

# ATI Shoptalk



Issue 9

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## The Free Time SECRET. By Chris Frederick

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### Upcoming Courses:

**Shop Owners**  
December 11-13

**Service Managers**  
December 4-5

**Advanced Shop Owners**  
December 7-8

**Annual SuperConference  
Advanced Owners Class:**  
January 18-19  
Scottsdale, AZ



In the last article, we explored the importance of free time to business and family life; the need to let your associates run the business if you want your business to give you a life rather than take it away. The biggest challenge is getting your people to listen, then follow you into battle. That's right, BATTLE!

There's a lot of leadership development information and training out there. What's frustrating is that most of it doesn't work. For example, you've tried to lead by example, right? You are a perfect example of what, when, and how to do things. Does everyone do what you do? When you "sweeten the pot" by offering your associates more money or free time to motivate behavior change, do they always respond? NOT ALWAYS! We teach them right from wrong over & over, but is it enough? Even business schools can't seem to teach it! Haven't you seen a bright new MBA graduate who is unprepared to lead a business?

To discover the SECRET for myself, I joined a Mastermind Group of personally and professionally successful CEOs. I read as well as teach

leadership skills because I realize my company cannot grow beyond my own skill level. In my first year I had the opportunity to hear Don Schmincke, a Harvard and MIT Anthropology professor. His bestselling books give CEO's a competitive edge by teaching them how to inspire followers to "die" for a cause. History's great leaders who could motivate their followers to take action for a cause changed their followers' beliefs first, then their behaviors to create the results they wanted. There will always be a performance gap between ideals and reality, but great leaders know the SECRET - how to change beliefs. It's a compelling story!

Business schools teach the importance of mission statements. We do too, but mission statements rarely change beliefs. Employees usually accept the beliefs expressed in their company's mission statement, but rarely change their behaviors as a result of it. Too often, the results just aren't there. It's better to let the "followers" create the mission; to let managers & technicians determine the company's values.

Schmincke has studied the history of leadership and how societal behavior modification follows belief system change. Now a business consultant, Don suggests that drama in

the form of a compelling business story can impact your customers' beliefs and your associates' performance. He tells the story of the Nordstrom's customer who returned tires because she was dissatisfied. Supposedly, Nordstrom's gave her money back even though they do not sell tires. As the story was untrue, the Board of Directors wanted to kill it. It did match their belief systems on customer service, however, so Don, in his capacity as personal coach to the CEO, suggested they let the rumor circulate to emphasize that if you want no hassle service, Nordstrom's is the place to get it!

A dramatic, compelling story can become a mission statement when it graphically illustrates the company's values. Ask your customers and associates what story is being told about your business. It might describe how you got started. You may have worked for a competitor whose values were not in line with yours, so you started a business to right the wrongs, attracting your followers & your employees, along the way.

One more thing; give your employees a common enemy to fight. Honda tells its people, "We will destroy Yamaha!" Lexus shouts, "Beat Benz!"



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Wal-Mart, "Give ordinary people the chance to buy the same things as rich people." FedEx, "When it has to be there overnight, beat the brown (UPS) with the red, white and blue!"

Challenge your team with timeless strategic questions: Where's the battlefield? Who's the enemy? How do we WIN? Craft a story that inspires passion & focuses action. It's one of the SECRETS to gaining the free time you and your family deserve. Don will be making a personal appearance at our next Mastermind Meeting at ATI.



## 2007 Superconference

We are very excited about the upcoming Scottsdale Super-Conference in January. We have **125 shops registered** to attend. If you plan to attend the Barrett-Jackson auction, please visit their website for more information.

**About The Barrett-Jackson Auction Company:** Established in 1971 and headquartered in Scottsdale, Arizona, Barrett-Jackson specializes in providing products and services to classic and collector car owners, astute collectors and automotive enthusiasts around the world. The company produces the "World's Greatest Collector Car Events™" in Scottsdale, AZ., and Palm Beach, FL. For more information about Barrett-Jackson, visit [www.barrett-jackson.com](http://www.barrett-jackson.com) or call (480) 421-6694.

# No Mystery With A Mystery Shopper.

By Brian Canning



Each of us wants to run a good business, provide excellent customer service, training, tools and staff to rank among the best in our market area. We want to be confident that we know what is going on in our stores. But how do you really know when you aren't there? How are our customers treated and how well do our employees apply that training? These are tough questions that need an answer.

I recently posed as a mystery shopper to observe how staff at a client's six stores was performing. Though there were some surprises, it showed a great company with a few issues to address and a lot to be proud of.

