

YOU DON'T WANT TO BE LIKE SISYPHUS: 5 STEPS TO IMPROVE YOUR DEALERSHIP'S WORKPLACE PRACTICES

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Poor Sisyphus. This unlucky dude from Greek mythology must have really gotten sideways with the powers that be. As the story (myth) goes, the Greek gods sentenced Sisyphus to spend eternity pushing a huge boulder to the top of a steep incline only to have it roll back down each time to the starting point at the bottom. For all of eternity, ol' Sisyphus will be doing that same thing, that same way, over and over again, hoping each time to achieve a different outcome. If he had some choice in the matter and continued to do the same thing, we would probably say that his actions fit the definition of insanity. Of course, in his case, he has no other options – he must keep doing it the same way.

You Are Not Sisyphus

Unlike Sisyphus, dealerships have options – you don't have to keep doing things the same way. You are not predestined to continue practices that were at best tolerated by previous generations of employees. You are not forced by the gods to employ anyone who longs for the "good ol' days" when employees could say or do most anything because "it's the car business," a myth in which dealership employees are not bound by employment laws, common sense, or any semblance of professionalism. Your dealership is not required by fate to employ those who believe employees offended by sexual comments or racial slurs should have thicker skins, should "man up," and should not complain. You are not sentenced to follow the same processes when selecting management personnel who often resemble

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generations of management personnel who learned their craft in those same, so-called "good ol' days."

Not only are dealerships not destined to continue these practices for eternity, society and survival simply will not permit that to happen. The fact is that the world has changed and been changed by many recent events that directly and indirectly affect the retail automotive industry. The #MeToo movement, social justice movements demanding equality, the cancel culture, the pandemic, and social media have brought and keep these issues in the forefront of social consciousness. While reasonable people can legitimately disagree with how we reached this point, the message is or should be clear: employees and customers expect your industry and others to abandon many of the practices that were considered acceptable or necessary in the "good ol' days."

5 Steps to Success

So what should you do if you feel like you've been rolling that same rock up that same hill for years now? Here are five action items you should consider to escape that mind-numbing fate.

1. Open Lines of Communication

A good start in re-imagining your dealership as a modern-day workplace is to talk to the employees about their workplace experiences and ideas. The purpose of the exercise is not to illicit grievances and complaints but rather to learn how the workplace is viewed from a perspective different than that of management. In addition to revealing the obvious opinions about how they do not appreciate lapses in professionalism, employees may identify small things that they see as an indication of a mindset or world view that management may never have considered. For example, if the dealership plays music through the sales department, what kind of music is it? Is it music that appeals to a wide range of employees or customers who have different tastes or is it a genre that appeals and is linked to one group of people only? Management may have never thought about this issue but there's a good chance the employees and customers have.

2. Take a Hard Look at Management

Another suggestion is to look at the management staff – because your employees and customers sure do. Do they

all look the same demographically? Do they reflect the demographics of your dealership's employees and the customers? Answering "no" does not equate to wrongdoing or bad motives, but should be inspiration to see what can be done to change that reality. Your employees and customers most likely feel more comfortable dealing with someone who has shared experiences. Most employees need a reason to believe they have a chance to move up in the company. Knowing that it has happened is real and tangible; hearing that it could happen is not. Customers notice, too.

3. Make Sure Your Managers are Leaders

An objective view of the management team may also be a worthwhile endeavor. In survey after survey, employees who resign from their dealership position give their treatment by management as the reason they left. In many situations, nothing changed after they reported their concerns to upper management or Human Resources. One possible explanation for this problem is that dealership managers often manage the way they were/are managed. They take over pushing the boulder up the hill from the previous generation who took over from the generation that preceded them. Unfortunately, the "it's the car business" mentality often is passed down from one generation to next. This succession plan also leads to having managers who look the same as their predecessors.

4. Evaluate Your Recruiting Tactics

Still another idea is to evaluate the recruiting plan and change it if continues to yield the same outcome. (You know: the faces remain the same and only the names have changed.) If the current excuse to continue with the Sisyphus-like recruiting and hiring process is that the talent pool is too shallow or that no good candidates are available, take steps to make the pool deeper. You can do that by hiring and developing your own talent pool. If your hiring practices resemble "catch and release," don't keep pushing that rock up the hill.

5. Embrace Human Resources (not Literally)

Finally, your dealership may be well-served by evaluating your views on Human Resources and employment policies. Human Resources is not the enemy, unless, of course, Human Resources is trying to protect employees and the dealership from making a bad decision.

Implementing and following good employment practices

and being profitable are not mutually exclusive concepts. Most employees want structure, certainty, accountability and consistency. Most government agencies, courts, juries, and arbitrators want to see the same.

Conclusion

There may never be a better time to abandon Sisyphus-like tendencies. The pandemic forced dealerships to abandon or modify business practices and philosophies long believed to be etched in stone and, in most cases, with positive results. Momentum exists for more positive change. Take advantage of the opportunity – Sisyphus would if he had the chance.