



# ENCOURAGING LEADERSHIP

Look for and cultivate these leadership traits in your employees

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Hold yourself and your staff accountable to see lasting change

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### MSO ROUNDTABLE

ABRN sits down with industry representatives in the multi-shop operator market to discuss industry challenges, what's to come and what shops will need to be successful in the future.

**JOHN YOSWICK** // Contributing Editor

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CERTIFICATION

## OEM CERTIFICATION PROGRAM CREATED FOR CARSTAR STORES

ABRN WIRE REPORTS //

**→** CARSTAR and Assured Performance jointly announced they will provide a special OEM certification initiative and bundled services to CARSTAR locations across North America. The new initiative leverages Assured Performance tools and resources for CARSTAR store owners to help accelerate adoption and compliance to OEM

certification requirements and business improvement milestones. CARSTAR corporate will also have access to optics across their network to manage business development, certification compliance and market coverage.

“As OEM certifications and repair standards continue to grow in importance, we want to ensure CARSTAR store owners have the resources, tools

>> **OEM CONTINUES ON PAGE 8**

**BREAKING NEWS**

INDUSTRY CHARITY

## GOLFERS RAISE \$120,000 FOR CHARITY

**→** Caliber Collision teammates, partners and friends played their hearts out at the 3<sup>rd</sup> annual Caliber Classic and raised more than \$120,000 to help the Caliber Collision Centers Foundation benefactor programs.

Proceeds from the golf tournament hosted by Caliber Collision at The Tribute at The Colony Golf Club on May 7 went towards supporting the Annual Caliber Rhythm Restoration Food Drive, which provides more than 3 million meals each year to 58 food banks across the U.S., as well as the Recycled Rides program. Caliber will gift more than 80 fully restored vehicles this year to military veterans, active duty service members and deserving local community members in need of reliable transportation.

“Caliber Collision is committed to giving back as we become a part of the fabric in every community we serve. I am humbled and grateful to our colleagues, partners and teammates who generously

>> **GOLF CONTINUES ON PAGE 8**

**TRENDING**

### SERVICE KING OPENS DOORS TO NEW DFW REPAIR CENTER

Service King Collision Repair Centers announced the opening of its 38<sup>th</sup> Dallas-Fort Worth location. The 20,000 square-foot facility is in Little Elm, Texas.

[ABRN.COM/LITTLEELM](http://ABRN.COM/LITTLEELM)

### PROCARE AUTOMOTIVE & COLLISION OPENS NEW LOCATION

ProCare Automotive opened its 29<sup>th</sup> auto body shop in San Antonio. ProCare is expanding and now is in several cities across central, south and southeast Texas.

[ABRN.COM/PROCARE](http://ABRN.COM/PROCARE)

### 1COLLISION NETWORK EXPANDS

1 Collision Network has added new collision service centers in San Bruno and San Mateo, Calif., Cottage Grove, Minn. and Schaumburg, Ill., and has also added a network affiliate in Omaha, Neb.

[ABRN.COM/1EXPANDS](http://ABRN.COM/1EXPANDS)

### CARSTAR LAUNCHES NEW STRUCTURE ACROSS U.S.

Having always operated under a zone structure, CARSTAR has reallocated, expanded and promoted various teams and team members to better support the regions they serve.

[ABRN.COM/NEWOPS](http://ABRN.COM/NEWOPS)

### NABC RECYCLED RIDES CHANGES LIVES

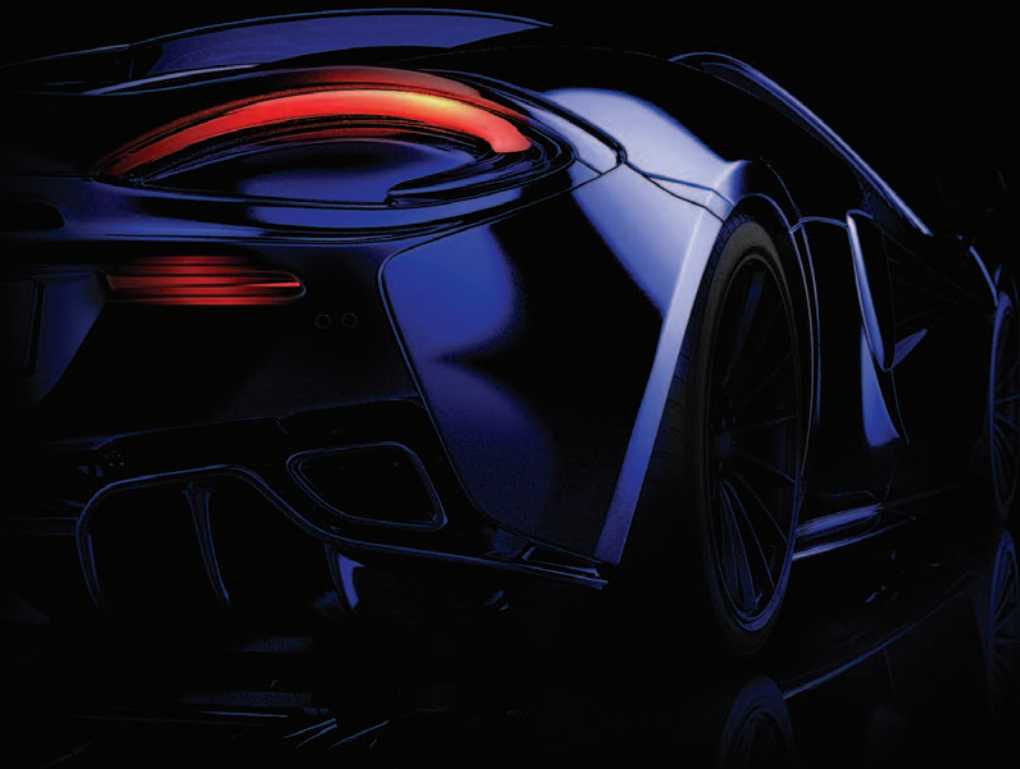
Four years ago U.S. Air Force veteran Diana Cuesta received a gift that “forever and literally changed my life” — a 2010 Kia Forte from the National Auto Body Council’s Recycled Rides™ program.

