

# ShopTalk

**ATI**  
Automotive  
Training Institute

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August 2012

## A Ruined Wedding Day

A bride, full of expectation and excitement, got ready for her wedding day. It was a destination wedding, where the bridal party and guests travel to somewhere special for the big day. In this case, it was Sandestin, in the Florida Panhandle.

She'd gotten her hair done. It was beautiful, with the little baby's breath flowers braided into it.

All that was left was to change into her wedding dress, put on the veil and take the elevator ride to the beach for the sunset ceremony. As her guests began to assemble, she pulled her dress out of the closet and looked around for a place to hang it. Although it was high up and almost out of her reach, a fire sprinkler sticking out from the wall was the only place to hang her gown. She reached up and put the dress there and then took off her robe so she could put on her beautiful dress.

As she reached for her dress, the bride never heard the glass bulb break. Next thing she knew, she got smacked in the face by Niagara Falls. It shocked her so much that she scrambled past her bridesmaids and out of her hotel room like a scared cat bolting away from a barking dog. She was screaming and crying so much she didn't realize she was wearing only her underwear.

Her hair was ruined. Her dress was ruined. Her bridesmaids' dresses were ruined. And out in the hall, shocked hotel guests saw the young bride in her underwear, dripping wet and frantic.

Luckily, I was far enough away that all the excitement didn't affect me very much. Except for that fire alarm I had to ignore for 13 minutes. Finally someone put a stop to that racket.

When my wife found out what had happened, she noted that this particular hotel doesn't have the little signs that tell you not to put hangers on the sprinklers. As if a sign

would have prevented someone from using a fire sprinkler as a hanger hook.

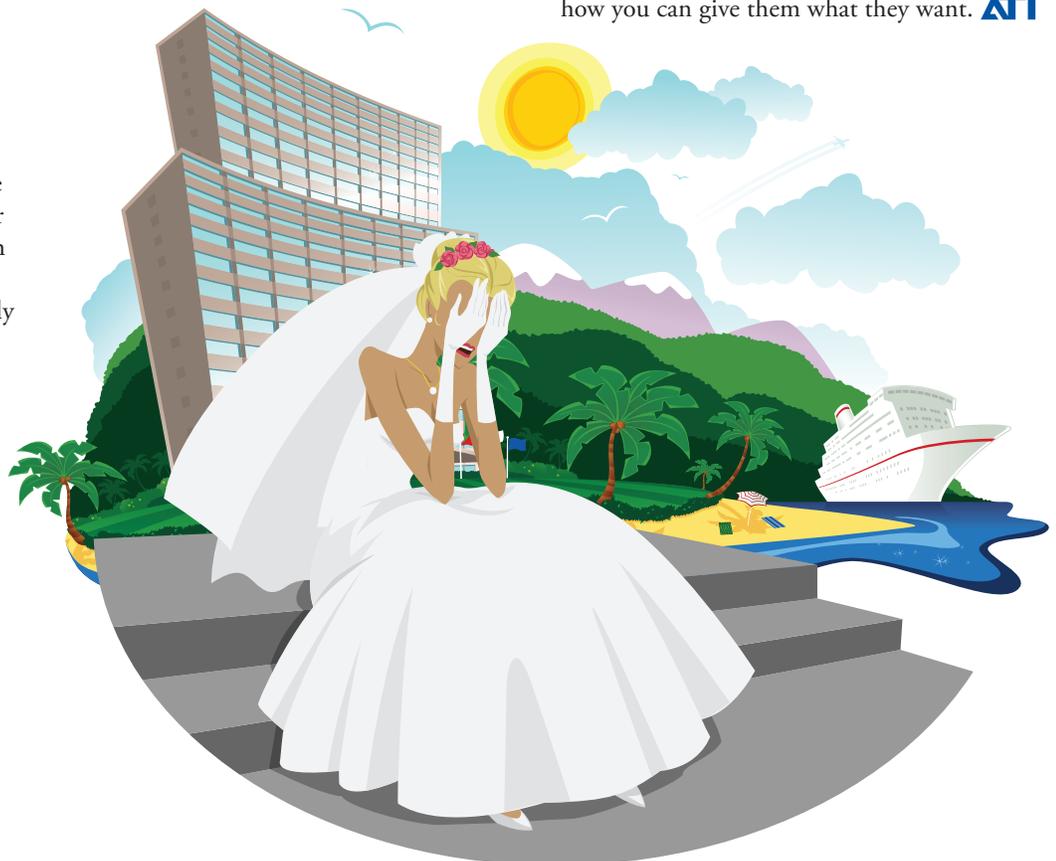
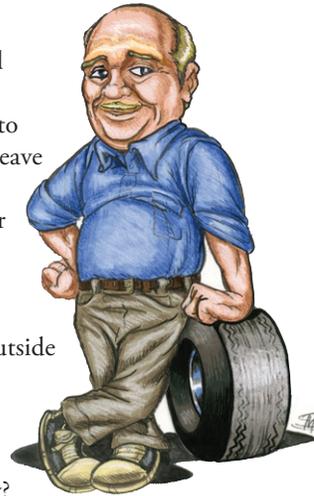
What I've wondered for years is why hotels don't put robe hooks in the guest rooms. They could put those hooks at a normal height and completely eliminate the impulse to hang clothes from the sprinkler, which, after all, is pretty difficult to reach.

