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Marine Retailers Association of the Americas

THE GUIDE TO DEALERSHIP IMPROVEMENT

***Inside:** The tools, strategies and resources
to create a culture of continuous improvement*

Made possible by Bill and Kristin Fenech of Barletta Boat Company



Dear MRAA Member,

At the Marine Retailers Association of the Americas, there's little that is more important to us than having conversations with dealers like you about how you approach improving and growing your business.

Your commitment to continuing to get better at everything you do is inspiring to us. Especially when we consider all that you're juggling.

Most dealers are running four or five different kinds of businesses under one roof, each of which has its own unique set of factors that need to be considered and managed to be successful. Add into that the challenges that come with seasonality, economic ups and downs, workforce shortages, the unpredictability of Mother Nature ... the list goes on and on.

You are not only making the best of all of the uncertainty of running a business, but we can feel your passion for serving your customers, caring for your team and contributing to your community. You want to be among the best of the best in this industry. We can't help but respect you and want to help.

As MRAA has worked to serve the marine retail community, our goal has been to offer tools, education and resources that can be quickly and easily put to work in the dealership.

The wake-up call for us has been the realization that, despite the best of intentions, most training and education out there doesn't go far enough to make a real difference for dealers and their employees. And most dealers don't have a training or human resources department that can pick up where the trainers and educators leave off.

So, the MRAA team has been working hard to ensure the educational tools, resources and content we provide ARE actionable, CAN be adopted by most dealers and WILL help them improve their performance.

That's the idea behind this Guide to Dealership Improvement. While the MRAA team can't literally spend our days in your dealership with your team, we do consider it our job to work for you. And we can't think of a better role for us to play than to help you grow and improve.

At the end of the day, our mission isn't just to provide as much value as possible in this guide. That's not enough. You trust us to help you and your team get better at what you do, to make a real difference in your businesses and in this industry, not just once, but on an ongoing basis. That's what our work at MRAA is all about. And in order to keep up with you and your quest for continuous improvement, we have to keep raising our game too.

This guide, therefore, will become a living, breathing project, designed to continuously improve and grow as we develop it to do more to help you continuously improve and grow.

Thanks to you for tuning in for this, our first edition! And thanks to Bill and Kristin Fenech of Barletta Boat Company for making it possible for us to bring this guide to life. We are grateful to have partners like the team at Barletta Boat Company who share our passion for serving the marine dealer community.

Kind regards,

Liz Walz, Vice President

MARINE RETAILERS ASSOCIATION OF THE AMERICAS

Table of Contents

Page 4

Introduction

Page 5

Why Improvement?

- *A solution to workforce shortages*
- *Employee satisfaction and retention*
- *A competitive advantage*

Page 7

What and Where to Improve

- *The Dealership*
- *The Department*
- *The Individual*

Page 16

How to Improve

- *Hold on to what is being taught*
- *Apply training in the dealership*
- *Develop a plan*

Page 19

Conclusion

Introduction

If you're reading this introduction, chances are you have a desire to improve and grow. That's what we've identified that members of the Marine Retailers Association of the Americas share in common: A thirst to continuously get better, a drive to be the best.

This Guide to Dealership Improvement has been designed to fan the flames of that desire by exploring why you and your dealership should pursue continuous improvement, what kind of improvement you might pursue, where in the dealership you might pursue it, and how to pursue

it to generate the maximum return on your investment of time and money.

The "Why" is designed to help you gain buy-in among your team and your leaders for any investments of their time or money required to pursue opportunities for improvement. The "What and Where" is designed to inspire you by providing a range of strategies you can adopt to pursue improvement throughout the dealership. And the "How" is intended to help you make the most of any time or money you invest.



Why Improvement?

A solution to workforce shortages

We hear it time and time again from dealers of every size and location. Not only are you having a hard time filling open positions in the dealership, but those you do hire are often underqualified. And because this challenge is shared by so many of your fellow dealers, you end up struggling to hold onto your best people due to competition with your peers.

One of the most incredible numbers to come out of MRAA's [Marine Industry Workforce Assessment](#) was this: "More than 20 percent of the positions that marine dealers have budgeted to have on their payrolls are currently unfilled."

Think about that for a moment. For every five positions on the average boat dealership's payroll, at least one is vacant. With an average number of employees per dealership location of 15, that means more than three employees per store. There simply aren't enough qualified workers to do the work the boating industry needs done.

If you're reading this, chances are you aren't surprised by this news. The survey - which looked at 517 marine industry business and over 1,300 retail locations across 49 U.S. states and three Canadian provinces - also found that more than 90 percent of marine retailers are looking to fill positions in at least two areas of the business.

For many dealers, solving their workforce shortage is the biggest challenge they face. The MRAA survey found "the marine industry could be looking at a shortage of more than 30,000 employees in the very near future." And the boating industry is not alone.

A recent white paper by online learning provider [Xyleme](#) citing research done across a number of industries, found widespread shortages in manufacturing, technology and many other business sectors. It reached the sobering conclusion that in some industries, there's a shortage of talent "you won't be able to hire yourself out of."

The solution to this problem is relatively simple: If there aren't enough qualified workers available, help those who ARE available BECOME qualified.

Regardless of how much you may or may not spend to do so, chances are it's much less costly than the alternative: either turning away business because of a lack of capacity or risking the burnout of your current team by spreading them too thin.

In this guide, we will show you a range of strategies you can adopt to create a culture of continuous improvement in your organization, fueled by training and education, which will help you attract new employees, develop them into high performers, and hold onto your existing team.

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Marine Industry
Workforce
Assessment

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Employee satisfaction and retention

Creating a culture of continuous improvement is also a strategy you can use to boost employee satisfaction and retention. And in today's market place, there are few more important factors in a dealership's success.