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## SERVICE KING'S MISSION 2 HIRE PROGRAM WELCOMES 400<sup>TH</sup> VETERAN

### ABRN WIRE REPORTS

Service King Collision Repair Centers, one of the fastest growing providers of high-quality automotive repair service in the U.S., officially welcomed its 400<sup>th</sup> U.S. Military veteran to the family as part of the organization's ongoing Mission 2 Hire initiative. With the recent milestone, the company remains ahead of its original goal to successfully recruit and hire 500 U.S. Armed Forces veterans and family members in five years.

"This is yet another extremely proud moment in the life of our Mission 2 Hire initiative," said Service King President Jeff McFadden. "We are always looking for top-tier talent to join our growing team and recognize the intangible qualities that so many U.S. Armed Forces veterans provide. The Mission 2 Hire initiative continues to make a profound impact, not only on the culture of our organization, but in the lives of so many of the veterans that we have hired since launching this program in 2015. We look forward to officially reaching our goal and continuing to connect with our heroes and their families."

All U.S. Military Veterans, spouses and family members interested in a career at Service King are encouraged to visit the dedicated veterans hiring page at [Mission2Hire.careers](http://Mission2Hire.careers). The page provides an intuitive platform to learn more about current opportunities at Service King, connect with the company and even features a skills matcher that connects prospective candidates with positions based on their military experience.

"At Service King, Mission 2 Hire embodies our unwavering commitment not only to hire veterans but to provide our heroes with a world-class organization to call their professional home," said Sean Huurman, Service King Chief

Human Resources Officer. "That entails providing a genuine and irresistible culture complete with comprehensive benefits and a support structure unlike any other in the collision repair industry. We're certainly proud to hit this milestone and look forward to welcoming more of our Armed Forces veterans and their family members to the Service King family."

Since launching in 2015, Service King's Mission 2 Hire has welcomed former military veterans to the family in the roles of service advisors, auto body technicians and a wide array of administrative and support positions across the company's more than 330 locations in 24 states. That influx of talent includes representation from all six uniformed service branches to the company's workforce.

Meanwhile, Service King has prominently featured Mission 2 Hire and promoted career opportunities for military veterans in the media throughout the campaign's lifespan, even producing an award-winning advertising spot during Super Bowl 50 in 2016. The 30-second radio spot featured a compelling first-person account by U.S. Army veteran and Service King teammate Jeremiah Kuehl. In the ad, Kuehl recounted his experience of being honorably discharged from the Army after serving overseas and his transition to a rewarding career at Service King. The ad was awarded the Westwood One Super Bowl Sound Award for creativity as voted on by listeners of the national broadcast through a comprehensive Neilson consumer study.

For more information on the organization, or to find a local Service King repair center, visit [www.ServiceKing.com](http://www.ServiceKing.com) and follow the company on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. 📱

>> OEM CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

and training to restore customers' vehicles to the OEM's pre-accident condition," said Michael Macaluso, President of CARSTAR. "Not only do these OEM certifications provide an additional level of customer confidence in the CARSTAR repair process, it helps CARSTAR also meet the repair standards of our insurance partners in the U.S. and Canada."

Assured Performance manages and administers OEM certification programs on behalf of Fiat Chrysler Automobiles (FCA), Ford, Kia, Hyundai, and Nissan and INFINITY, and in Canada, for Fiat Chrysler (FCA), Ford, Kia and Nissan. All qualified collision repairers in North America have the opportunity to attain multiple, diverse OEM certifications through a single provider by leveraging the common business development, audit, inspection and documentation processes managed by Assured Performance. In order to qualify, repairers must have the proper tools, equipment, training and facilities to repair vehicles to OEM specifications and ensure a vehicle's fit, finish, durability, functionality, value and safety are preserved. 📱

>> GOLF CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

supported the Caliber Collision Centers Foundation," said Steve Grimshaw, Caliber Chief Executive Officer.

Key sponsors of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Caliber Classic Golf tournament included:

- Axalta – Presenting Sponsor
- Enterprise, LKQ Corporation and PWC – Gold Sponsors
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- And over 40 local and national business partners. 📱



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# What is your parts ordering marketplace?

Finding a reasonable market price, but at what cost to our businesses?

