

WHAT AN EASTER EGG HUNT CAN TEACH

LESSONS LEARNED AS A CHILD IN THE YARD APPLY TO HOW YOU WORK WITH EMPLOYEES.

BY CHRIS "CHUBBY" FREDERICK | CONTRIBUTOR

WHEN you have been working with shop owners and their businesses for more than 40 years, you see lots of change. The one change I hate to see is when a shop that was admired by everyone in the area slips into half as good as what it once was. It typically happens gradually, with the owner blaming everything including the bathroom sink. The reality is most owners are working so hard in the business they actually don't know what is happening to them. I was listening to a rather long but worthwhile story from Kim Hickey, an ATI coach and former shop owner, explaining how it can happen to anyone.

Kim began by asking if you ever have been sitting somewhere enjoying doing nothing when you overhear someone say something so ridiculous it just makes you almost jump out of your skin? And try as you might, you just can't keep your mouth shut about it? That's how she moved into this story.

The other day I overheard a group of women chatting about Easter: who was coming for dinner, what kind of pies, blah blah blah. It was then that I heard something that made every part of me nuts. A few of the women were speaking about the Easter egg hunts they were planning and where they were going to hide eggs, candy, etc., when one woman started to reprimand them.

She said they could not just randomly hide candy, eggs and prizes because if they did, there would be no way for them to ensure every child received the same number of eggs, the same amount of candy and the same amount of prizes. She continued to speak and say that if all the children did not all get the same kind and amount of loot that it could lead to hurt feelings and possibly cause a child to grow up insecure.

She had a plan that would spare the world from these children who could be permanently and psychologically damaged by getting shorted at an Easter egg hunt. Her plan was to color code each egg and basket. Each child would be assigned a color and they would be



“HOW CAN A SHOP STAY THE BEST OVER DECADES OF SERVICE TO THEIR MARKET? PUT ALL YOUR ENERGY INTO WORKING ON THE BUSINESS VERSUS WORKING IN THE BUSINESS SO YOU CAN PAY ATTENTION TO ANY CHANGES THAT MIGHT BE A THREAT TO YOUR REPUTATION.”

CHRIS “CHUBBY” FREDERICK [ATI CEO]

permitted to hunt only for the eggs of that color. Each set of colored eggs had the same number of eggs and the same prizes and money in them. The story reminded me why it is so difficult to find employees that want to work — they want to get paid, applauded and praised just for showing up.

A Level Playing Field?

While her intentions might have been good, her plan was not. Her plan stripped and robbed participants of being victorious. It robbed them from being rewarded for excelling. It robbed them of learning that if you plan better, work smarter and try harder, you will be rewarded. Is it any wonder with plans like these that so many people lack problem-solving skills, competitiveness and the drive to improve themselves? It is because of well-intentioned ideas like these that people are just about encouraged not to work hard for anything, and instead expect and demand that it will just be given to you.

If there were any long-term damages incurred as a result of a child participating in this Easter egg hunt, the damage would not be insecurity, it would be lack of motivation. To that woman, it is just an Easter egg hunt. In reality, it is a learning opportunity. It is a thinking game. It is a venue to learn how to strategize and outsmart your opponents. It forces you to figure out how you can stay two steps ahead of everyone else. It is a lesson in planning.

I still can remember going to bed the night before my childhood Easter egg hunts and laying out my plan of attack. I would mentally check off all my cousins' strengths and weaknesses. As I lay in bed too excited to sleep, I would picture the layout of the yard and decide where I would start. I learned very quickly that you don't start at the first cluster of eggs where everyone else was. If I did that, not only would I be outnumbered, but I could possibly get trampled because I was smaller.

I also learned quickly that being



greedy is not good either. If you ran for the giant chocolate or stuffed Easter bunny, you wouldn't have room or hands to carry anything else, so while the big kids were each grabbing a huge stuffed or chocolate bunny, I was grabbing lots of eggs and smaller things. Some even had money in them.

I could not be more delighted with how shortsighted my cousins were. They always went for the path of least resistance. Because my cousins were bigger and stronger, I had to use my head and learn to weigh my options. Had someone just said here is a yellow basket, go fill it with the yellow eggs, I would not have had to do or learn anything. Instead I would be waiting for my handout.

As my cousins watched me each year, they got smarter. They started to spend time coming up with a better plan. They began sizing me up and looking for my weaknesses. I had to make adjustments to my strategy every year. If I didn't, I would not have been able to continue to be victorious. I had to evolve, be aware of all my opponents' strengths and weaknesses.

Set the Bar High Enough

You should use the same skills you used as a child hunting for eggs in running your business. When you are putting together pay plans and reward programs for your employees, are you creating ones that encourage them to work smarter, try harder and continue their education? What are you doing to set the bar for them? How are you helping to motivate them to become better versions of themselves?

What about you? Are you aware of your competition? Have you taken inventory of your strengths and weak-

nesses? Are you evolving? Have you been staying current with the latest technology and keeping abreast of what is new in our industry?

How much research have you done on learning about future trends in your field? Do you ever take a walk around the neighborhood your shop is in and randomly stop in stores and ask where the best automotive repair is and see what answers you get? How often do you pull up at your shop and peruse the parking lot, walk through the front door, sit in your waiting room, stand at your counter? When was the last time you looked honestly at your shop like a customer does?

Get Back in the Game

If you answered no or I don't know to any of the above questions, you could be in danger of being left behind without even realizing it. In today's world, maybe at schools and during Easter egg hunts you can get away with doing the minimum and still get a reward, but in the business world that doesn't happen.

Do you want to test your strengths and weaknesses against your competition? We have a diagnostic worksheet you can use to assess if you are staying the best shop in your market. For a limited time, you can find it at www.ationlinetraining.com/2015-03.



Chris "Chubby" Frederick is the CEO and founder of the Automotive Training Institute. ATI's 108 associates train and coach more than 1,150 shop owners every week across North America to drive profits and dreams home to their families. Our associates love helping shop owners who are having the same struggle as many of them have had, and who are looking for the same answers — and in some cases looking for a lifeline. This month's article was written with the help of ATI coach and former shop owner Kim Hickey.

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