This is true for two reasons. The first is because the workforce shortage puts pressure on dealerships to do a better job retaining their current employees, as they are becoming harder to replace. The second is because of the correlation between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction. Want to learn more? This was the subject of one of the most popular track sessions at the 2015 Marine Dealer Conference & Expo, titled "ESI Fuels CSI," by Sam Dantzler of Garage Composites and the Watersports Dock.

MRAA RESOURCE



MRAA E-LEARNING COURSE:

ESI Fuels CSI

Presented by Sam Dantzer



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Career development is, in fact, the number one factor in employee retention, according to Sharon Jordan-Evans, author of “Love ‘Em or Lose ‘Em: Getting Good People to Stay.”

Research has shown this is especially important to the Millennial generation, which is becoming a growing part of the marine industry workforce. A 2016 Employee Job Satisfaction and Engagement Report by the Society for Human Resource Management revealed, for example, that Millennials placed more importance on job-specific training, career development opportunities and career advancement opportunities compared with older generations.

“Given the pace at which the market and today’s consumer is changing, if you’re not committed to improving and ready to adapt, you will quickly fall behind.”

“Millennials believe managers and employers should nurture and invest in them with the intention of advancing within their profession,” it stated in the report. “Millennials may become impatient with mundane tasks while attempting to pursue their interest, thus it is important to provide opportunities for them to be challenged with new tasks as they have mastered others.”

Ultimately, when you invest in employees’ training and education – even if that investment is simply taking the time to help them learn a new skill you’ve already mastered – it shows them that you care about their development, which makes them more likely to care about what’s important to you as an owner or manager.

A smart man once said: “You can’t manage what you don’t measure.” That’s why the Marine Industry Certified Dealership program requires dealers to participate in an annual Employee Satisfaction Survey process whereby the results of the survey are shared with employees and used to identify areas for improvement. Learn more at MRAA.com/Certification.

A competitive advantage

For you, the desire to improve your performance and your dealership’s performance may be second nature. But that’s not the case in many dealerships. That’s why it can be such a strong competitive advantage for those who not only have the desire, but consistently act on it, creating a culture in which employees are rewarded for finding paths to improvement and growth.

Here are some of the reasons dealers don’t put a culture of continuous improvement in place:

Lack of Desire They are satisfied with the dealership’s performance and their own performance. Some would argue that when your thirst to improve is gone, it’s time to get out of the business. Given the pace at which the market and today’s consumer is changing, if you’re not committed to improving and ready to adapt, you will quickly fall behind.

Lack of Investment There are two types of investments you can make in continuous improvement: Time and Money. Some dealers are unwilling or unable to make a financial investment in training and education. They may be under the impression that training and education isn’t affordable, which is simply not true. There are plenty of high-impact training opportunities that a dealership can pursue for free, several of which we will share within this guide.

More likely, they don’t believe it will generate a return on investment for the dealership. For example, we often hear from frustrated owners and managers who invested in training an employee, only for them to leave for another job. They don’t want to make the same mistake again. However, as we mentioned earlier, when you don’t work to improve the performance of your employees, departments and dealership at large, the costs can be much higher than the financial investment you might make in training and education. In

fact, a lack of training and education is a leading reason employees cite for leaving jobs – and it can make it difficult for you to attract job candidates.

Don’t get us wrong: Training doesn’t have to be expensive to be effective. In reality, the most important investment you can make in your team’s education comes in the form of time and commitment.

Lack of Commitment This is the No. 1 barrier to a culture of continuous improvement. Dealers often see training and education as an event, not an ongoing process, so they only focus on it during specific times of the year or while participating in formal educational opportunities. The problem here is that any training, if it is to truly make a difference in the performance of an employee, a department or a dealership, requires continuous repetition and reinforcement.

We’re not suggesting that you should be setting aside hours per day or per week in the heat of the boating season. Rather, we need to find small, but impactful ways to reinforce the training and education that will most impact “game day” performance when it’s most needed, which is the day, the week, the month, the season when the dealership does most of its business. Otherwise, the stress of this busy time of year can lead even those team members with the best of intentions back to bad habits that negatively impact dealership performance, employee satisfaction and the customer experience.

When you choose the right training opportunities for the right reasons and complement them with policies and a culture that support continuous improvement, they can generate a significant return on your investment of time and money that set you and your dealership apart. That’s the purpose of this guide – to help you do exactly that.

What and Where to Improve

As you consider what kind of improvement to focus on in your business, it's helpful to consider three levels of focus: the individual employee, the department and the dealership at large.

In the next section on how to improve your dealership, we'll make some suggestions about how to develop a training plan and budget customized for your dealership, its departments and your employees. But first, let's take a closer look at the improvement strategies you might consider at each level.

Level One: The Dealership

While some improvement strategies are job specific, there are others that all your employees can take part in and benefit from. Here are some important company-wide initiatives or topics your dealership may want to consider.

Onboarding

For the past few years, lack of training has been at the top of the list when it comes to reasons employees leave their jobs, and this is a problem that often begins as soon as a new hire reports for work on day one.

In a recent onboarding webinar: "How to Implement Effective Onboarding," Kathryn Carlson of HR management firm KPA calls onboarding "the process of meeting the new employee's immediate needs and the first and best chance to turn a new hire into a productive, engaged and successful employee."

