

Sales floor

Basic training

BY TARA BAUKUS MELLO

Every dealership trains its salespeople, but some stores get better results than others. The difference is in having a comprehensive strategy, says consultant Mark Walsh of Mark Walsh International, Sydney, Australia. "Today's salesperson needs to be trained more thoroughly to be more professional than at any other time in the history of automotive retailing." Here are six basic steps:

■ **Treat training seriously or your employees won't.**

Employees know from the moment they're hired at Flow Automotive Group, Winston-Salem, N.C., that training is key. "New sales consultants go through three days of process training, two days of product training, and one day of orientation before they set foot on the sales floor," says Dennis Chriss, director of organizational development.

■ **Get fired up.**

Trainees won't be enthusiastic about training unless the trainer is, experts agree.

■ **Stress that the methods taught can bring success.**

"Every winning sports team practices the basics over and over because the coach knows that's what they need, and he wants to see them win," says Randy Brenckman, NADA Dealer Academy management instructor/marketing director for dealership operations. Chriss makes sure his managers really believe in the training material before they present it to staff, because "if it doesn't resonate with them, it won't have the impact we want on our staff."

■ **Let trainees know what's expected of them.**

Show recruits the MAP ("minimum acceptable performance"), says Walsh. "They need to have a clearly defined objective with a written procedure for how it should be done, and they should understand what the consequences are" if it's not done properly. At Rhinelander (Wis.) GM and Toyota, dealer Mike Aus works with staffers to create their own report cards that list key responsibilities and measure how well they're executed. "When people know what you expect from them on a daily basis, they hold themselves accountable."

■ **Deliver training in small chunks with realistic goals.**

"Salespeople become resentful if they feel unduly pressured to perform just because they've been in a training course," says



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Walsh. To quell such feelings, Brenckman suggests asking the staff to list 10 areas where they feel training would be beneficial to them. "Let the salespeople tell you what they want to learn. You will be surprised that what they list is also *your* vision, and you will have buy-in from the start."

■ **Use overlapping training techniques.**

Employing multiple training techniques—such as classroom style, one-on-one, and role-playing—helps reinforce the ideas being taught, says Walsh. And don't forget real-life experiences, says Aus. "When we're addressing what happened with lost sales the day before, we pull out the sales process book to see where things went off track."

In the end, training should never be casual or onetime, says NADA's Brenckman. Even informal meetings—such as one-on-one coaching sessions in the hallway—should have specific lessons in mind. "Training has to be wrapped around everything you do," he says. "If everybody is following the process, then you are always in a state of training."