

# ShopTalk

**ATI**  
Automotive  
Training Institute

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September 2011

## Your Most Valuable Asset

A coaching client recently had a bank shut down his checking accounts one Friday afternoon — right after he had cut checks for his payables and monthly bills. The reason why isn't important; it had to do with collateral for a loan becoming encumbered. Frightened by regulators that are shutting down banks every week, my client's bank had made a risk judgment. But there's a lot more to this story.

This shop owner had built a strong reputation in the community. He'd made contributions to candidates for his county commission, he had been to all the chamber events and his wife volunteered for several community organizations. He was the "go to" guy when the community needed something done. Until the bank seized his accounts.

The bank told him it was seizing his accounts on Monday morning. He spent the day calling his vendors and telling his employees. He had to take money out of a brokerage account, selling stocks at a loss to get cash. The money was coming, but it was going to take a day for the transaction to be final and for the cash to be available. Plus, he had to set up a checking account at a new bank.

Tuesday morning, he was up well before everyone else in his home, went to his shop and got ready for the day. His brokerage firm opened at 9 a.m. He'd go then to pick up the check for the stocks he'd sold the day before.

About 7:30 a.m. his wife called at the shop and asked if he'd seen the newspaper. He hadn't. In his rush to get to the shop, he had skipped his usual stop to buy a paper. Evidently his problems had made it into the local news.

When he got to the convenience store to buy a paper, he was horrified. His silly problem with the bank was written up in the business section. In addition to a couple of quotes from vendors, there was a quote from one of his employees about the bank refusing to cash his payroll check. The shop owner was really angry now. He'd cashed that employee's check himself out of the drawer on Monday afternoon!

And what's worse was the betrayal by the newspaper. The shop owner had run an ad in that paper every week for the last 14 years. And it had printed a story about him and his business without the courtesy of a phone call? Without asking him to comment or explain what was happening?

The quoted employee was sitting in the shop's waiting room with a copy of the newspaper when the shop owner returned. He told his boss he'd never said those things. A reporter had called and asked some questions, but he'd never said anything like what was written in the paper.

When the shop owner's brokerage firm opened, he was able to get his money, deposit it and deliver cashier's checks to replace the checks he had sent on Friday. Few of the vendors had even deposited the checks since they'd gotten his call before the mail arrived on Monday.

But the damage was done. When he returned to work, his shop was empty. One car had been in all morning, a flat repair.

The shop owner's visit to the newspaper was animated. The reporter wouldn't talk to him,

and his advertising representative was full of apologies, but worthless. Finally he got the publisher to see him. The publisher explained the difference between the business side of the paper and the journalistic side. How journalists are free to write their stories as long as they check their facts. Yet the disputed facts didn't seem to bother the publisher. The string of 728 weeks of advertising in that paper was over.

While this will likely never happen to you, it is a good reason to keep money at a couple of different banks.

More important, this shop owner's experience is a great demonstration of the value of your reputation. In auto repair your reputation is everything. That's what your customers are buying, reputation and confidence; the actual repair is secondary. They are buying the confidence that when they step on the accelerator, their car will go, and when they step on the brake, their car will stop. While that confidence allows you to charge more, it can be fickle.

By Thursday, business was back to normal. Within weeks the bank was taken over by the FDIC and sold to a national competitor. The bank released his funds and the dispute was resolved, but the shop owner decided to hire an attorney to handle the matter — he feared he'd literally choke someone if he went down there to handle it himself.

Remember, you are selling your reputation; that's your most valuable asset. Consider your reputation whenever you are dealing with a customer, hiring an employee or buying an investment. Reputation is the foundation your shop is built upon. **ATI**



## No One Knows It All

If anyone in the auto repair business could be tempted to think he knows it all, Scott Brown might be a prime candidate. After all, he's a second generation owner of Cardinal Plaza Shell in Springfield, Va., and he's been working there since he was 7!

"My dad started this business in 1969, and when I graduated college, I began running it in 1986," Scott says.

In addition to a lifetime of hands-on experience, Scott had another unique advantage.

"I have known Chris (Frederick) since before he was Chubby," Scott explains. "He was friends with my dad, and I went to a one-day boot camp in 1992."

The years passed, and Scott's shop was busy and successful. Fortunately for him, Scott had a friend who was struggling, so he took him to an ATI boot camp. That's when Scott learned what he didn't know.

"When I went to that boot camp two and a half years ago, I said, 'Wow, I need this for myself!'" Scott exclaims. "I signed up the next week."

Scott recalls that before ATI, as he got busier in his shop, he began to feel isolated – and just plain tired.

"When you're working 12- and 14-hour days, you find yourself getting more and more isolated. And you're doing the same thing, like a squirrel on a wheel. I really didn't know all the things I didn't know," Scott says.

One of those things was how to control his business, and Scott will tell you it was a lesson well worth the investment in ATI.