Lately I have been hearing some unique ways of describing what my marketplace area is from a few DRP insurers while discussing searches and ordering, especially regarding salvage parts. Here are a few examples:

1. The marketplace is anywhere we can order a part.
2. If it can be shipped to your shop's door, that is the market area.
3. It is like Amazon — you can order anything from anywhere.
4. If you fixed the car in your (home) garage, you would order the part that is cheapest from "XYZ" state.

Most repairers who have DRPs have complained about this in recent years. Thanks to a number of automated search tools, it is relatively easy to shop all over our great country. What is not easy to do is deal with quality issues, returns, refunds, job delays and all the accompanying administrative work and expense. Far too often parts purchased from vendors afar require special payment (as we typically don't have accounts with them), have quality issues, have clean-up time issues (they are less motivated since we don't have relationships including frequent purchases), have return issues (for the same reasons) and have refund issues.

Some insurers will only pay the least expensive price found as long as the part located sounds like it may be acceptable. According to the Automotive Recyclers Association (ARA) website, there are about 9,000 auto salvage business locations in our country employing about 140,000 people and generating \$32 billion in sales. Of course in such a scenario the key question is whether or not a located part is truly acceptable as described from the various vendors, most of which we have little or no experience with. When expressing our concerns to these insurers the following are some of their responses:

1. Your local vendors should/can price match the part.
2. Your shop does not need an account; they will take a credit card.



**THE TOTAL LABOR TIME REQUIRED IN RETURNING A PART IS ROUGHLY 1-2 HOURS. YOU CAN IMAGINE WHAT THAT EQUATES TO IN TERMS OF LABOR EXPENSE.**

3. If you have a problem, let us know and we will take them off our list.
4. If you fixed the car in your garage you would order the part that is cheapest from "XYZ" state. (Which is a silly argument of little relevance. This is of little comparison with a professional collision repair from a legitimate business.)  
As most repairers will tell you, when we order some of these parts from unknown sources from out of state, sometimes we have a good experience. Most will also tell you that often we don't and that it is a terrible experience for us as repairers and thus for our customers.

In the past, I was part of a lean exercise where we identified all the steps to return a part. We came up with more than 60, including all the steps the estimator, technician, parts person and accounting office go through, including keeping track of the return part, return slips, communications, supplements and accounting office work relevant to keeping track of the purchase costs and refunds within internal accounting and additional work handling and auditing vendor invoices, return slips

and monthly statements. I think it is safe to say the total labor required is roughly 1-2 hours of work. You can image what that equates to in terms of labor expense. In other words, returning a part is a bigger issue than many people assume.

Of course, the most demanding insurers who push this on us appear to be focused simply on cost savings with very little consideration for administrative costs for shops, nor for potentially all of the negative issues resulting from job delays, including customer CSI, rental expense and shop production inefficiency. Often it is not considered that when a repairer has to stop body repair while waiting for a part — as the tech can't work on that vehicle — we want them working on another. So we give them another job, which means we must maintain a larger work in process (WIP) and won't necessarily return to the job waiting for the part until the tech is finished with the second job. Cycle time and inefficiency increase and the issues



snowball into bigger problems.

The irony of this is that many of us have a number of good salvage part companies in our area who are better prepared than we as repairers to shop the outside market and to know who out there is a better or worse performer. Local trusted vendors are also far more inclined to go the extra distance for a good collision business customer in terms of searches and investigating part quality, providing clean-up time, handling returns and more.

Another irony is how some of these insurers define our "area" or "marketplace" when it comes to ordering parts. When I ask them if we can use the same definition of my area or marketplace to establish labor rates, they don't find my logic amusing.

Yet one more irony is that my state's insurance regulations state, "No ad-

juster..., employee, or other representative of an insurer shall in collision cases: .... specify the use of a particular vendor for the procurement of parts or other materials necessary for the satisfactory repair of the vehicle. This clause does not require the insurer to pay more than a reasonable market price for parts of like kind and quality in adjusting a claim." Shouldn't this matter? The cheapest price from a yard hundreds, or even thousands, of miles away should not necessarily constitute the "reasonable market price."

As reported in CCC'S 2018 Crash Course, average cycle time has been trending longer in recent years. One wonders if this issue is a contributor.

I know to some extent I am venting. However, as an industry, we should be much better than this. While the automated parts searches are great for find-

ing parts and no doubt help keep costs down, they are woefully inadequate when it comes to offering accurate descriptions and grading of parts quality, monitoring delivery time, measuring return rates, receptiveness to clean-up costs and other salvage parts vendor performance indicators. While containing insurer cost is good, there should be more effort to do the same for repairers. And, most importantly, we should be more focused on the consumer. Too often they take a back seat to the convenience and cost containment of some insurers. ❧

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# ENCOURAGING LEADERSHIP

## Look for and cultivate these leadership traits in your employees

**DARRELL AMBERSON //** Contributing Editor

**T**his is the third part in a series of articles on the importance of establishing leaders in your MSO business. In the first part I covered the difference between management and leadership. In the second part I talked about what difference it makes in terms of business performance. I also covered leadership 'style,' including attributes and behaviors.

I concluded by covering how perfecting our own skills is the best place to start in passing leadership skills on to others.