Of course, the best onboarding strategies start with a tour of the dealership's employee handbook. When you first start a job, you want to know what's expected of you at the new company. Who reports to

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Employee Handbook

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When you first start a job, you want to know what's expected of you at the new company. Who reports to whom? What can and can't I wear? How much vacation time do I get? What happens to me if I break company policy? All of these questions are standard on the part of new employees, and your dealership needs to be ready with answers. Developing an employee handbook takes the guesswork out of the who, what, when, where and whys and puts everyone on an as level playing field. When they are supposed to be doing, they typically feel more confident, and they wind up living up to (or exceeding) your initial expectations.

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Employee Handbook

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whom? What can and can't I wear? How much vacation time do I get? What happens to me if I break company policy?

All of these questions are standard on the part of new employees, and your dealership needs to be ready with answers. Developing an employee handbook takes the guesswork out of the who, what, when, where and whys, and puts everyone on the same page. When people know what they are supposed to be doing, they typically feel more confident, and more likely to live up to (or exceed) your initial expectations.

Don't have an employee handbook? MRAA can help. We provide members with a sample employee handbook for information purposes. This sample can be used as a template for creating your own customized employee handbook, modified in accordance with your local, state, province or federal law in effect at the time of its creation or revision.

Good training means effective learning rather than overwhelming someone with information. But many businesses expect employees to jump right into their jobs after a quick tour around the facility and a few introductions.

Dealership trainer and educator Sam Dantzler of Garage Composites and the Watersports Dock says employers know they should be doing a better job preparing their employees to succeed, but find it hard to do so at the "speed of retail." He believes an effective onboarding process should take several weeks, not several hours.

A common first mistake employers make is not explaining to new employees how their training is going to take place, according to Dantzler. This leads to confusion for everyone. Instead, he believes a

MRAA RESOURCE

How to Implement Effective Onboarding

Presented by:
Kathryn Carlson
 VP of Human Resources

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KPA Webinar

How to Implement Effective Onboarding

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good training plan starts with the employer mapping out the process for the employee, explaining what he or she is going to be doing, and when.

Here's how Dantzler says a one-month onboarding plan could work:

WEEK ONE

This should be an orientation and nothing more. Don't overwhelm new hires by throwing everything at them right away. Have them spend one day in each department in the dealership. At the end of each day, managers should take time to review what was learned and answer questions. Give new employees the opportunity to observe and learn how the dealership operates.

At the end of the week, sit down with the employee and ask how they might change or improve things. This lets people know their input is valued and needed, and can also generate ideas that improve the business from someone seeing things with fresh eyes.

WEEK TWO

Dig into the sales process for the new employee's department. Every department should have a sales process, Dantzler is quick to remind dealers. Walk through the steps, then spend time practicing and role-playing those steps so that they become more natural. If available, you might have the new employee take an online course to reinforce what they're learning, then discuss and practice what they learned before moving to the next course. This is also a good time to allow your new employee to shadow high performers.

WEEK THREE

This is the time for focus on operational knowledge - when to go to the CRM, how does that work, what forms to use when talking to the customer, etc. Break the employee's job duties down, and spend each day teaching and practicing a few at a time. At the end of the week, the employee should spend time as the dealership's Saturday greeter, no matter the job they have been hired to do. This helps them become comfortable engaging prospects and customers walking into the dealership.

WEEK FOUR

Focus this week on phone training, Dantzler suggests. Employees should be able to utilize the phone to cause customers to come to the dealership. Provide a list of bullet points, then have the employee cover them when calling to invite customers to the dealership for an event of some kind. This shows the importance of the phone in causing activity inside the store, provides familiarity with the process and gets employees in the habit of using the phone.

The four-week onboarding process gives a new employee time to understand the operations and culture of a dealership, gives them empathy for the work being done by those around them and sets them up to succeed for the long-term. It also makes retaining them much easier and gets them accustomed to the ongoing training a dealership needs to flourish.

MRAA MEMBER BEST PRACTICE

At One Water Marine, Scott Cunningham Jr. has been creating short videos to train new and current team members on internal processes, ranging from sales and service to administrative duties. He records them using voice over screen share technology.

To do this yourself, first you'll want to select a program that allows you to record your computer screen. There are many programs out there, both free and paid, including:

Screencast-o-matic.com

TinyTake.com

Screensteps.com

Telestream.net/screenflow

You might record yourself logging into the company's Customer Relationship Management system, creating a new customer record and filling in some information about that customer that your dealership requires as part of your sales process.

The next step involves using the program you've chosen to play back the recording of your computer screen while now recording your voice, explaining what the employee should do at each step in the process and why.

Scott says he keeps the videos short - between two and five minutes. This not only makes them quick and easy for the employee to watch, but it also allows him to focus on a specific process. This improves the likelihood that the viewer will stay engaged throughout the video and learn from the experience.

Dealership processes

Greet a customer, sell a boat, fix an engine - these jobs become much less difficult the more a person does them, especially when that person works in a dealership with a culture of continuous improvement because they're always looking for ways to learn from their experience and improve.

A dealership filled with experienced employees is more efficient and profitable because everyone knows how things are done and settles into the daily routine of doing them. But this can also be dangerous,

if that experience isn't captured in the form of process maps. What happens if that person gets sick or injured? Or moves away?

Process maps are simply a diagram of those routines that successful businesses use to train new employees on how to replicate the success of their predecessors, and remind everyone else how a given task is supposed to be performed. They are also a tool that allows dealerships with a commitment to continuous improvement to quickly and easily adapt to changes in the marketplace, customer and employee feedback, and their own knowledge of what drives success.

They are an incredibly valuable tool for boat dealers because they help deliver a high-quality, consistent experience to all customers in all areas of the business. And they're especially useful to dealerships when employees come and go, or move internally. An easy-to-understand map that guides someone into a new job can replace months of mistakes, missteps and lost revenue opportunities.