"ATI is a big financial commitment over a long period of time," Scott acknowledges, "but ATI actually under promises and over delivers. After just those first three days of the owner class, I was able to create a financial model for my business. So now I'm running my business instead of having my business run me. Within

a month I had doubled my gross profit, and within three months I had tripled it."

Two-plus years into it, Scott is as excited about ATI as when he started.

"When you go to a SuperConference, you're in a room with hundreds of other guys, and they're willing to share what works for them!" Scott exclaims. "That's the really unusual thing about ATI members. People usually tend to want to hide their ideas. It's not like that at the SuperConference and in 20 Group. These guys will bend over backward to share. It helps everybody stay on the cutting edge."

Now Scott spends almost all of his time working on his business instead of standing behind the counter.

"I love that term re-engineering," he says. "I spend 95 percent of my time working on different things to transform my business. It's a lot more fun than what I was doing before."

*continued on page 3*

### Sam's Corner

## Twenty Group Members – Fishing Anyone?



Over 200 ATI clients have learned the value of spending time with other successful shop owners that you don't compete with in your market. Many of our clients are building personal as well as business relationships through this networking medium that we call 20 Groups. The relationships are as valuable as the new strategies we learn from each other in the 20 Group meetings.

In an effort to help you spend a little more time together and have a heck of a lot of fun doing it, I would like for you to consider a day of fishing in the Chesapeake Bay on your next visit. The fishing is excellent and the crew of the Becky D have been taking ATI beginners and seasoned salts fishing for over three decades. I will supply the food, nonalcoholic

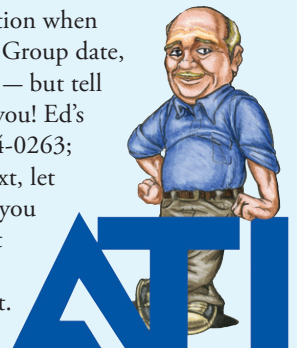
beverages, ice and coolers for your day of networking and fun on the Bay. You split the charter fee and the tip among six anglers for a very reasonable day of fun in the sun.

I have been fishing with Captain Ed Darwin and his mate, Jim Stikney, for over three decades. As many of you know, I was heavily involved in offshore fishing with my own boat and a charter business serving Ocean City, MD; Hatteras, NC; and Islamorada, FL. I have met a lot of captains in my day but not one can hold a candle to Captain Ed. When the Maryland Department of Natural Resources needs striped bass for research in a certain size category, they ask Ed to catch them. The Chesapeake Bay nautical maps are highlighted with structures named after Ed: Ed's Lumps and Darwin's Rockpile. At 83 years old, Ed will fish right alongside of you all day and when you get tired and sit down he will still be standing. He is a true legend on the Chesapeake Bay! Ed's mate, Jim, will clean your fish, teach you how to catch big striped bass and entertain you all day while you network with your 20 Group members.

Ed loves families on the boat as well, so if you want to turn your visit to ATI into a mini vacation, I assure you that your family won't

forget the experience. Over 500 ATI clients have fished with Ed over the years and almost all of them keep coming back each year. The picture in this article is from our last Mastermind Meeting and the happy camper holding the fish is Dave Murphy with Patrick Connell and Steve Ammazzalorso. We limited out on big bass that day, which is more the norm than the exception. The season begins in May and ends in November. In the spring, the bigger fish use the shallower water around the Bay Bridge as a staging area before entering the Susquehanna River to spawn. If you can get the fish home, they are excellent to eat, as well as some of the biggest white perch you have ever laid your eyes on. I am a catch-and-release fisherman the majority of the time, but Jim is more than happy to clean and bag the fish for you.

Make your reservation when you know your 20 Group date, because Ed is busy — but tell him Chubby sent you! Ed's number is 410-974-0263; give him a call! Next, let us know what day you need lunch and get ready for some outdoor excitement.





# Are You Ready for Car Care Month?

By Mike Haley



What if I told you there is an event you can do twice a year to bring in new customers, get reacquainted with old customers and provide a community service. Would you want it? If I told you

this event has national recognition and sponsorship. This event already exists and it is the Car Care Month performed every year in October and April. The Car Care Council was developed to help educate consumers about the second largest investment they have, their vehicles. Car Care offers everything you need to help schedule, plan and promote your event. For a fee of \$59. (tax deductible) you will receive your Car Care kit which includes all the point of sale tools needed to have a successful event.

The event is truly yours to develop, as small or as large as you would like it to be. The event could be just your shop or you could involve other businesses and vendors. You can also create a large event involving several businesses, sponsors and volunteers. Remember: whichever event you decide on, you need to take the time to schedule and plan. If you are having an in-house event this will be a time to show off your facility and staff. Make sure you are showing the brand and professionalism you

want to be remembered for. Determine the equipment and manpower needed to have a successful event.