### Next steps

As we refine our own leadership skills a measurement of our success will be in how effective we are in influencing the hearts and minds of others. The traits we observe in others will be the evidence. So what traits do we want to see and cultivate in our employees? Let's look at a few:

**Compliance. Obedience.** Performing tasks as directed as well as complying with company procedures is important. However, we are looking for something more compelling and powerful. It doesn't necessarily take a great leader to get

some people to perform some tasks. A harsh dictator can accomplish that, causing people to perform tasks out of fear instead of personal motivation. We're looking for leadership that inspires people to perform and also become leaders.

**Competence** is a good indicator of intelligence and understanding. Beyond that, it indicates the individual cares. They have taken their responsibilities to heart and are completing their tasks successfully.

**Enthusiasm** is a great indicator and is indicative of an internal desire to accomplish and show motivation. There

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is a very positive aspect to people who display motivation.

**Grit** is the drive to persevere in the face of challenges. It's a willingness to accept some sacrifices and work hard towards a successful future — a stubborn and relentless effort that refuses to lose and will only accept success. These are great attributes and essential for any team. These can also be indicators of good leadership.

**Grace** includes qualities of decency, respect and generosity. This one is exceptionally powerful.

These mark a person with whom others want to cooperate. These attributes influence the hearts and minds of others, striking to the core of great leadership.

### Google's Project Oxygen

Since the early days of Google, people throughout the company questioned the value of managers. They had a highly technocratic culture and as one manager said, "We are a company built for engineers by engineers." As described in a report from the Harvard Business Review, Google launched Project Oxygen, a multiyear program to measure key management behaviors and to cultivate them through communication and training. By 2012, the employees had widely adopted the program, and the company was showing statistical and significant improvements in multiple areas of managerial effectiveness and performance.

They analyzed managers' performance through exit interview data, Googleist ratings and semi-annual reviews, comparing managers on both satisfaction and performance. They found employee retention was more related to manager quality than seniority, performance, tenure or promotions. The data also showed a tight connection between manager's quality and workers' happiness. Employees with the highest scoring bosses consistently reported greater satisfaction in multiple areas including innovation, work-life balance and career development. Google's people analytics

team identified eight key behaviors of the company's most effective managers.

A good manager:

1. Is a good coach
2. Empowers the team and does not micromanage
3. Expresses interest in and concern for team members' success and personal well-being
4. Is productive and results-oriented
5. Is a good communicator — listens and shares information
6. Helps with career development
7. Has a clear vision and strategy for the team
8. Has key technical skills that help him or her advise the team

The key behaviors primarily describe leaders of small and medium-sized groups and teams and are especially relevant to first- and second-level managers.

People designed the training to be hands-on and immediately useful. In "vision" classes, for example, participants practiced writing vision statements for their departments or teams and bringing the ideas to life with compelling stories. In 2011, Google added Start Right, a two-hour workshop for new managers, and Manager Flagship courses on popular topics, such as managing change, which were offered in three two-day modules over six months.

One manager reported, "I now spend a third to half my time looking for ways to help my team members grow." And to his surprise, his reports have welcomed his advice. "Engineers hate being micromanaged on the technical side," he observes, "but they love being closely managed on the career side."

Project Oxygen has accomplished what it set out to do: It not only convinced its skeptical audience of Googlers that managers mattered, but also identified, described and institutionalized their most essential behaviors. Oxygen applied the concept of data-driven continuous improvement directly — and successfully — to the soft skills of management. Widespread adoption has had

a significant impact on how employees perceive life at Google — particularly on how they rate the degree of collaboration, the transparency of performance evaluations and their groups' commitment to innovation and risk taking.

In other words, these "character" qualities outranked sheer drive and technical expertise when it came to predicting success.

Managers who use "character" focused leadership skills can cause staff to display the attributes, or traits, that we seek. Those traits lead to a better work environment and a higher level of performance. They also cause staff to develop their own leadership traits that put them on a track to become leaders.

### Our task

As we continue to work on our own skills to be the best leaders, it is up to us to continue to find ways to cause our staff to display the traits we seek. To continue to get deeper into the subject, one might ask, "What is the best way to instill grit and grace in your team?" It can be about cultivating three specific emotions: compassion, pride and gratitude. Our success is built on the ability to form relationships. In these relationships we need qualities including honesty, fairness and diligence. Moral emotions, including compassion, pride and gratitude, are what drive these qualities.

Research has shown that when people feel grateful, they're willing to devote more effort to help others, to be loyal even at a cost to themselves and to share profits with partners rather than take more for themselves. When they feel proud — an authentic pride based on their abilities and/or their team's abilities — they'll work harder to help colleagues solve problems and feel better about themselves, including a higher level of confidence. When they feel compassion, they're willing to devote time, effort and money to aid others. It's about caring. And all of these behaviors draw others to us. People who express gratitude, compas-



sion and pride are viewed positively by those around them.

The correlation of these emotions to the qualities of grace (including decency, respect and generosity) are direct and obvious. Gratitude and compassion lead to generosity and decency. Compassion and pride and gratitude inspire one to treat others with respect.

These emotions also build grit. They increase the value people place on future goals relative to present ones and thereby pave the way to perseverance. People induced to feel grateful typically show increased patience when it comes to financial and other rewards. They're twice as willing to forgo an immediate smaller reward so that they can invest it for a longer-term gain. In a similar vein, people made to feel pride are willing to persevere more on challenging tasks precisely because pride induces them to place greater value on the future rewards

of obtaining the ultimate goal.