Many dealers have found that getting employees involved is the best and quickest way to create the process maps they need, if they don't already have them in place. Every department in the dealership should

“ *An easy-to-understand map that guides someone into a new job can replace months of mistakes, missteps and lost revenue opportunities.* ”

get together and write down all they do on a whiteboard, then organize these actions into the various processes: how do we greet a customer; how do we make a follow-up call; how do we write a service order, etc.

This is the time when employees can talk with each other about how they do things and learn from one another, discussing what works and what doesn't. Once the best process for each task is agreed upon, it should then be written down – or even better, created visually online using a program like LucidChart.com – where it will become the tool that explains how everything in the dealership is done, which is critical for effective training and management.

Want help process mapping the key business activities in your dealership? One option is to turn to the [Marine Industry Certified Dealership program](#), which provides each dealer with a consultant who can lead them through this exercise to help them fulfill the program's requirements.

Time management

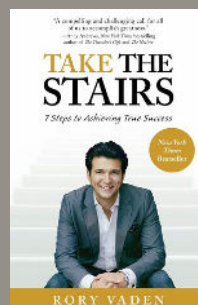
The best way for a dealership to create a culture of continuous improvement across an entire business is to develop a simple plan to educate employees without adding more hours to an already busy day. That's a challenge because many workers have multiple duties and fill more than one role within a company.

But sometimes training can actually help employees find more time to work in and on the business. Learning where and when to focus their time and energy can help people spend it much more effectively, which creates a better experience for customers and better results for the dealership.

Mentorship/Apprenticeship

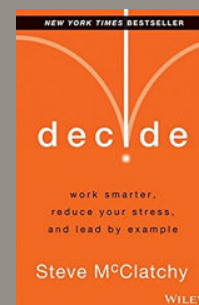
The mentor/apprentice method of training is one of the oldest, most time-tested techniques for sharing knowhow. While it isn't as widespread anymore in North America as in many other parts of the world, a number of boat dealers are still having great success training employees as apprentices, even as many of their competitors struggle to find enough qualified people to fill open positions.

MRAA RECOMMENDED READING



Take the Stairs

By Rory Vaden



Decide

By Steve McClatchy

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MRAA E-LEARNING COURSE:

Master Your Time and Stress

Presented by Valerie Ziebron



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Cross-training

Another very efficient, low- to no-cost training technique for all of a dealership's employees is cross-training. It benefits the business as a whole and the individual employee as well.

Learning the basics of what others in the dealership do on a daily basis helps people become better teammates because they have a much greater understanding of what their fellow employees are responsible for and what they need. It can also create stronger bonds between departments, helping them work together more closely, making them stronger individually and as a whole.

Employees often enjoy cross-training because it provides more variety in what they do, allows them to learn, and can help them grow into greater roles within the company. In addition, having another team member cross-trained on their role can give individual employees more comfort and flexibility in taking time off, which is important to their long-term satisfaction with, and performance in, their work.

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MRAA E-LEARNING COURSE:

Dealer Case Study: The Advantage of Apprenticeship

Presented by Trevor Campbell



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Meanwhile, cross-training allows dealership owners and managers the security of knowing that if an employee doesn't report to work that day, there are other team members who understand that person's job and can fill in as needed, keeping the business running smoothly.

When a cross-training program is put in place, it's helpful to keep a few things in mind:

- Begin by identifying the specific areas where cross-training is most needed. For example, where would your dealership suffer most quickly if this or that employee were suddenly absent;
- Then identify the employee best suited to fill that vacancy. Match the skill set to the skills required for that position;
- Explain the benefits of cross-training to employees and reassure them you're not planning to eliminate certain people of positions;

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Turn Upset Customers into Loyal Ones

Presented by Valerie Ziebron



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MRAA MEMBER BEST PRACTICE

Wisconsin's Shipyard Marine pairs new employees with a mentor who is constantly by their side for between one and three months. He or she is instantly able to answer any questions or provide the necessary guidance to eliminate confusion and head off potential problems.

At Alabama's Russell Marine, new employees who would like to become service technicians begin in the rigging department, where they have time to learn about the boats they'll be working on first-hand, while also learning how the dealership operates. During this time, they are able to continue their education as technicians through online courses and other training opportunities, but also get practice delivering good customer service and learning the other skills needed to do their jobs successfully.

The apprentice technicians, who meet weekly with managers to review their progress, typically spend about a year in the rigging department before they're ready to be promoted to the position of technician.

- Provide adequate time and resources for the training to take place. Employees will resent the program if they believe they're being asked to add more work to the jobs they already do;
- Talk to employees about how the training should take place, they may have valuable input as to what's required to get someone else up to speed; and
- Reward or recognize employees who complete cross-training.

Customer service

All employees stand to benefit from understanding how to improve the dealership experience of prospects and customers, whether that experience takes place on the phone, on your website, via social media, over text or email, at the boat show, in the service department, in the showroom, on the docks or even in the local community.

Level Two: The Department

Within your dealership, there are often groups of employees that would benefit from a specific type or area of improvement. Sometimes these groups are organized under a specific department, sometimes they aren't. Here are some improvement initiatives and topics that may help them meet and exceed their goals.

Management/Leadership

Owners and managers have often been with the dealership or at least working in the industry the longest of all your team members. But that doesn't mean they have nothing left to learn. In fact, you might argue that the dealership benefits the most when managers and leaders work

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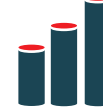
BUSINESS



TEAM



SUCCESS



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to improve their performance, as it impacts employees, customers and the financial success of the business.

