

By **Steve Ferrante**, CEO, Sale Away LLC.

3 THINGS TOP SHOPS DO DIFFERENTLY

What separates consistently high-performing shops from everyone else.

In August, I had the honor of presenting “3 Things Top Shops Do Differently” webinar for Joe’s Garage Online Education Series with AAPEX. In this article, I’ll expand on that presentation by sharing what I’ve learned from working with outstanding multi-location operators across the country. The markets, business models and personalities may differ, but the companies that consistently perform at a high level tend to have three things in common.

1. THEY BUILD A WINNING TEAM CULTURE

We hear a lot about culture these days, and I think the word has become so overused that it sometimes loses its meaning. Culture isn’t a slogan painted on the breakroom wall. It isn’t an employee handbook, a company picnic or pizza on Friday. There’s certainly nothing wrong with pizza, but pizza isn’t culture.

Culture is how people behave when nobody is standing over their shoulder. It shows up in how your phones are answered, how customers are treated, how advisors respond when the shop gets slammed and how managers deal with poor performance. It’s what gets coached, what gets recognized and, maybe even more importantly, what gets ignored. Culture is the operating system running in the background of every customer interaction.

That’s why I’ve always believed that if you want to attract and retain top talent, you first have to create an organization that top talent wants to be part of. Great employees want standards and accountability. They want to work alongside people who care as much as they do, not continually carry someone who falls short while management looks the other way. Top shops also hire for attitude and train for skill. Skills and processes can be taught. Enthusiasm, work ethic and a genuine desire to serve people are much harder to coach into someone who simply doesn’t have them.

Leadership has to model what it expects. You can’t demand urgency while moving at half-speed yourself, preach accountability while continually making excuses or talk about taking care of customers and then treat an unhappy customer like an inconvenience. Employees are always watching, whether leaders realize it or not.

The relationship works this way: Customer experience is driven by employees. Employee performance is driven by workplace culture. Workplace culture is driven by leadership. Trace almost any customer experience problem far enough



upstream and you’ll eventually arrive at leadership.

That same culture determines how well everything else in the business works. In a strong culture, process helps advisors succeed, coaching feels supportive and performance standards become something to take pride in. In a weak culture, process feels forced, coaching feels personal and accountability becomes optional. Same tools, completely different outcomes.

2. THEY INSTITUTIONALIZE A SALES PROCESS

For some reason, sales is one of the few important areas of business where people still seem comfortable telling employees, “Just be yourself and do what works for you.” Imagine running the rest of your shop that way. Everyone develops their own checkout procedure. Everyone handles inspections however they feel like doing it. Every technician follows a different repair process. Good luck with that.

Yet when it comes to selling, average shops often depend heavily on natural talent and individual style. The problem is that talent without structure produces random results. Top shops don’t rely on people “winging it” on the phone or at the counter. They give their advisors a clear, repeatable sales process that establishes how a professional customer conversation should unfold.

That doesn’t mean handing everyone a script and creating a shop full of robots. I’m a big believer in personality. Advisors should sound like themselves because customers can smell a canned presentation a mile away. A good sales process simply provides structure and makes sure the important

SHOP OPERATIONS

things consistently happen.

When fundamentals are left to personal preference, performance becomes consistently inconsistent. One customer gets an outstanding experience while the next gets something completely different, depending on who answers the phone. A defined process creates greater consistency, professionalism and confidence while allowing advisors to focus on the customer instead of figuring out what to do next.

Just as importantly, process makes coaching possible. Without it, coaching becomes opinion: "I think you could have handled that better." "You need to be more confident." "You should sell harder." Once the process is clearly defined, you can identify what happened, what didn't and what the advisor should do differently next time. Now you're not coaching personality. You're coaching performance.

3. THEY MEASURE WHAT THEY MANAGE

Most shops measure plenty of numbers. Sales, car count, gross profit, average repair order and month-end results all matter. The problem is that by the time those numbers show up on a report, the customer interactions that created them have already happened. You can't go back and change last month.

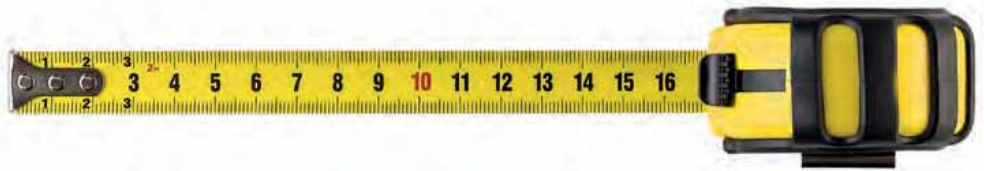
Top shops certainly pay attention to results, but they also measure the behaviors producing those results. You can't manage what you don't measure, and you can't improve what you don't evaluate.