Another benefit is that these emotions help solve an increasingly common problem of professional life: loneliness. Today, loneliness has become an epidemic in the U.S., with 53 percent of American workers regularly reporting feeling isolated in their public lives — an immense problem given the toll loneliness takes on the both physical and mental health. New technologies where we interact and communicate electronically contribute to the problem. Regularly feeling gratitude, compassion and pride — because these emotions automatically make people behave in more communal and supportive ways — build social connections. For example, people assigned to engage in simple interventions to feel and express gratitude show enhanced feelings of social connection and relationship satisfaction over time.

It is therefore our task as leaders to

cultivate these emotions. Gratitude, compassion and pride make us more willing to cooperate with and invest in others. But because they accomplish this feat by increasing the value the mind places on future gains, they also nudge us to invest in our own futures. In so doing, they make both teams — and the individuals who comprise them — more successful and resilient. As a result we are more effective leaders and we cause others to take on the traits that cause them to become leaders. ■



#### DARRELL AMBERSON

is the president of operations for LaMettry's Collision, which has eight locations in the Minneapolis and St. Paul area. He is a

board member for the Automotive Service Association, and he has more than 40 years of collision industry experience.

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PREP STATION

# What to do when what you want to happen doesn't

Hold yourself and your staff accountable to see lasting change

In the coaching business, you often come across a shop owner who knows what to do but can't get the strategy implemented. Listen to how veteran ATI coach Brian Hunnicutt accomplished this with his members.

At a young age I become a district manager for a chain of auto stores. In store visits, I would verbally create a clear level of expectation of what I wanted to see happen.

What would happen? Nothing. So I got a notebook for each store and wrote my clear level of expectations on the first page. Reviewed it with the manager, and what happened? Again: nothing. Each manager had the same excuses — they called them “reasons.”

## Have them list the obstacles

I had them list each reason they could not get done what I wanted in the back of the book. I would start at the front of the book, and I would help remove the obstacles. We would meet in the middle of the notebook with a fixed store.

That notebook evolved into a simplistic tool to help with holding your employees and yourself accountable.

Divide the notebook into sections: first, what does the store, you or the employee do well? The second section lists what needs to be worked on. Third, pick two things from page two that you are going to work on. Fourth, what are the goals? The fifth page is the overflow from section two, if needed, since you should not have more than 15 items on page two. Sixth is the schedule.

## Start with a notepad

You need to take good notes. Drive to your store from every direction and really look at it. What is good about the store?

**REMEMBER THIS PHRASE: “AS THE OWNER OF THE STORE, I NEED TO KNOW THAT I CAN COUNT ON YOU FOR RESULTS.” MOST PEOPLE WILL STEP UP AND GET THE JOB DONE.**

Walk through your store from every angle: what is good about it? Write it down and transfer it into the store notebook later. Now do the same exercise and what does the store need to work on? It can be cosmetic; it can be courtesy checks. It can be tech productivity, higher ARO. What does your store need to work on?

Now sit and think about each employee: what do they each do well? Last, but not least: what about you? You can take it — what do you do well? Then once again the fun part — what do you and your employees need to work on?

Then transfer the notes into the notebook under the store, employee or your section.

The third page is the two things that the store, employee or you are going to work on from page two. Only work on two things at a time each; pick a hard item and an easy item to work on. Write down the first item, leaving room to have

the employee write down what they are willing to do to work on it.

## Develop a mentoring plan

You may need to mentor them on what to write down, but they need to write it in their own words and own it. Have them date it as well. The critical part is that it has to be trackable and measurable.

Once they are doing a consistently good job tackling the weakness, move it to the front page. Pick another item from page two and move it to page three. Start the process again.

If they do not do a good job, you have them reiterate that they are willing to do it. Then have them sign it and write today's date on it. Let them know that this is a big deal.

## Make them commit

Remember this phrase: as the owner of the store, I need to know that I can count on you for results. The best part is that only 2 percent of the time do we have to fire someone. Most people will step up and get the job done. 📌



**CHRIS “CHUBBY” FREDERICK** is the CEO and founder of the Automotive Training Institute. ATI's 130 full-time associates train and coach more than 1,500 shop owners every

week across North America to drive profits and dreams home to their families. Our full-time coaches have helped our members earn over 1 BILLION DOLLARS in a return on their coaching investment since ATI was founded. This month's article was written with the help of ATI Coach Brian Hunnicutt. [chubby@autotraining.net](mailto:chubby@autotraining.net)



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# Big growth in big sky country

Montana-based Big Sky Collision invests in staff to foster growth

**BRIAN ALBRIGHT** // Contributing Editor

Everything in Montana is vast, and the state's biggest family-owned multi-shop collision repair company has to cover a big area. Big Sky Collision operates three stores in Billings, Bozeman and Livingston, Mont., but its service area stretches for hundreds of miles. The Livingston location is 120 miles away from Billings; the Bozeman store is 150 miles from the headquarters.

Montana is the fourth largest state, but third most sparsely populated, so expansion into new markets can spread an owner thin. According to Big Sky owner Matthew McDonnell, investing in his staff and focusing on customer service has helped keep the company's growth manageable.