In fact, in some ways, the dealership may benefit from thinking of this group as its own department. Not only should the management and leadership team have its own strategies for improvement, but the dealership benefits when members feel a sense of belonging to this group. When that kind of bonding takes place, managers are more likely to collaborate with and learn from each other.

this as more important for big dealers, but in actuality, because smaller dealers have fewer employees, they also tend to have fewer succession options. A change in the employment status of a single person can have a much bigger impact on the business.

Good planning can result in a development process that will groom current employees for advancement, putting a structure in place that results in a stronger team and business long before any transition takes place.

The first step in your succession plan should be identifying the dealership positions you'd like it to cover. Next, outline the skills necessary for each of those jobs and how successors can be trained to perform them. The third step is identifying successors for each of

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MRAA E-LEARNING COURSE:

Success: What It Takes to Do It Right

Presented by David Spader



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Here are some specific areas of focus managers and leaders may want to consider when pursuing improvement:

- Succession planning – Put simply, a succession plan involves preparing for the future of the business. Some dealers limit their focus here to the smooth and successful transfer of control of the dealership from the current owner or owners to a future owner or owners. However, a dealership can benefit from a definition of succession that considers the growth and development of its entire team.

Just as succession planning provides guidance and protects the business from the consequences of an expected or unexpected change in ownership, it can also provide guidance and protect the business from expected or unexpected changes in its managers and key employees.

For that reason, it's not just owners and general managers who should be involved in succession planning. Managers should also consider succession within their department. One might dismiss

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MRAA E-LEARNING COURSE:

The Conversations that Drive Succession

Presented by Andrew Keyt

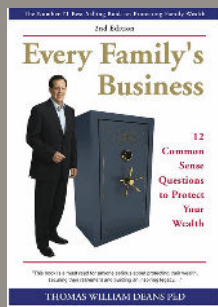


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those positions. Now you're ready to evaluate where they currently stand in the development of those skills and put together a plan to help them come up to speed in any areas in which they currently lack proficiency. Finally, monitor the progress of that plan, adjusting as necessary for changes in the business and your team.

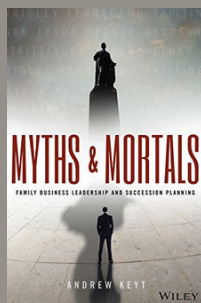
- Strategic planning – Managers must also understand and know how to use strategic planning. Unlike a business plan, which helps dealers organize their companies and explain it to others, strategic planning establishes concrete goals for the business and action plans to achieve them. It provides the framework for businesses to grow by offering long-term focus and can improve communication and teamwork throughout the company.

MRAA RECOMMENDED READING



Every Family's Business

By Thomas William Deans PhD



Myths and Mortals

By Andrew Keyt

A few basic components that every strategic plan should include:

Mission Statement This sums up what the company or department wants to achieve;

Objectives These are the individual goals the company or department has set to fulfill its mission;

Strategies This is how you will reach your objectives and can change if the goals are not being reached;

Actions These are measurable, specific activities you plan to take to implement strategies; and

Monitoring Benchmarks and checkpoints for measuring progress.

- Management – Oftentimes, managers get promoted into their positions because they excelled in their department, selling a lot of boats or boasting the highest technician efficiency numbers, not because of their experience successfully managing a team. For that reason, management training can be one of the most worthwhile investments for the dealership. After all, few factors are more critical in a dealership's success than how effectively your managers lead and coach your employees.
- Dealership financials – Because most managers were high performing members of their department before being tasked to lead it, they rarely have experience in managing a department's financial success. In addition, they don't always have a clear picture of how the department's success impacts the overall financial performance of the dealership. Because the skills of your managers in this area can have a direct impact on the dealership's profitability, it's an important area of consideration when seeking opportunities for improvement.

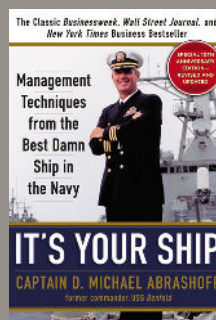
Dealership Departments

Regardless of what department you manage in a dealership, there are some quick and easy strategies you can adopt to create a culture of continuous improvement amongst your team members.

- Meetings – Almost every dealership department will get its staff together once a week for a meeting. Those meetings are the perfect opportunity to spend a few minutes on training and education.

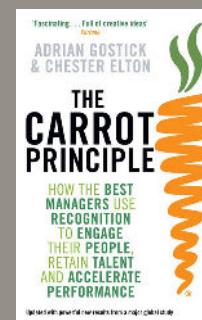
Bob McCann, the Lead Certification Consultant for MRAA's Marine Industry Certified Dealership Program, says the formula for every successful departmental meeting should have the same three elements:

MRAA RECOMMENDED READING



It's Your Ship

By Captain D.
Michael Abrashoff



The Carrot Principle

By Adrian Gostick
& Chester Elton

Recognition Employees love to be noticed for their work, so managers should note achievements throughout the week, then mention them during each meeting. This not only boosts employee satisfaction, but it also reinforces best practices;

Housekeeping Time should be spent reviewing current and future work, whether that is deals and deliveries, repair and parts orders, or something else altogether. Other topics might be the upcoming schedule, and general do's & don'ts;

Training Each meeting should end with at least 10 minutes of training. It doesn't have to be anything complicated. For example, just go around the room and ask each salesperson why now is a good time to buy a boat or for one idea to improve the customer's experience. The greatest learning often comes through these sharing of ideas. This is also a good time to review the department's key processes to make sure everyone understands each step and which parts they are responsible for.