I've spent many years evaluating sales calls, and one thing I've learned is that simply recording calls doesn't accomplish much. Plenty of businesses record thousands of calls that nobody

ever listens to. Recording is passive. Evaluation is intentional. Proper evaluation makes expectations visible and performance standards objective, giving managers something specific to coach instead of debating whether someone did a "pretty good job."

This has become even more interesting with the arrival of AI-powered sales-call scoring. I'm frequently asked about it, and I've tested several platforms that have tried to win me, and subsequently my clients, over to their systems. The limitations I've found go beyond the score itself.

The first is identifying the right calls to score. Not every incoming call is a sales call, yet I've seen AI systems apply sales-process scoring to many calls that never should have been evaluated as sales opportunities. If a significant portion of the calls being



Visit us
at AAPEX!
Booth
#V2023

Engineered to keep you moving.

With Continental, you'll know it's the right choice, every time. Pick the parts that are engineered to perform and built to last. Continental.

continental-engineparts.com/na/en-us



SHOP OPERATIONS

measured aren't genuine sales calls, the performance metrics become distorted. Bad data doesn't suddenly become useful because AI produced it faster.

My team uses the AI embedded in our call recording and scoring platform to help identify calls that are likely to be suitable, essentially turning a giant haystack of incoming recordings into a more manageable one. We still screen those calls one by one to make sure they're actual sales calls before evaluating them.

There's also the challenge of understanding the nuances of how a sales process is executed and accurately evaluating the interaction against the scoring criteria. Sales conversations are fluid. A scoring system must understand not only what happened, but whether it happened effectively and in a way that advanced the conversation.

That doesn't mean AI-powered call scoring doesn't have a place in the shop. It does. It can make basic

monitoring more affordable and immediate and expand coaching capacity. But it cannot replace a clearly defined performance standard or the judgment required to accurately evaluate how that standard was executed. At minimum, I believe shops should test AI-generated scores against human evaluations before using them for compensation or performance discipline.

That's really what separates the top shops I've worked with from everyone else. They don't assume a good culture will somehow develop on its own. They build it. They don't hope every service advisor eventually figures out how to sell effectively. They establish a process. And they don't wait until month-end to discover whether that process worked. They evaluate the behaviors happening every day.

None of this requires some secret formula available only to the biggest or most sophisticated operators. It does require intention, discipline and leadership willing to follow through.

And the shops that understand that are usually the ones everybody else is trying to catch. ■

*An avid auto enthusiast, **Steve Ferrante** literally grew up in and around his family's auto service business in Massachusetts. Today, he is the **CEO and Trainer of Champions of Sale Away LLC**. A true student of his profession, Steve has over 30 years of successful sales, sales management and sales training experience. Specializing in the tire/auto service industry since 2009, Steve has received national acclaim for teaching independent tire and auto service businesses how to improve customer experiences, produce greater sales results, build a "winning team" corporate culture and be the "Top Shop" in their market. To learn more about the Pinnacle Performance program for your team, visit pinnacleperformancetraining.biz. Steve can be reached directly at **603-681-0787** or via e-mail at steve@pinnacleperformance-training.biz.*

WHY PINNACLE PERFORMANCE TRAINING IS BEST FOR YOUR TIRE/AUTO SERVICE TEAM

Proven Training. Real Results. A Competitive Advantage.

**17+ YEARS OF PROVEN AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY EXPERTISE**

**BUILDS WINNING TEAM CULTURE**

**INCREASES CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT & LOYALTY**

**IMPROVES SALES CONVERSIONS & CONSISTENCY**

**ENHANCES PROFESSIONALISM AND BRAND PERCEPTION**

**CREATES A REPEATABLE PROCESS FOR SUCCESS**



REAL TRAINING. REAL IMPROVEMENT. REAL RESULTS.

**HIGHER SALES CONVERSIONS**

**STRONGER TEAM PERFORMANCE**

**MORE PROFITABLE BUSINESS**

**SUPERIOR CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE**

THE PINNACLE ADVANTAGE

**BI-ANNUAL ONSITE TEAM TRAINING**

**CONTINUOUS ONLINE LEARNING PLATFORM**

**REAL SALES CALL EVALUATIONS & COACHING**

**EXCLUSIVE MARKET PARTNERSHIP**



DON'T COMPETE LIKE EVERYONE ELSE. PERFORM AT A HIGHER LEVEL WITH PINNACLE PERFORMANCE TRAINING.

pinnacleperformancetraining.biz

28 10.26 | SHOP OWNER