

Has Average Become Acceptable in Your Dealership?

by : Dave Anderson

Every once in a while a cynic will jokingly ask what all the fuss is about concerning stretching to reach his dealership's fullest potential. The logic goes: "We're having a decent year"; "We could be doing a lot worse"; "We're better than we used to be"; and, so on. Being an average dealership is certainly an option to anyone wanting to settle for obscurity. You could start work late, finish early and pace yourself throughout the day. You could do just enough to get by; just enough to get paid; just enough not to get fired. Your corporate vision could be: To be no worse than most other companies. Your core values might espouse: We do our best whenever we can; we don't mess with our success; we try hard to get through each day. Your mission statement could boldly state: We will be the best we can be whenever it is cheap, easy, popular and convenient.

This all sounds like nonsense, doesn't it? Or does it? Look again. While you would never come out and say these things, you don't have to. Your actions sometimes say them for you. If some leaders objectively looked at the majority of their people on an average day they'd find that the ridiculous values listed in this article are assumed more often than they want to admit. People are so busy covering their own behind, surviving and maintaining what they have that they're not investing enough in growth, risk, change and stretch. The effects of average mentalities and performances don't always show up overnight but they do emerge over time.

Here are four signs average has become acceptable in your dealership. Before you go into denial, read over these points objectively and honestly evaluate where you are. After all, I don't believe most managers suffer because they can't fix their problems. I believe they suffer because they can't see them, but this is not about fault. It's about fixing it.

1. Average has become acceptable in your dealership if you have pay plans that reward average or below average industry standards. If you're going to pay people extra to be average or below, you are shrinking people's thinking, diminishing their potential and conditioning them to become mediocre. What do you get in return? More average! It's not rocket science. It is pathetic.

If this is the case: It's time to stretch people to meet your standards and pay extra for above-average performances only, rather than lowering your standards to accommodate a mediocre employee.

2. Average has become acceptable in your dealership if you have more people in a department that produce average-or below-average numbers than not. In other words, if your next headcount shows you have two, five-car Freds; two, seven-car Sams; three, eight-car Eds; one, 12-car Tom; and, one, 19-car Nancy, do the math: you are living in a cesspool of mediocrity. If you ran a democracy and people were allowed to vote, eight-car Eddie would be Pope of the place. While I pick on sales in this example, the same parallel holds true in all departments.

If this is the case: Have a frank conversation with the manager presiding over this mess and determine his plan for remedying the situation since the status quo is unacceptable.

3. Average has become acceptable in your dealership if you don't hold average or below performers accountable for their results. What's the consequence for remaining average or below in your dealership? If you don't have a good answer then average has become acceptable. By the way, what's the consequence for a manager failing to elevate his worst performers to at least average or a peep above in a reasonable amount of time (the time allowed is up to your discretion)? If there's no consequence for a manager failing to either develop or replace average or below people, you've bonded with mediocrity at the highest levels in your organization and are its chief collaborator.

If this is the case: Install minimum performance standards and have the guts to enforce them. Remember, minimum standards are not just designed to stretch an employee and eliminate the wrong people more quickly. They are primarily engineered to force the manager to do his job and either get people better or get better people.

4. Your dealership has become average if you've failed to confront (or personally spoken to) any of the following phrases lately and everyone that heard it meekly nodded in agreement: "We can't find good people in our area"; "Yea, but at least we're not the worst in the zone"; "Wait 'til he works out first and then maybe we'll train him"; "This economy isn't what it used to be" (that's right: we no longer have 21 percent interest rates and 13.5 percent inflation); "Cancel the training meeting! We need to get some cars out today"; "I can't fire him because I've got no one to replace him"; and, the monologue of morons continues, ad nauseam.

If this is the case: Put things in perspective for your team. These are good times we're living in and a relatively healthy

economy in which to do business. Besides, if they think this is bad, what will they do when we see a real downturn? Keep in mind that anyone in this business for less than 14 years or so - give or take - has never had to suffer through a prolonged business downturn in our industry.

It's actually harder to be mediocre. Sadly, most people who think that all the "fuss" about stretching, accountability and reaching your potential sounds like a lot of trouble fail to realize that it's a lot tougher to be mediocre and to get just by. When you're mediocre your anxiety multiplies because you're worried about keeping your job, paying your bills or getting a raise. When you're mediocre and are consciously putting forth less effort than you're capable of, you diminish your own self-esteem, become apathetic, indifferent, and lose passion and self-esteem that can lead to a feeling of worthlessness and depression. If you have to be at work anyway, why not work smart, work hard and do your best? You'll never feel ultimately good about yourself until you do. If you have to be at work anyway, why not pull together as a team and build an elite company rather than one that just gets by? Why not take pride in what you do, in what you accomplish and in how you create "Wow" experiences for customers?

Life is too short to work in an average dealership, to be an average employee or put forth an average effort. Average is the enemy of excellence. It begins as a rest stop and turns into a grave. The profile of an average company should offend you. It should make your skin crawl and create at least minor nausea. If it doesn't or if it sounds all too familiar, you have serious work ahead of you to turn your average dealership into an elite enterprise.

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