When the bride set off the sprinkler in her room, it also set off the sprinklers in the surrounding rooms. Water was blasting at a rate of 30 gallons a minute in 13 different guest rooms. It was so much water it started pouring down through the light fixtures to the rooms below. It was a huge mess—all because of an absentminded bride in a hurry on her wedding day.

I bet the hotel will "solve" this problem by putting up signs to "educate" guests to leave the sprinklers alone. Wouldn't it be better to put hooks on the wall to fulfill their guests' need to have access to a hanger outside the closet?

What can auto repair shop owners learn from this story?

Rather than telling your customers "no," figure out how you can say "yes" to their requests. Rather than "educating" them about what your shop does and doesn't do, think about how you can give them what they want. **ATI**



## Shade Tree Auto Went From Part-Time Hobby to Full-Time Business

Like most auto repair shop owners, Clint Dudley of Shade Tree Auto in Grimes, Iowa, likes working on cars. In fact, at first it was just a fun pastime for him.

“I originally wanted to get into the automotive industry strictly as a hobby and took a few classes at the local community college,” Clint explains. “Before I knew it, I had a degree and realized I could make some money with it.”

Clint began working in independent shops but decided being a mechanic wouldn't meet his life goals. “I realized I'd have to step it up a bit,” he says. “So, I started taking Service Advisor positions and got some experience. From there, I started working out of my garage at home. I was one of those ‘shade tree mechanics.’”

Clint's shade tree business began to take up too much of his nights and weekends, so he got a business loan, found a location, hired an employee and turned his “hobby” into a full-time business. And full time it was.

“I was probably busier than I needed to be!” Clint laughs. “My labor rate was way too low. We didn't mark up parts near enough. I was just trying to get people in the door. I had that sympathy for the customer that says ‘Don't worry about it. Let me take care of that part.’ That turned into a whole breed of customers that wasn't healthy.”

Clint's employee had “health” problems as well. Clint had hired a friend he had worked with in previous jobs, knowing this friend would call in sick whenever he wanted to go fishing. “Well, he started calling in sick a lot, and so you start putting two and two together,” Clint says. “Obviously, that didn't work!”

The fledgling business was busy, but not profitable, so Clint brought in a partner. “We used that partner's cash injection to open up the suite next to us and doubled our size,” he explains.

But that didn't solve Clint's problem: “We had the volume, but if you're not profitable, there's no sense in getting more cars in.”



Clint went a full year without a paycheck, so he knew he needed to do something different in his business. He decided to take his wife to an ATI Boot Camp in Kansas City. “We didn't have much money for our anniversary, so we made that an excuse to go,” Clint explains.

It turned out to be a great way to celebrate. “I went into the event very open minded,” Clint says. “I took the last year's numbers and let them see where we could make improvements. I went into it hoping for some answers, and that's what I got.” >>>

### Sam's Corner

## The Branding Story

You might wonder about this article every month called Sam's Corner. It began from a very successful shop owned by Sam and Mary, who had a love affair with die-cast 1/18th models. Their customers and the customers' children were encouraged to touch this collection of hundreds of cars in their waiting room. The kids began to tell other kids, and soon those kids' parents were taking their children to Sam and Mary's shop to play with the models. It motivated me to collect models! As you can imagine, the parents brought their cars with them to be serviced and the customers' love affair with the car models grew. Sam passed away a few years back and his wife, Mary, continued running the business. The branding story in this case was the die-cast models, and it spread all over town.

A brand is not a logo but a story embedded in the minds and hearts of a market. The elements of a story include a collection of thoughts and feelings associated with someone or something. Branding is defined as a tragedy vehicle to attach the story to the business.

Effective branding will help you increase market share and sales plus build company

equity; however, very few businesses have created a brand that succeeds in accomplishing these benefits. The primary reason is we haven't crafted our story – and we all have one.

