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Become an overnight success

Best practices that will help you evolve into a more successful tool dealer.

How do you define success: Financial freedom? More free time? Helping others? Being your own boss?

No matter how you define business success, you can most likely achieve it as a tool dealer. Or you can fail miserably. It depends on how hard you work, and on what you work hard at.

You won't become a success over the course of one night. But, if you stick to a few key business principles, one morning you'll wake up a success.

So, what are the actions and attitudes that separate successful dealers from the rest?

To understand, I talked to two men who have worked with four of the leading flags for over 56 year of combined experience. These leaders now oversee many other successful dealers. Here are their insights.

Keep your focus

"Remember the reason why you got into business and stick to it persistently," says Dave Columbus, director of national sales for Cornwell Quality Tools.

Columbus reminds his Cornwell dealers that "the only place success comes before work is in the dictionary."

Columbus knows a bit about selling tools; he has a total of 36 years of tool business experience. He was a tool dealer with Snap-on for three years and with Matco for five years before joining Cornwell. At Cornwell he was a district manager for 12 years, a regional manager for nine years and has been National Sales

Director for the last seven years.

"It's going to be hard work," Columbus says. "Work comes before success in all businesses, but certainly this one."

Be consistent

"Your clients should be able to set their watch by you," says Jim Holtz, a Mac Tools district manager with 12 years' experience as a dealer and eight as a district manager.

You should be at the shop the same day and the same time every week. Some owners and technicians schedule their work around you.

You're not really in the tool sales business. You're in the service business. Your priority should be to provide unparalleled customer service, Holtz says.

Practice self-honesty

"When you work for yourself and by yourself, self-honesty is important," Columbus says. You need to be able to honestly evaluate your own performance. "A lot of people let themselves off the hook, because they don't have anyone to compare themselves to. And we all self-rationalize."

To be a successful dealer, you need to step back and try to be objective.

For example, it's easy to justify stopping work at two o'clock when you're having a bad day or staying home until 10 o'clock because you have to drive the kids to school.

"The fact is you didn't do that when you had an eight-to-five job working for the boss,"

Columbus says. He suggests weekly self-evaluations.

"I think self-honesty comes down to being able to look yourself in the mirror every week and ask: 'If I had an employee who just performed as I did, would I say 'Good job?' or would I say 'You need to do better than this if you want to keep your job?'"

Keep it fresh

"Carry your basic six or seven items into the shop," Holtz says.

If you've heard it once, you've heard it a hundred times: Tote and promote. If you want to sell more, show more.

"Target specific shops with specific tools," Holtz says.

Not every shop is the same, so customize your offer to the shop's specialty. If they do a lot of drivability work, bring in diagnostic and underhood tools. If they do brake and front end, bring along some clever specialty tools.

"Always bring some kind of power tool. And if it's not moving, discount it," Holtz suggests.

There is no need to tie up your inventory with something that's not selling. It's better to dump it than to let it sit and collect dust. Use that cash to buy more products that will sell.

Maintain integrity

Whether you know it or not, your reputation is bankable.

"Because of the nature of this business your customers will know you better than you know yourself sometimes," Columbus says. "You might think that you're

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a hard worker and you're consistent and you're there every week, but they really know," Columbus continues. "You need to be transparent in your integrity because your customers see it and they remember what you said last week and the week before that."

The tool business is based on mutual trust.

"The root word for integrity is integrated or integral," Columbus says. "I think what that means is that your actions need to be integrated with your words. You can talk a good game, but if you don't follow through with your actions then people see through it."

Your actions have to match up with your words.

Have a professional appearance

If you want to be treated professionally, you need to look the part.

"Who wants to deal with a tool guy that comes walking into your shop looking like a slob?" Holtz says. "Dress professionally."

How you look says as much about

how you perceive yourself as how you want to present yourself. Put your best foot forward.

"Your truck is your store," Holtz says. "Make sure it's set up professionally and clean, and doesn't smell [bad]. Your customers want a professional experience."

Be reliable

Your customers depend on you. Not just to show up, but to be of value.

"Great service is knowing who your customers are, having an idea of what they need," Columbus says. Then, "showing them what they need so they can do their job easier, safer, faster, better...and provide them with those products. Let them see it, let them make the decision."

Customers expect you to stock and show the tools that will make them a

success. If you help them achieve their success, they'll help you achieve yours.

Does success come overnight?

Consistently stick to these guiding principles day after day, year after year and one morning you'll wake up and find you've become a success.

As any star athlete or performer will tell you, it takes years of dedicated practice and a lot of hard knocks experience to get to the point where you rise to the top and are considered a success. Hard work and determination seem to be the keys. Others may think it happens overnight. Successful people know the difference.

As McDonald's "Founder" Ray Kroc once said: "I was an overnight success alright. But 30 years is a long, long night." ^(F)

Tool Dealer Self-Evaluation Checklist

Cornwell's Dave Columbus lists four simple questions to ask yourself during a weekly (or daily) self-evaluation. You may add more, but this is a strong starting point:

1. Am I really doing the things I have to do, or just what I want to do?
2. Do I deal with people I don't necessarily like or who don't necessarily like me?
3. Am I positive? (Nobody wants to buy from a salesperson without a positive attitude.)
4. When I come home at night, whether it's a good day or bad day, did I give it 100 percent?

TALKBACK: What other questions should a dealer ask himself/herself?

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