505

#### Mike Brewster

Gils Garage  
817 Saratoga Road  
Burnt Hills, NY 12027

#### Dean Wright

Hanover Lube & Brake  
446 Baltimore Street  
Hanover, PA 17331

#### Earle Arnold

40 West Auto Care & Towing  
284 Montevue Lane  
Frederick, MD 21702

#### Bob Moore and Christine Secora

Cypress Lake Auto Repair Inc.  
9601 Cypress Lake Drive  
Fort Myers, FL 33919



8611 Larkin Road  
Suite 200  
Savage, MD 20763