- Role playing – It's one thing to know and understand a concept. It's another thing to actively use it on the job. That's why role playing is so important. Oftentimes, we associate role-playing with sales – and it's a strategy that certainly should be used by those selling boats, service, finance, insurance, parts and accessories. However, role playing can also be effective in training team members in customer service, management and human resources. Any time the success of one of your team members is dependent on an interaction with another human being, role playing can help.



- **Book club** – A great (and relatively inexpensive) way to introduce a new idea to your department or increase adoption of an existing idea is to have them read a book, article or blog on the subject. Here’s how to overcome some common objections.

Provide an incentive Some marine industry employers pay team members who finish a book from the company library a small amount (\$25-\$50). All they have to do to receive the payment is read the book and sit down with their supervisor for a short conversation about what they learned. To get the whole department to read it, offer to cater a “lunch and learn” once they’re done where they can discuss the highlights.

Appeal to their pride – Remind them that other dealerships have read similar books. A list of some of their recommendations (and MRAA staff recommendations) can be found here: <http://www.mraa.com/page/RecommendedReading>

Chunk it up Don’t expect the entire department to read a given book in one week. Instead, ask them to read one or two chapters a week. That way, you have the opportunity to discuss key points during weekly departmental meetings.

- **Online learning** – While books can be powerful, humans are primarily

- **Peer-to-peer learning** – One way to maximize the effectiveness of any investment your department makes in training its employees is through a method called peer-to-peer learning. With this approach, managers ask staff members who take training courses to make presentations to their coworkers about what they learned and how it applies to the department. Knowing they will have to do the presentation helps employees focus during training, and that knowledge can then be shared for the benefit of all, increasing the department’s return on investment in training. Florida’s Quality Boats of Clearwater is one dealership that uses this strategy, requiring both its sales and service staff to hold training sessions for their peers upon returning from training courses.
- **Outside trainers** – Another way a department can expose team members to opportunities for improvement is to bring in an outside trainer or educator to present to the group. While this can be expensive, the benefits of face-to-face interaction can’t be denied.

Level Three: The Individual

Much of the knowledge and skills an employee needs to be successful will come with the kinds of dealership and departmental improvement

“ *It’s one thing to know and understand a concept. It’s another thing to actively use it on the job. That’s why role playing is so important.* ”

visual learners. That’s one reason online learning has become so popular. To incorporate online learning into its departmental improvement effort, managers can either ask employees to independently take an e-learning course during the week and then discuss it during an upcoming department meeting, or the course can be shared (as a whole or in part) during the department meeting itself.

For example, a dealership manager who attended the Marine Dealer Conference & Expo might share a few minutes of a track session video that was particularly insightful with her team as part of an explanation for a change in departmental process. The MRAA offers about 100 online learning courses for marine dealers at MRAATraining.com – and this number continues to grow. They are included as part of the association’s Silver and Gold Memberships or can be purchased individually. Many trainers and educators now have their own online learning courses as well.

strategies already discussed. But training and education is not one-size-fits-all. Each person is unique in what they want, or need, to learn to reach their career goals and your goals for them. That’s why training on an individual level, by considering and creating an educational path that best suits each employee, may be the most important training of all.

Here are some strategies you can use to help your employees improve and grow in their work for your dealership.

Job descriptions

Managers often take for granted that each of their employees has a good handle on exactly what it is they are supposed to do. Unfortunately, that’s often not the case. An individual likely has a basic understanding of the work he or she is supposed to do each day, but many people don’t see the entire scope of their position and aren’t fully contributing because of that.

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MRAA Kevin Lodder Scholarship

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This scholarship was founded in memory of Kevin Lodder of Lodder's Marine in Fairfield, Ohio. Kevin worked in his family's dealership and was dedicated to this industry from an early age until his untimely passing. The recipients of this scholarship will receive tuition to attend the *Spicer Total Management 1 Workshop* in Sioux Falls, S.D. (a \$2,995 value) and a stipend of \$800 to offset travel expenses. The Kevin Lodder Scholarship is awarded annually during the Marine Dealer Conference & Expo.

Job descriptions can be a simple fix to this problem and an important educational tool. If you have job descriptions for every position within your dealership, ask yourself whether you have recently reviewed them with your employees. If the last time you looked at an employee's job description was when you hired them, chances are that's the last time they looked at it too. This is an opportunity for you and your employee to discuss topics like:

You may be surprised to learn how employees see their duties and how these views may differ from managers' expectations. This can start a valuable conversation and spur growth as staff members more fully understand what's expected of them and what opportunities to improve and grow are available.

Performance reviews

On first thought, reviewing an employee's performance often seems like a necessary evil that managers, and those they oversee, must endure at least once a year.

It doesn't have to be that way. Done properly, a performance review is a great opportunity to talk about where an employee wants to grow within a dealership and what opportunities are available now and in the future. With that information, together, you can chart out a path for that person to follow, including any training and education they might need to reach the end goal.

This will accomplish the goals of a traditional review, which are to help employees do their jobs more effectively and efficiently, leading to better customer service and bottom-line results for the business. But this approach also provides career development and earns a dealership the reputation as a place where employees want to work because they can thrive. When this happens, performance reviews become a positive rather than negative experience. Employees see how they

MRAA RESOURCE



FREE TO MEMBERS

MRAA's Sample Job Description Portal

The Marine Retailers Association of the Americas has created nearly 50 job descriptions for common positions around the typical dealership. This MRAA Members-Only benefit allows you to access each of these sample job descriptions, which have been created in Word documents, and allows you to create your own job description for the position you are seeking to fill. For example, if you have a Parts and Service Associate position open, if you could take components of a job description from a parts position and a service position to craft your own job description. These resources are available to MRAA Members only. Click below on the department that you'd like to start with. Not a member? [Join here.](#)

Sales	Service	Parts
Operations	Finance	Marina

[Post a job!](#)



Job Description Portal
AVAILABLE AT MRAA.COM
CLICK HERE

MRAA MEMBER BEST PRACTICE

Len's Cove Marina has adopted an alternative to the traditional performance review. The Canadian dealership has each of its employees create a Personal Business Plan every December.