McDonnell is a second-generation owner. His father started the business in 1978, but the younger McDonnell didn't really join the family business until later in life. "I swept floors there when I was younger, but I actually went away, went to school and worked in the restaurant industry," McDonnell says.

While his two brothers did work with his father, McDonnell didn't join the fold until he was in his thirties. "I was golfing with my dad and he just asked me to come back and work for him," McDonnell says. "He wanted me to handle insurance relations."

His introduction to shop-insurer relations was eye opening, to say the least. "My dad is pretty old-school, and the first week I was here I saw him yelling at an insurance adjuster," McDonnell says. "My jaw was on the ground. That's how you do business with each other?"

The insurance company reps weren't any better, at least at first. "I became an estimator, and if I made a mistake I would get browbeaten over the phone," McDonnell says. "We had 12 different DRPs to satisfy, there were all these demands, and it was just absolutely stupid. Except for one thing — that was when we delivered a car back to the customer, and they were thrilled. That's what kept me going."

McDonnell says he is a stickler for repair procedures, as well as pre- and post-scanning. "Over time we got kicked off all but two DRPs," McDonnell says. "What I learned was that you have to find people who want to do things right and partner with them. If the other ones aren't focused on that, I'm not interested



## BIG SKY COLLISION CENTER

Billings, Mont. // [www.bigskycol.com](http://www.bigskycol.com)

**Matt McDonnell**  
Owner

**Spies Hecker/Axalta**  
Paint supplier

**3**  
No. of shops

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Management software

**1**  
No. of states served

**CCC, Mitchell, Audatex**  
Estimating software

**65**  
No. of employees

**\$12 million**  
Annual gross revenue

in what they're selling."

The fact that his background is outside of the collision industry has helped make insurer relations more business-like, McDonnell says. "I run a business, and there are customers and employees who I need to take care of and protect," McDonnell says. "I care about my people, and they care about our customers. I tell the insurance companies, if I don't like what you're selling to me, I'm not going to buy it. It has nothing to do with liking or not liking them. We are transparent on our invoices,

and I give them everything they need to make the right decision to pay the full bill. I want to deal with people who can say “yes.” If you can’t say “yes,” then I need to get to a person who can.”

Big Sky now works with three DRPs, and McDonnell says they have developed good partnerships with those companies.

## Rapid growth

As his responsibilities grew at Big Sky, McDonnell bought his brothers out, took over the company, and applied his experience in running restaurants and bars to the body shop. In 2014, he took part in the Discover Leadership Training program, which he credits with helping him lead the company into new growth areas.

“It really opened my eyes,” McDonnell says. “So many people in this industry play the victim card. They can’t do something because of the insurance company, or their employees won’t go for it. They make up their mind they can’t do something before they try. We changed that, and in 2015 we started a whole new adventure here.”

Within the year, Big Sky made its first acquisition almost by accident. “I was good friends with the owner of A&D Auto Body Repair in Bozeman, and he was a mentor of mine,” McDonnell says. “We had planned to open a store in Bozeman because that was the next market nearest us.”

McDonnell reached out and let the owner know about his plans so it wouldn’t come as a surprise. “I told him I hoped we could take business away from his competitors, but it doesn’t always work that way,” McDonnell says. “I told him, ‘We want to be friendly competitors, unless you’re willing to sell,’ and I said that kind of as a joke, because he was doing really well.”

The next day, the owner surprised McDonnell with an offer to do just that. “He wanted to spend more time with his family,” McDonnell says. “We made the transition in a few months, and it went really well.”



A short time later, McDonnell received a similar call from the owner of Crash Repair in Livingston. “He said he wanted to do the same thing, but we really weren’t ready,” McDonnell says. The owner offered up his financials and explained that he wanted to sell the autobody business so he could focus on a more lucrative storage unit business he owned. “We did owner financing, and he gave me a deal I couldn’t refuse,” McDonnell says. “That store has been a little moneymaker ever since.”

As the company and staff grew along with the business, though, McDonnell had to face a new problem — his repair processes were built around a smaller operation, and they were creating a bottleneck that dragged the team’s cycle times up to 18 days.

At the time, the original Billings shop was divided into 24 stalls. Each body tech was responsible for three vehicles at a time. The cars headed for the paint booth as they were completed, but that led to a back-up in the paint booth because the workflow was so disjointed.

McDonnell decided to apply a lean approach to his shops after a visit to Marshall Auto Body in Waukesha, Wis., in order to reduce waste, improve communication, and streamline operations.

In 2014, McDonnell and his employees revamped their operations so that a team of multiple technicians (two A techs and two B techs) would work on each vehicle at once. Each has a set of designated tasks to complete based on the repair. McDonnell implemented a color-coded repair order system to indicate the severity of the repair and also instituted a checklist of parts and repair steps for each vehicle.

One vehicle at a time gets released to the paint department, where a team of technicians take care of the paint and prep activities. The checklist and written notes that travel with the repair order help improve communication among the team members, customers, and appraisers.

As a result, the company cut cycle times from 18 days down to six. After just a few months of the new system, each repair team averaged 74 cars per month.

Previously, the entire Billings store had averaged just 110 vehicles per month.

Big Sky also pre-washes and scans every vehicle to get a better idea of the physical damage and trouble codes/faults.