There are only seven possible stories:

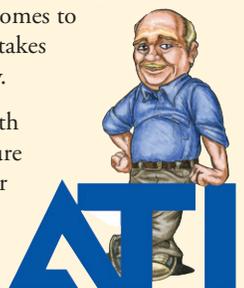
- 1) Rags to Riches. Harley Davidson is an example.
- 2) Overcoming the Enemy. A hero or heroine confronts a monster and defeats it. Mass merchandisers or car dealers provide examples.
- 3) Reborn. Someone falls under a dark power and a miracle takes place to give them a new life, as happened with Apple.
- 4) The Quest. The hero or heroine makes a long, hazardous journey to reach a priceless goal far away, as Starbucks did.
- 5) Voyage and Return. Some event like a fall or crash propels the hero or heroine out of familiar surroundings into a disconcerting and abnormal world, as in the movie “Forrest Gump.” Hooters would be a brand example.
- 6) Comedy. Its roots are in miscommunication between several members of a cast, as in “Seinfeld.” Geico would be the brand example!
- 7) Tragedy. The story culminates in destruction

and death. The main character is overcome by a desire for power that destroys them, as in the movie “Bonnie and Clyde.” Enron would be the brand example!

So begin by choosing a theme that tells your story the best and makes it compelling to listen to. Put it on your website and company brochure. But you can't just write it and forget about it. It needs to be woven into everything you do in your marketing, and you must constantly promote it.

Branding is not advertising and marketing cocaine. It takes time for the market not only to hear your message, but also time to believe it. Your internal culture must also have time to absorb the brand promise and start to live it every day. Many shop owners expect instant success when it comes to building a brand, but it takes patience and consistency.

So share your story with your coach, and make sure you have completed your marketing, advertising and leadership courses. Patience is a virtue!



# Do You Have the Staff You Want?

By Geoff Berman



My hope is that your shop is one of the few shops out there that can boast about having the staff they want: everyone knows what to do, and they all do it with enthusiasm. Unfortunately, most shops can't make that statement. I've often wondered why that is? In my almost nine years as a coach here at ATI, I have found clear similarities among the shops that have an effective solid culture and among those that do not. It all starts with how clearly the businesses have defined expectations, and the processes they have in place to accomplish them.

### Employees have to be trained

How do you think an employee feels when you say "How many times do I have to tell you not to do it that way?" You can't expect any employee to know what you want when you don't tell them, and then get mad at them when they don't do it. Even McDonald's takes the time to put new employees through training and mentoring programs before they start work, and these are minimum wage employees. What does the new-employee training look like in your store? Did you set an expectation when you hired them as to when their training should be complete? Is this training documented? My guess is many shops don't do any of this and then find that they are constantly repeating the same lessons, getting more and more frustrated.

The good news is there is an easy fix to this: **processes!!** How many processes do you think your business should have? A process for how you open the doors in the morning and another for closing at night. A process for how you handle the customer's morning drop-off, and how you say goodbye at the end of the day. One for how you handle work flow, parts ordering, parts receiving and diagnostics. I think

you can see the list is endless. Now that you understand the types of processes an effective business should have, the question becomes, how many do you have, and how many of those are in writing? I'm guessing that few of them are written down. This self-inquiry sets the foundation for your training. Your role is to teach the staff the business's processes and the foundation your business is built on. This is the only way to ensure their understanding of the systems and set them up for success. Have you ever struggled with a staff member who needed to be "untrained" of a bad habit? This is the answer to getting that person on the page you want quickly, and possibly even making a good employee out of them, rather than hanging on to them longer than you should before they ultimately quit and leave you stranded. Without clear expectations and strategic processes throughout your business, your staff is destined to fail. The most important time you will spend with any employee is during their initial training. This will absolutely set the stage for their success or failure. **So choose to set the stage for success!!!**

### It's nothing without accountability

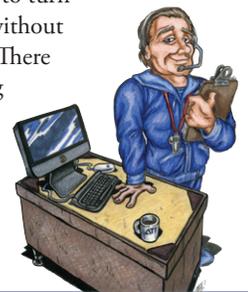
Now that you have hired a new employee, all you have to do is tell them as a condition of their employment, that they have 90 days to learn 25 processes. Right? Wrong!! You still have them on the failure track. Human nature dictates that your employee will try to cram all their learning into the last days of the probation, and so won't learn much at all. We need to give them a schedule with clearly noted dates and times for the completion of learning each process. If they have 13 weeks to accomplish this task, they will need to exhibit understanding of two processes a week. Give a new employee 30 minutes, two days a week, to train. When they have done studying, ask them questions or have them show you, to make sure they understand what

they reviewed. If you're satisfied they've "got it," have them sign the bottom. Give them the copy and you put the original in the employment file. By doing this from the beginning, you are sending a very clear message about the importance of training and of the content they must learn. You also make it very easy to mentor employees by using the process to help them improve, rather than getting mad at them for not doing it. **Empowerment will always prevail over shame!!!**

### Training never ends

I know most of you struggle with having weekly meetings. A side benefit to what I am proposing here is that once you have created the processes for your business, you will never have to worry about having content for your weekly meetings again. Continual training and cross training between sales and tech processes will help staff members have empathy for each other and boost shop morale. Finger pointing will become almost obsolete. Once you have gone through all the processes, start over and do it again. Each time you do, you will gain valuable insight from staff feedback, and each process will continue to improve with staff input. Your employees will start to "own it" and feel even better about being part of your shop's culture.