Team members use a template created by the dealership that asks them to list specific goals they will work to achieve in the coming year, then outline the strategies they will use to achieve them. The plans also identify specific tactics or actions employees will use and any obstacles to success they envision.

The final portion of the plan is devoted to personal and professional development, where employees explain the training they will pursue to "invest in themselves."

After these plans are submitted, managers go through them, offering feedback and suggestions for improvement, then the employee and manager both sign off on the finished version. But the dealership doesn't stop there.

The plans are reviewed during monthly meetings with each employee, when progress is checked, strategies tweaked and action plans put in place as needed to keep on track.

- Is the employee fulfilling the expectations of the position?
- Is the position fulfilling the employee's expectations?
- Is the employee spending time on tasks outside of the job description?
- Should the job description or position be changed?
- What are the employee's strengths and weaknesses in each area of the job description?
- How can the manager and employee work together to improve areas of weakness?
- Are there ways the dealership can better leverage the employee's strengths?
- What are the employee's career goals?
- How can the dealership help the employee reach their goals?

If you don't currently have job descriptions in place – or if you have them for some positions and not others – have those employees without one create their own as part of the performance review process. As their manager, create a job description for the position yourself. Then compare what they've written with what you've written, and discuss the differences.

can benefit from them, helping create better buy-in to the continuous improvement process.

Other opportunities

Of course, while performance reviews and job descriptions can be powerful tools for helping employees improve and grow, there are many, many other resources available. Here are just a few:

MRAA RESOURCE

FREE TO MEMBERS

Simple Path to Continuous Improvement

10 Tips for Marine Dealership Performance Reviews

1. There are many reasons to conduct performance reviews, but perhaps the most important is the chance to identify opportunities to develop your employees' skills and experience. You can't expect your department or dealership to improve and grow unless your employees are improving and growing.
2. If you are conducting performance reviews for the first time, an easy way to start is to take the employee's job description and break it into three categories based on the Impact each listed item has on the employee's success in the position: high, medium or low impact.

10 Tips for Marine Dealership Performance Reviews

AVAILABLE AT [MRAA.COM](http://www.mraa.com)
CLICK HERE

to service profitability, the sales process, digital marketing and customer service. In addition, its Continuous Certification Program provides highly customized online training to Marine Industry Certified Dealers and their staff.

Business Books, Blogs and Podcasts While the list of potential resources is long, here is MRAA's Recommended Reading List to get you started: <http://www.mraa.com/general/custom.asp?page=RecommendedReading>.

Tech Schools, Colleges and Universities

20 Groups

Local, state, regional and national trade associations

MRAA RESOURCE

MRAA E-LEARNING COURSE:

Dealer Case Study: An Alternative to the Performance Review

Presented by Sean Horsfall

AVAILABLE AT [MRAATRaining.COM](http://www.mraatraining.com)
CLICK HERE

Marine Dealer Conference & Expo With approximately 30 educational sessions for marine dealers, not to mention the Dealer-to-Dealer Roundtable Discussions and the Learning Lab, this annual event is chock full of strategies for dealership improvement. Many dealerships send up-and-coming leaders to the event as part of their training and development. Learn more at <http://www.marinedealerconference.com>.

In-person workshops - Many training companies offer in-person workshops, either at their headquarters or in various locations across North America. Two popular marine industry providers are Spader Business Management and Garage Composites.

Online learning MRAA offers marine dealers approximately 100 e-learning courses from many of the marine industry's best trainers and educators. Topics range from leadership and succession planning

MRAA MEMBER BEST PRACTICE

Wisconsin's Gage Marine has its own variation on the performance review process using an approach called Catalytic Coaching that has improved employee performance by focusing on a dialogue rather than a score. Instead of a manager rating the employee, staff members are asked to assess their own performance, strengths and weaknesses, with the managers offering input for improvements.



How to Improve

Any effort you make to develop your team will inevitably have a positive impact. If nothing else, it will demonstrate that you, as an owner or manager, care about the growth of your team and that you're willing to invest in their development, even if that's just an investment of time.

However, as part of this guide, our goal is to help you generate the highest return possible on your investment in training and education. Here are some strategies recommended by experts on how the brain learns.

Hold on to what is being taught

Research shows us that people usually forget 90 percent of what they learn in a class within 30 days. And the majority of this forgetting occurs within the first few hours after class.

The typical human brain can hold about seven new pieces of information for less than 30 seconds, writes John Medina in his book, "Brain Rules." If something doesn't happen in that short stretch of time, the information becomes lost. It's like a video tape that gets recorded over with new information.

“ *The typical human brain can hold about seven new pieces of information for less than 30 seconds.* ”

To extend that 30 seconds to a few minutes or even an hour or two, you need to consistently re-expose yourself to that information, he suggests. That's what keeps things in working memory.

Think about the stereotype of the student cramming for a test. They might pull an all-nighter, repeating and repeating what they need to know for the test right up until they walk into the classroom.

But our goal here has nothing to do with a test, unless the test is real-life success in your dealership. And in order for that to occur, our goal should be for the most important information you and your team take away from your training and education to be stored in long-term memory. Believe it or not, the process of fixing something you learned permanently in your memory can take years of repetition.

“ *The more you can create a multi-sensory experience for those you are training, the higher the chances they will retain it.* ”

So, how can you ensure that you and your team don't forget the most critical pieces of what you learn?