Car Care will provide you up to 200 free copies of the Car Care Council's inspection form to use during the event. The form is in triplicate: one copy for the customer, one for Car Care and one for you. This is a great tool to follow up on any items that require the attention of a qualified service center. The kit will also provide a banner, brochures, mirror tags and an event DVD to help you organize your Car Care event.

You also have an opportunity to involve some of your vendors to help support the event and assist with some of the cost by providing food and beverages. Some vendors can supply information about things like worn parts versus new parts. Non-profit organizations could provide a car wash. I once saw an event were Advance Auto brought their NHRA simulator.

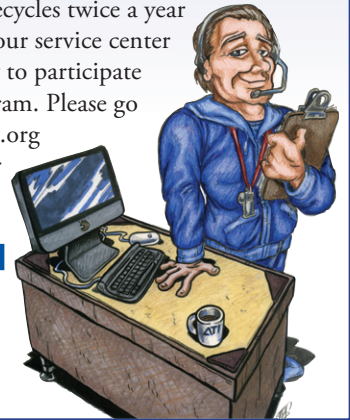
This is also an opportunity to gain low-cost or sometimes free advertising. You can ask the local newspaper to publish a press release. You may want to ask the local radio station if they would like to promote the event, provide a public service announcement and hold an on-site remote.

The photo opportunities of the event are also great for your website, Facebook or YouTube. Car Care is a great event to showcase, because it shows your business performing a free service to help educate customers and make them aware of the current operating condition of their vehicle. After the event, send the customers a thank-you letter for attending the event. The letter can invite them to contact you with any questions or concerns, and ask them to send family, friends or co-workers to your facility when they require the same inspection.

This is one of the best tools I have seen that provides national support and recognition. It displays community involvement and truly educates the customers — something the industry has failed to do until now.

The program recycles twice a year and provides your service center an opportunity to participate in a great program. Please go to [www.carcare.org](http://www.carcare.org)

or contact your coach for any questions you may have. **ATI**



### *No One Knows It All, continued from page 2*

Scott is still very busy, and he says he has to pick and choose what he does.

"One of the struggles is there's so much information coming at you, and you can't possibly do all the good ideas at the same time. I've created a marketing plan where all the different pieces fit together. I've learned you've got to implement one thing thoroughly before you move on to the next."

Scott says he has a "mind map" of about 30 things he wants to accomplish, "but I'm focusing on six right now. For example, I had an incredible website I had written myself, and I had really good success with it. But I knew if I wanted to step up to the next level, I needed to hire a professional. So I did."

Other projects Scott is working on include a newsletter, a customer loyalty program and building his shop's presence within social media. He gets ideas for all of these from the people he meets through ATI.

"ATI has hooked me up with a lot of tremendous shop owners," Scott says. "I've made some friends in my 20 Group that I'll probably have for life. You learn from these other people as well as from your coach and your classes. Everyone has the same challenges, but another thing I really like about ATI is that they don't come up with a solution and then try to cram that solution onto every shop. Everyone gets their own custom solution."

Another benefit of participating with other shop owners is accountability.

"Knowing you're going to see these guys in six months, you want to show improvement," Scott says. "Honestly, we have the best minds in the industry, in both ATI clients and the ATI staff. So I feel confident in the future."

Scott can feel confident because even though 30 percent of the service bays in his area have gone out of business in the last two years, he continues to have record year after record year.

"We were up over 10 percent in sales. There aren't very many shops saying that. And this year it's going to be even better," he says.

With five children, two in college, two in high school and a second grader, Scott jokes that he has no exit strategy when it comes to work.

"It's like Bosnia. You get in and you're never getting out," Scott laughs, "but it's fun."

Scott keeps it fun by following his own best advice:

"You need to work on one thing at a time. Your first step is to build your financial model from what you learn in your owner training," Scott explains. "The portal is a really great tool. Also remember you can't do it all yourself. I send my service writers for training, and that helps them buy in to making the changes." **ATI**

# Your Available Training Programs for September and October








## September 2011

Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday/Sunday

			1	2	3/4
5 Labor Day	6	7 <b>Shop Owner</b> 1 of 9	8 <b>Shop Owner</b> 2 of 9	9 <b>Shop Owner</b> 3 of 9	10/11
12	13	14	15 <b>Master Mind</b> <b>20 Group</b> Salt Lake, UT	16 <b>Master Mind</b> <b>20 Group</b> Salt Lake, UT	17/18
19 <b>Service Advisor</b> 3 of 4	20 <b>Service Advisor</b> 4 of 4	21 <b>Shop Owner</b> 4 of 9	22 <b>Shop Owner</b> 5 of 9	23 <b>Shop Owner</b> 6 of 9	24/25
26 <b>Service Manager</b> 1 of 2	27 <b>Service Manager</b> 2 of 2	28 <b>Shop Owner</b> 7 of 9	29 <b>Shop Owner</b> 8 of 9	30 <b>Shop Owner</b> 9 of 9	

## October 2011

Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday/Sunday

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



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