The plan to make me a mystery shopper was almost spur of the moment. I had initially been asked to speak at their monthly sales meeting about leadership. I had previously met, spoken with and interacted with virtually all of these people. I knew their quality going in.

The owner, general manager and I put an impromptu plan together where I would visit five stores the next day and the sixth the following day. We would discuss our findings with staff members that Tuesday night at their scheduled sales meeting.

I arrived at the first targeted store just as it was opening. I was driving a 1997 Chevy Lumina with nearly 110,000 miles and an expired state inspection. I was greeted very warmly and professionally and was promptly talked into a tire rotation, new wiper blades

and a higher end oil change. So far so good! I was treated very well and my car was completed very quickly. As I was paying, it became obvious that he recognized what was going on as he overwhelmed me with good cheer, helpful information and courteous conversation. The good news here was that before he realized who I was, he was very friendly, set expectations for my visit and made me feel very welcome and important.

For the additional stores I visited, I was exposed to the best and the worst this company had to offer and was both impressed and concerned about what I saw. On the good side I was almost always greeted very warmly and in almost every case, there was a very good effort at the counter to inform me about maintenance and sell me a more comprehensive service. It was hit and miss as to whether or not we would pull fluid samples or do courtesy checks or discuss any findings with me and in several cases discuss findings before pulling the car out of the shop. This last issue was very disappointing simply because I felt as though we were giving up on sales even before presenting them to me, the customer. I told each Service Advisor that I was looking to purchase the car for my daughter and wanted to see if the car was worth buying. I would say that most of the stores actually did a courtesy check but only one of the six made appropriate recommendations for maintenance and repairs totaling \$1700. Two or three others recommended services or a fuel filter but nearly all of these recommendations were made with the car sitting outside the shop. One final

disappointment here was that this company has great tools and point of sale material (bells and whistles) and in too many cases we missed opportunities to use them. You only get that one opportunity to make a great first impression & wow that new customer. We could have and should have done better here.

I had one Service Advisor treat me so well that I was sure that he had recognized me. He did such an incredibly good job at establishing the relationship that I had to struggle to fill in the blanks in my story. I heard the next day that this Service Advisor had located a job for me, knowing that I was looking and new to the area. I had another Service Advisor do a tremendous job of reading me an estimate and he went to great length to discuss all that he had noted while the car was in. He then went on to prioritize it all and even set up an appointment for me later in the week. This was a very impressive performance but unfortunately, it was done with my car sitting outside the shop.

The most impressive part to me was the very positive discussions we had regarding my various adventures at the sales meeting that second night. I walked into this meeting prepared for the worst but was pleasantly surprised by the thoughtful discussion and attentive review of all that had gone on. We were able to put it all in perspective, praise the good, discuss the negative and in the end set our sights on getting better. In my opinion these shops and staff have a lot to be proud of.

**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).

I would say that the use of a mystery shopper is not for the faint at heart and if you are willing to introduce one into your shop you must be prepared and committed to fixing whatever issues might present themselves. In nearly every way, I was treated well and would likely come back if I were an actual customer. We have good people who got a little off track and we can fix that. I am very sure that this company will be using mystery shoppers well into the future and I would make a strong recommendation for similar efforts in your business. It can be painful and it can be embarrassing but how else will you ever know what your customers are seeing and experiencing? It is far too late when they have taken their business elsewhere. This Owner and this General Manager were exceptional in that they are very committed to excellence. How willing would you be to turn the mirror on yourself and your business? My suggestion would be to steel yourself and be prepared for a less than flattering view. Denial will obviously not address the issues that are occurring in your store right now and you cannot begin to fix what you cannot see. Make the mirror your friend and work to improve the reflection. Ultimately your employees will be better for the effort and your customers will be the happy beneficiaries.

A final observation: being a mystery shopper is very serious work that requires preparation and a good plan. It is essential to write down observations and other details immediately upon leaving a store. It is critical that your descriptions be accurate, both in giving credit and in expressing concerns. I was saved from my disorganization by a very diligent General Manager.



# Mrs. Smith, Where Have You Been The Last 6 Months?

By Geoff Berman



How many times have you noticed that it has been 4000, 5000, or even 6000 miles since your customer's last oil change? How often have you found a competitor's sticker or a quick lube sticker in the window of some of your best customers? Now think about how many visits your store lost as a result. If you are like most shops across America, and you are not scheduling your customer's next visit, then this is you. You are probably seeing your customers about twice a year.

All you have to do is tell the customer when to come back, the way the dentist does it. When did you last leave the dentist's office without an appointment? As much as we might hate it, we return because we have that appointment in our date books, and because we understand the importance of having our teeth regularly checked and cleaned. Is vehicle service any different?