### Staff development is critical

As part of the company's growth, McDonnell has been careful to invest in his staff. "Your competition can copy every advantage you have except one," McDonnell says. "That's the investment you make in building leaders. There are a lot of KPIs to focus on, but if we invest in building leaders and really focus on building people up, they can take the business to the next level."

McDonnell put 40 staff members through the same Discover Leadership program he had found so inspiring and instituted ongoing education and training. He's also encouraged a high level of community involvement at the shops as well. "We're better people all around," McDonnell says. "The stores are really self-managing. We manage by the numbers, but we can't be at all the stores all the time. Right now, we're on pace to hit \$12 million between the three stores, but I've told the team I think we can hit \$14 million, and everyone is focused on making that number."

At the Bozeman store, McDonnell was able to help the number-two at the shop move into management at the Livingston location. "We also took a painter who wanted to be an estimator and got him where he wanted to be," McDonnell says. "I just told him he had to teach someone how to paint before he made that transition, and I think he's a store operator in the making."

"We had an office manager who moved into an estimator position, and then an assistant manager," McDonnell adds. "Now she operates the highest sales store we have. A few years ago, she was mainly answering phones. She had the skill set and respect of the team, and she wanted it."



McDonnell also regularly stops production for training and to get input on operations. "You don't do things to people, you do things with them," McDonnell says. "If they can formulate their own input and make it their own, they will run a lot farther with it. They can put the tools down for a bit, and we learn as managers about the people we're working with."

Leadership is divided between sales/marketing, operations and accounting/HR. "I'm a sales and marketing guy, and I have someone who manages production, and we hired a CPA to handle accounting and HR. The three of us meet daily," McDonnell says.

The company is also working on building its own technician development program to address a common issue — the shortage of trained technicians. "We're not looking to take techs from another body shop; we want to build these guys," McDonnell says. "We are building a program now that we believe can fast track them from zero to an A tech in two years."

After Big Sky builds a pool of technicians it can draw from, McDonnell wants to keep the program expanding so that there's a flood of skilled techs across the region. "Our idea is that if we don't have anywhere to put them, we can send them off to the next best shop," McDonnell says.

He notes that shops in Montana have a strong commitment to each other. There aren't any consolidators there yet, and most of Big Sky's competitors are

small MSOs or independent shops. "We have a strong association here, and I'm talking to other shops all the time," McDonnell says. "We're all friends, and we do things outside of work. We have stuck together, and the best thing we have going here is that we are connected and have regular conversations with the insurance commissioner's office and hold our insurance partners accountable."

Big Sky is working with OEMs on brand-specific certifications, which McDonnell sees as a big growth opportunity. "In the future, the vehicles are going to tell owners where to take them for a repair," McDonnell says. "The car will pull up a list of certified shops on the screen in a market, and that is where they'll go, because that's who they will trust with their car."

He also says that a continued focus on quality will give more leverage to the collision industry moving forward. "The pendulum is swinging, and carriers are seeing that as severity goes up, they need to partner with good shops," McDonnell says. "They will want to know up front who the good guys are, and the smarter carriers are forming those partnerships."



**BRIAN ALBRIGHT** is a freelance journalist based in Cleveland who has been writing about manufacturing, technology and automotive issues since 1997. He is a regular contributor to *ABRN*, *Motor Age* and *Aftermarket Business World*.

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> PART # SSPC-A

INNOVATIVE PARTS CART A

(shown with optional shelf-mat SSPC-SM)



> PART # SSPC-B

INNOVATIVE

PARTS CART B



A red metal rolling cart with a deep basket and a hanging bar. The cart has a vertical frame with a horizontal bar at the top for hanging. Below the bar is a deep, rectangular basket. The cart is mounted on four casters. The background is a dark, textured surface.

> PART # SSSP-B/DB  
INNOVATIVE  
PARTS CART B  
WITH DEEP BASKET

A red metal rolling cart with multiple wire baskets. The cart has a vertical frame with a horizontal bar at the top for hanging. Below the bar are three wire baskets stacked vertically. The cart is mounted on four casters. The background is a dark, textured surface.