This might sound like a daunting task, but I promise you it is not as hard as you may think. Once you get started you will wonder how you got by for so long without it. Can you imagine how difficult it would be to turn off a check engine light without first checking the codes? There is a process for improving everything. **Isn't it time to start implementing the processes that will get you the staff you want!!! ATI**



>>> The next step for Clint was ATI coaching, but he ran into a roadblock: his business partner. "He was not interested. He didn't see how we could afford the extra money. Long story short, he's not here anymore. I bought him out last year and began the ATI program," Clint says.

Some 18 months later, Clint sees many improvements. "While there's no magic bullet, there are a number of things we've tackled over the last year and a half," he says. "We tweaked the price matrix for parts, we established a shop supply fee for things we weren't itemizing

and we got our staffing model straightened out. We more or less built our confidence in knowing that it's O.K. to bill people for the work you do."

When Clint ran into some personnel challenges, he discovered still more value in his ATI coaching. "It's easier to make big decisions when you know they're good decisions," he says. "Our business coach has been through these things before, and that eliminates a lot of question marks."

Today, Clint routinely uses the ATI portal as a diagnostic tool. "It's a part of everyday life,"

he says. "The portal spreads everything out so you can see where you have problems and where you're doing well."

With his shop in better order, Clint is able to focus on marketing, which he says is mainly by word of mouth and networking in the community. He also uses Demandforce for web reviews. "We've gotten a lot of people through web searches based off of the good reviews we've gotten on Demandforce," he says. "We're also focused on

*Continued on page 4.*

# Your Available Training Programs for August and September 2012

## August 2012

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday/Sunday
		1	2	3	4/5
6 <b>Service Advisor</b> 1 of 4	7 <b>Service Advisor</b> 2 of 4	8 <b>Shop Owner</b> 1 of 9	9 <b>Shop Owner</b> 2 of 9	10 <b>Shop Owner</b> 3 of 9	11/12
13 <b>Service Advisor</b> Money Train	14 <b>Service Advisor</b> Money Train	15 <b>Shop Owner</b> 4 of 9	16 <b>Shop Owner</b> 5 of 9	17 <b>Shop Owner</b> 6 of 9	18/19
20	21	22 <b>Shop Owner</b> 7 of 9	23 <b>Shop Owner</b> 8 of 9	24 <b>Shop Owner</b> 9 of 9	25/26
27 <b>Service Advisor</b> 3 of 4	28 <b>Service Advisor</b> 4 of 4		<b>California S.A.</b> 3 of 4	<b>California S.A.</b> 4 of 4	

## September 2012

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday/Sunday
					1/2
3 Labor Day	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
10 <b>20 Groups Profit Force (Chicago) Rollin in Dough</b>	11 <b>20 Groups Profit Force (Chicago) Rollin in Dough</b>	12	13 <b>Master Mind</b> <b>Service Advisor</b> 1 of 4	14 <b>Master Mind</b> <b>Service Advisor</b> 2 of 4	15/16
17 Rosh Hashanah	18	19 <b>Shop Owner</b> 4 of 9	20 <b>Shop Owner</b> 5 of 9	21 <b>Shop Owner</b> 6 of 9	22/23
24 <b>Service Advisor</b> 3 of 4	25 <b>Service Advisor</b> 4 of 4	26 Yom Kippur	27	28	29/30

Continued from page 3.

customer retention because it's easier to keep the customers you have as opposed to bringing in new ones."

Clint's main technique for retaining customers is a simple call to thank them for coming into the shop. "It demonstrates to the customer that they are important to you," he says. "It's been a big deal for us. Our location is on a dead end street, so we need to have customers telling their friends "These guys do a good job."

To keep up with the demands of a busy shop, Clint recently implemented a paperless system to

manage his business. "We had the computers in place, but we were still handwriting everything," Clint says, shaking his head. "Now people fill out everything on the computers, and it's all organized."

As a matter of fact, Shade Tree Auto is now so organized that Clint was able to close the shop for a couple of days and take his crew to the SEMA Show in Las Vegas. "Last January we told the guys that if we hit our numbers, we would all go to the SEMA Show," Clint says. "They didn't believe it, but they worked hard so we were able to go. It was a blast!"

The only better stress buster for Clint than a trip to Las Vegas? Being back in the black. "Not having a paycheck puts a lot of stress on a family," he smiles. "Now my wife is starting to see where we're headed. I knew success was out there. It's just nobody else did. It goes back to that famous Einstein quote where the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. Shop owners need to try something new if they want different results. The big key for us is being open minded – that and trusting your coach. Try a few things, and when you see he's right, try a few more." **ATi**

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