Seventy percent of our customers are women. Women are the real multi-taskers, the schedule keepers, the organizers of family life. They will want this appointment scheduled just like the hundreds of other monthly activities they are responsible for organizing. They will appreciate this appointment appearing right there on the calendar, not easily forgotten.

By scheduling appointments, you will not only see your customers more often, but also begin to stabilize car count. You know how many hours a day your technicians can produce and you know how long you will need their vehicles when they return for scheduled appointments. This is your

opportunity to be proactive, to start making your days flow the way you want them to with plenty of work and the right mix. It's easily done and with very little effort. Here's how:

1. Try to schedule people for your slowest times.
2. Leave your busiest times, like the end of the month, open for those unexpected walk-in inspections (you can even schedule those for next year!)



3. Stick with it...you will make mistakes in the beginning, this is only natural when learning a new skill. You might have many rescheduled appointments, but you will still see those customers sooner.

4. Be patient...it could take 3-4 cycles before your customers become comfortable with the new process and buy in completely.

5. Scheduling is as simple as "The Three C's": a card, a conversation, and a call back. For a detailed description on the entire procedure of scheduling ask your coach or email me directly ([gberman@autotraining.net](mailto:gberman@autotraining.net)). I would love to send you the detailed outline of how it's done.

As much as you will like "The Three C's," it is going to take three months before you start to feel the benefits. So while you wait, here are some suggestions for getting immediate results:

✓ Go back through your data base & look for customers who were due to return for service over the last 3-4 months. (You can go back farther if you wish, but I would start here.)

✓ After you have made your list, make the calls! Explain that while you were going through your records, you noticed that they were overdue for their vehicle maintenance service. Ask them if they can return this week or would they prefer next week, and make the appointment.

✓ What do you do if they object and say that they are not interested? Their response is usually based on one of two reasons. Either they feel they are not ready for service or they simply don't plan to come back to your service center. If they convey that they are not ready, simply offer to call them back in a month, and then follow through! If they don't want to return, change your call into a CSI session and gather information. Try to find out why they are not returning. What is keeping them from using your service center again? Even if you are unable to make an appointment or convince them to return, you will at the very least learn some things to help you continue to improve on your ability to create a happy customer.

✓ Once you have contacted all your customers who are 3-4 months overdue, try those who haven't returned for 5-6 months.

Remember...you can't fail if you don't quit!!



## Sam's Corner: Thanks and Reflections From Santa.

By Brian Canning

In a couple of weeks I get to wear my very hot red suit, stocking cap, white wig & beard while, for the second year in a row, playing Santa at our annual holiday party. I could sarcastically complain about the indignity of it all but I would confess to actually looking forward to it.

The Holidays are a time that we get to gather with those we love and reminisce about the past. In my capacity as ATI's Santa, I get to bring joy

to a few kids that truly believe they are standing in front of that exalted mythical figure & I get to make them smile (hopefully) and give them a memory that will last for many years to come. I take this responsibility very seriously and though in some perverse afterthought I might have been tempted to dash their high opinion of Santa and do something less than Santa-like, I try very hard to live up to their lofty expectations and

keep their dreams alive.

I would wish you the very best of holidays, peace and fulfillment in the New Year. I hope that you both seek and grant forgiveness. I would have you love and be loved. I wish you the happiness that comes with success and dreams realized. Remember those in uniform far from home and others who give of themselves so that your life might be better. They have families, hopes & dreams

just like you.

Finally, I would let you know that the holidays are without a doubt a time for love and remembrances and family but your ARO is off, your car count is way down and you are not doing enough courtesy checks. Enjoy it all but I'll be on the phone just like normal next week. You'd better be ready!



## Seven At the Top, *Happy Holidays to All!*

### This Month's Winners are:

**Chris Carr**  
Ray Carr Tire  
112 Rosser Avenue  
Waynesboro, VA 22980

**Chris & Kim Dellapuca**  
Del's Service Center  
987 Garrisonville Rd.  
Stafford, VA 22554

**John & Patti Jindra Jr.**  
Quality Tire Service Inc.  
7401 Spring Grove Road  
Spring Grove, IL 60081

**Dan Robinson**  
Dan's Champion Auto Store  
510 Pfau Street  
Mankato, MN 56001

**Danny Salter Jr.**  
Pro Trans  
807 Pulaski Hwy  
Bear, DE 19701

**Steve Thomas**  
Rossi's Automotive Services  
903 Selim Road  
Silver Spring, MD 20910

**David & Denise Books**  
D&D Automotive Repair  
1714 Arthur Court  
Waukesha, WI 53188



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