> PART # SSSP-C  
INNOVATIVE  
PARTS CART C

# PARTS CART ACCESSORIES

SSPC-HB – 24" w x 38" h – Headlight Bag

SSPC-TB – 49" w x 38" h – Trim Panel Bag

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Part # SSPC-PT



Innovative Pan™  
Part # I-PAN

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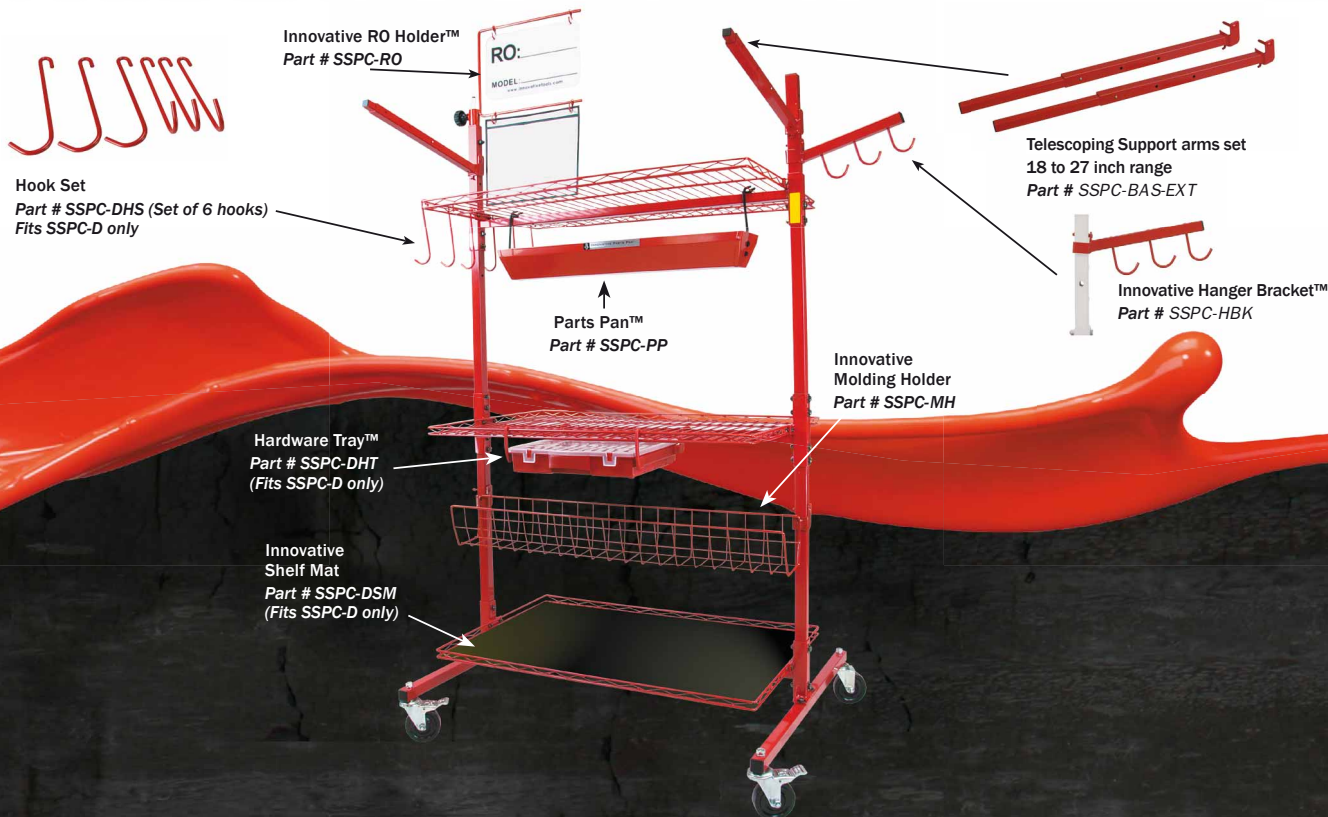
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6,89 x 1,75 m  
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PLASTIC SHEETING



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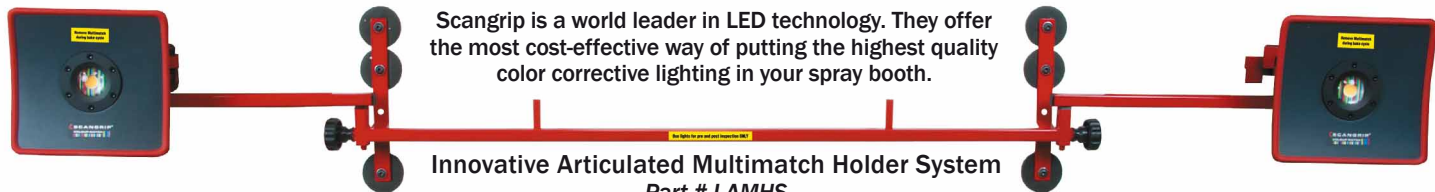




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4000 Lumens and ultra-high CRI of 95 from the **Scangrip Multimatch** instantly identifies bad blends, mottling and poor coverage so everything can be easily fixed before clear coat, saving you time and money.

# INNOVATIVE LIGHTING

> PART # SG-MMS  
MOBILE  
MULTIMATCH  
SINGLE



## Multimatch Quick Slide & Lock Bracket™

Allows you to mount or remove the Multimatch light in under 2 seconds for quick, hand-held spot checking.

**Water/Shock/Dust-Resistant**

> PART # SG-MMD  
MOBILE  
MULTIMATCH  
DOUBLE







> PART # SG-TMS  
TRIPOD  
MULTIMATCH  
SINGLE



180° rotation allows you to direct light exactly where it's needed. Perfect for buffing hoods and roofs.



> PART # SG-TMD  
TRIPOD  
MULTIMATCH  
DOUBLE



> PART # I-MATCH 2  
I-MATCH 2

World's only Color-corrective headlamp for the professional who needs perfect lighting

# VOTED SEMA'S BEST NEW COLLISION REPAIR AND REFINISH PRODUCT



> PART # SG-SM  
SUNMATCH



> PART # SG-MP  
MATCHPEN



> PART # SG-MM  
MULTIMATCH



## Colormatch System

Part # SG-CMK



- Includes:
- Matchpen
  - Sunmatch
  - Multimatch
  - Shock-resistant case
  - One year warranty

Go to  
[www.innovativetools.com](http://www.innovativetools.com)  
to watch the latest videos for  
the Color Match System