

WHEN THE ROCK WON'T ROLL UP THE HILL

IF YOU TELL PEOPLE WHAT YOU EXPECT FROM THE START, YOU DON'T HAVE TO PUSH QUITE SO HARD.

BY CHRIS "CHUBBY" FREDERICK | CONTRIBUTOR

MANY OF us learned valuable lessons from our dads that have really helped us in business. It didn't matter whether they

were in our business or not, because the stories they told somehow would help in any situation. I want you to listen to a great story told by our head coach, George Zeeks, about his dad.

My dad received his GED while he was in the U.S. Army, which he joined to escape his family of 15 brothers and sisters. His departure meant one less mouth to feed, but he was still loved and missed. His eighth-grade education drove him to years of reading and study, however, he never lost his habit of cryptic witticisms. This led to many deeply frustrating attempts to share what he had learned with his hard-headed son.

Though he rose to the highest enlisted rank possible and led men in battle in two wars, his attempts to lead his son through seemingly simple tasks put us at odds many times. One of his favorite sayings was, "Why are you trying to push that rock uphill?"

First, I didn't see any hill. Second, what rock was he talking about? He never explained that saying to me. He just said I would understand someday.

Don't Push Harder, Be Smarter

I managed a solid crew at a good shop and always had done very well with them. Then one day, I was frustrated at my crew for not being able to perform one basic task. It was time for some serious cleaning. Kind words, bribes, high-volume conversations and physical threats just weren't working. I had neglected to look at the problem from any viewpoint



JUST
SCAN IT 

Scan this QR Code to get more on your smartphone. Or visit MotorAge.com/ProfitMatters712

GET A FREE SCAN TOOL APP AT:
www.scanlife.com

“HOW CAN I GET MY EMPLOYEES TO FOLLOW ME WHEN I AM NOT THERE? TO DO SO, THEY MUST BELIEVE IN YOUR BELIEFS TO SERVE YOUR CUSTOMERS.”

CHRIS “CHUBBY” FREDERICK [ATI CEO]

other than mine. Then it hit me: I was way too busy pushing the rock up the hill.

Every shop owner I have talked to has shared this moment. The biggest difference is if and when they realize who is at fault. Have you ever felt the hope and optimism in hiring an employee you just know is perfect for the job? I mean, this is going to be the answer to all of your problems. Just plug and play and we are in the promised land, right? If you recognize this feeling, then you have had your hands on the rock before.

It never gets better than the interview. Experience comes from time, wisdom from pain and excellence from learning not to do the things that caused the pain. But takes more than some clever quote to fix the problems in your shop.

Set Employee Standards

When you have a new hire, do you set the standards for them so they know what is expected? Do you know what those standards should be? Failure to clearly explain what you expect from them will leave them to make up their own standards of what they should do.

Maybe they left their last job on their own, maybe not. Do you want to leave that loose end hanging? Having clear-cut standards and expectations starts with you, and those standards echo down through the staff. Things as basic as when you are to show up and how you are to dress affect the culture of the whole shop. Do you have standard policies that everyone follows?

One of the biggest mistakes we see is forgetting to explain the purpose behind the standards. I want you to take a sec-



ond and think of why you have your staff come in at the time they do. What is the purpose behind it? Can you explain it to your staff in a way that will lead them to care? Do you give up?

Try something like this: “Bob, the reason we have you come to work at 7:45 is so you can be ready to start on the cars at 8. We know that you only have so many hours in a day to be able to make the money that you need — money used to take care of your family, the birthdays, vacations and holidays. We want to make sure that you make a good living so you and your family are happy and doing well. To make sure that you have that opportunity, we make appointments for customers starting at 8. That way, you can start making money from the first minute that the shop is open. We make a promise to the customer, so we can keep our promise to you.”

It might seem wordy, but explaining the purpose will reach them. It also sounds better than, “You’re late, dirt-bag!” I know it will have better results.

The key is that we talk about things the employee will care about. The most important point is that we should have this conversation when the employee is first hired. We hear all the time that we should create an employee handbook, but we don’t make the time to do it. Most of the basic problems we have can

be avoided if we let the new hire know ahead of time what is expected.


Another problem is the lack of productivity standards for the technicians and sales staff. Have we shared with them how many labor hours they are supposed to produce or sell? Do you know how many hours are in your labor inventory? If not, then how does your writer know how many hours they have to sell?

Do the technicians know how many hours you need for them to produce so you make a profit on their labor? These are all questions that you need to answer for yourself before you even know what to expect from them.

The real question is, do you know what you need and do you ask for it? If you fail to know these answers or provide them to your crew, you are setting them up for failure. If they fail, you will fail. You must know what you expect, and they must know what the shop standard is.

It Depends on You!

Building a team and creating the right culture in your shop depends on you. You have to know what the proper expectations are. Set the proper standards for the crew and hold everyone accountable. Most importantly, hold yourself accountable.

Remember that accountability is not about confrontation. It is much more about separating the behavior from the person and focusing on the bad behavior, or praising the good. If you would like to have an Employee Problem Checklist and the reasons for those problems, go to www.ationlinetraining.com/2012-08. 

Free Video Reveals...

What Are You Really Paying For Shop Labor? It May Be A Lot More Than You Think.

- Find out if you are paying too much for your labor.
- How to easily determine the hours each tech must bill to achieve your profit goals.
- Get Chubby’s Effective Labor Rate Calculator for your shop.



To give back to the auto repair industry Chubby is making this online training video available for free, visit www.ationlinetraining.com/264 for immediate access. This free video is available for a limited time only.



Chris “Chubby” Frederick is CEO and founder of the Automotive Training Institute located at BWI Airport in Maryland. ATI’s 98 associates train and coach more than 1,000 shop owners every week to drive profits and dreams home to their families. This month’s article was written with the help of George Zeeks, head coach and mentor to ATI’s coaching staff.

 E-mail Chubby at cfrederick@autotraining.net