1. Think and talk about it. During breaks in training, ask the group to turn to the person next to them and discuss what they learned. Or get together with your team to download the key takeaways of your training.

2. Make a connection between what you're learning and real life examples. The more personal the examples, the better. The more that you and your team members can connect what you're learning with experiences and knowledge you already have in your brain, the more likely you are to retain it.

3. Connect the learning moment with the moment when you'll need to retrieve what you learned. For example, if you can learn in the same environment where you will later need to retrieve what you learned, you'll be more successful. Sales managers, if you want to teach your sales team a new closing strategy, conduct the training in the showroom.

If you can use the same senses to study what you need to learn that you'll use when you put it to work, that also will help for retrieval. For example, if you're practicing how to close a boat sale, that's an oral exercise, so practice orally, not with a written exam.

4. Space out your repetition. Cramming works great if it's only important that you remember something for a short period of time. But if you want to hold onto it for the long haul, space out your repetition. Schedule a once a week practice of a key new process or strategy.

Research shows that such repetition is needed even years after you've supposedly learned something "for good." Even your most experienced team members can gain huge benefit from refresher classes.

5. The more elaborate and in-depth this practice is, the better. For example, you tend to retain more when a learning experience involves more senses, such as seeing, hearing and touching. That's why an audio recording is good, but a video is even better. And a course that involves not just video, but also activities, tests and homework is even more effective. Research suggests that if information is presented orally, people remember about 10 percent 72 hours after exposure. Add a picture and that percentage goes up to 65 percent.

The more you can create a multi-sensory experience for those you are training, the higher the chances they will retain it.

Of all of those senses, your vision is the most powerful. Visual processing actually takes up about half of everything your brain does. And in the visual realm, pictures or video provide much more input to your brain than text. If you can see something, it's much more powerful and likely to be retained than simply reading about it.

Apply training in the dealership

When researchers Michael M. Lombardo and Robert W. Eichinger studied the learning that takes place among working adults, they found that only 10 percent occurs through formal training and educational courses.

Another 20 percent comes from coaching, mentoring and other workplace interactions, while the largest share – 70 percent – is based on real-life, hands-on experiences, according to their 1996 book, “The Career Architect Development Planner.”

So, what does this mean for you in your dealership? Well, we think it underlines a few key ideas:

- The Power of Leadership. As a member of your dealership’s leadership team, you have the ability to influence whether your team puts what they’re learning to work or not. It doesn’t matter whether that learning comes from formal educational opportunities



(books, webinars, classes, etc.) or from their experience on the job. When you encourage them and ultimately hold them accountable for applying that knowledge, the likelihood they will put it to work goes up dramatically.

“ Once training is on the calendar for everyone to see, they can better prepare for it, and the whole dealership can see that a plan is in place and must be taken seriously. ”

- Formal Education as a Beginning. If you’re someone who enjoys learning, you may not care whether the education you participate in has direct application to your day-to-day life. But as a dealership owner or manager, your top priority when it comes to training and education – your own or that of your employees – is applying it on the job to improve performance. Formal education can jump-start this improvement, when properly positioned by leadership. For example, some dealers:

a. Use training as a tool in performance reviews to either help the employee improve in an area of weakness or help them develop toward a career goal, such as being promoted into a new position;

b. Ask their employees to set goals for the improvement they expect to see as a result of the training beforehand and then track their performance afterward;

c. Require employees who receive training to train the rest of the team on what they learned and how to apply it.

- The Benefits of a Continuous Improvement Culture. When your team is consistently encouraged, recognized for and perhaps even incentivized for finding and pursuing opportunities to improve themselves, their work and the dealership, then they will be much more likely to seek out ways to apply all that they learn, inside and outside the dealership.

Develop a plan

Setting aside time to focus on dealership improvement is like putting money into a savings account. It’s easy to overlook when things are good, and can be even easier to ignore when times are tough. But the investment adds up and will eventually payoff in a big way.

The most powerful improvement often comes in the form of training and education, whether inside the dealership or out, formal or informal. The good news is that an effective training plan is not difficult to create and having one will allow your business to maximize the returns it receives from investing in this important work.

With your plan in place, the value that training provides will become much clearer, the rough patches your dealership endures will be smoother, and the good times even better.

To help you create a dealership training plan, we’ve created a Training Matrix, which you can use as a template.

First, consider the short- and long-term goals you’ve identified for the company’s employees, departments and the dealership at large. Prioritize those goals, considering both importance and urgency.

Once you’ve decided which goals to pursue in the time period your plan will cover, it’s time to determine:

- Who needs training
- What training is needed

- The goal of the training
- Where to find the training
- How to schedule the training
- How to track and assess the results

The most overlooked item on that list may also be the most important – scheduling. Taking the time to get training onto the calendar can really help set the process in motion. A good way to do so is by populating the calendar with the dates employees have to be in the store – events, holidays, busy periods, etc. Then everything else is fair



Conclusion

Within this Guide to Dealership Improvement, we've given you the ammunition to gain buy-in from your team members and leaders when pursuing opportunities to improve and grow. We've presented a range of improvement strategies for your consideration, including training and education for individual employees, your department and your dealership as a whole. And we outlined how you can put those strategies to work to make the most of any time and money you invest. But this guide is not complete. Just as you are constantly seeking ways to improve your business, we are constantly seeking ways to improve

our service to you, and this guide is no exception. While we're already hard at work thinking about how to add to it, we'd love to hear from you on the ways we can best support you, your team and the dealer community as a whole. So, as always, please reach out and let us know if there are specific areas in which you'd like to see us add further information, insights, best practices and advice. It would be our honor to deliver that to you.