



TRAINING AND RETRAINING

How hungry are your sales and finance teams? Top trainer says the path to increased production is paved by leadership, accountability and proper compensation.

One of the questions I ask to start off every group training session I conduct is, “How hungry are you?” Hungry people do the hard things that others will not do. The issue I find in most dealerships is not whether the training level provided is sufficient. It’s simply a matter of how hungry their people are.

Your managers and staff should want to grow. You do not have to feed people who are not hungry. When things are going well, training can be an afterthought. But wait — who is not hungry for more success? Not you, and I am sure your staff feels the same way.

Whatever your opinion of training, you must admit that many aspects of our business have changed. Many of the former ways of selling simply will not work today. One of the most frustrating things to watch is a talented F&I manager who hasn’t changed their approach in years. They’re attempting to sell products to a customer whose buying habits and expectations *have* changed, often dramatically. It’s ugly!

REFRESHER COURSE

So what exactly has changed? Everything! The post-Recession consumer has changed the way they spend their money. Their expecta-

tions of the “extras” after a major purchase, including F&I products, have changed. Banks have changed how they approve deals, and layers of compliance have been added that simply did not exist several years ago.

If I hear one more F&I manager — or salesperson — excuse their low production by claiming that “Customers are tough,” I think I’ll scream! Yes, consumers have changed the way they buy cars. We must change the way we sell. If not, you might as well show up in one of your old suits tomorrow. I remember when lime green and ocean blue were popular colors. But I also know some of the sales techniques from that era are felonies today.

If that doesn’t convince you, remember that well-trained employees are more satisfied in their positions. They stay longer and produce at higher levels. You can have a productive, long-tenured and, yes, hungry staff. There are only three main requirements:

1. YOUR LEADERSHIP

Trainers can be excellent motivators, but we won’t be there every day. The expectation of continuous improvement must be set by the dealer and communicated down.

One of the most powerful motivational

speeches I have ever heard was made by a dealer client at the launch of a new training initiative for his F&I team. The dealer said, “I am investing a significant amount of time and resources to provide training to help you improve your skills and income. I expect you to pay me back by proactively embracing the training. Those who do will be rewarded by an increase in income and some special bonuses. For those who do not, I will take it personally that my investment in you was not wise!”

2. THEIR ACCOUNTABILITY

Now that you’ve set the tone, ask every team member to report their averages for 2013, and then set a goal for 2014. Start with average profit per vehicle retailed (PVR) for the F&I team and cars sold and average gross for your sales team. Ask them how much better they can do in the next 12 months, and tell them to aim high.

Actor Jim Carrey grew up so poor that, for a time, his family lived in their Volkswagen van. But Carrey believed in his future. One night in 1990, when he was a struggling young comic in Los Angeles, he drove his beat-up old Toyota to the top of a hill. Broke and looking down over the city, mulling his future, he

wrote himself a check for \$10 million, wrote "for acting services rendered" in the memo line and post-dated it to Thanksgiving 1995. He then stuck the check in his wallet.

By 1995, Carrey had found tremendous success. He was making \$20 million per film. Did the check work magic? Of course not. But a struggling actor who was hungry for success carried his goals with him every day and worked tirelessly to make them happen. I have F&I managers all over the country who write themselves a check each January and celebrate when their income rises to the level they worked toward all year.

3. FAIR COMPENSATION

Finally, I have learned that rewarding effort as well as production can help turn a struggling staffer into a productive one. Higher levels of production are a natural result of intentional effort. You already use compensation plans to drive performance. Add a training component that rewards and penalizes employees based on compliance with the training expectations.

Better yet, make it a team effort. Put forth the effort to conduct group meetings several times throughout the year. It doesn't have to be all about the numbers. You can conduct teambuilding exercises, share best practices or discuss future goals for the store, such as moving toward a seamless sales process.

Let me leave you with a challenge. Walk through your dealership and ask your salespeople, F&I managers and sales managers the same two questions: "What has been your average over the last 12 months? What is your goal and expected increase in the year ahead?" The answers and the level of detail they contain — or the puzzled looks — will let you know right away how hungry your team is. Then you will know how much motivation is needed before the training initiative begins.

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TIME WARP

Today's dealership staffs are a mix of several generations. So how do we provide an effective training process that will work for baby boomers, Generation X and Generation Y?

We know how short the attention span of Gen Yers are. They, along with many of their Gen X counterparts, are accustomed to information being relayed at a fast and interactive pace. Older employees tend to favor a one-on-one effort. The most effective efforts combine the needs of both groups.

We all live a web-based life, so web-based training is very effective across all age groups. Younger trainees are sometimes best left on their own, but all staffers will need one-on-one follow-up and older workers will demand it.

Another benefit of web training is that it provides the built-in ability to track each person's progress with accurate, real-time numbers. Provide the training for new skills and the opportunity to implement them. The processes that develop as a result will produce the results you are seeking.