

# Investing in Your Employees will Pay Dividends

How to find and keep top-notch employees



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**With COVID-19 restrictions** rapidly receding in the rear-view mirror, the US economy is regaining steam, and many of the jobs lost in the early days of the shutdown are coming back. Ironically, however, employers are having trouble finding people to fill these positions. This is happening to businesses of all types, and fast lube shops are no exception. Judging from conversations we've had with owners; many are rethinking their hiring practices to ensure that they can attract and retain quality employees while encouraging top-notch performance.

Selecting the right people for the job is the key to success in any business. But who is the right hire these days? Is it an automotive technician with three to five years of experience? Or is it someone who's intelligent and responsible, personable, outgoing and a team player? The service technician is the face of your business to the customer, responsible for building the confidence and trust that will determine whether the customer returns for their next service. Who is the type of person you want representing your business to customers, regardless of their experience?

Competition for experienced hires is heating up, and the talent pool is shrinking. With that in mind, the technical and mechanical aspects of the typical service technician position can largely be taught and trained. It's the intangible qualities—positive attitude, reliability, a customer-service mentality—are harder to teach. Today, many operators are focused on finding people with desirable soft skills and investing in training them to perform oil changes and vehicle inspections. They are looking at attitude over experience in many cases to broaden their applicant pool.

Following the layoffs and shift to remote work during the pandemic, more people are thinking about changing their career paths. Especially those workers with experience in hard-hit sectors, like retail or hospitality, may already possess the customer service skills you are looking for, and they could be ready for a career change. Think about tapping into larger segments of the population in the search for motivated candidates who want to learn a rewarding trade. This could include people, specifically women, who have chosen to stay at home to take care of their families but are now looking to rejoin the workforce. As part of hiring practices small businesses should endeavor to have a workforce that mirrors community demographics and that includes female employees and females in management positions. Having this kind of diversity is viewed positively by the team and more importantly by paying customers.

You also need to think about recruitment techniques and messaging. Use your website, social media presence, and job posting sites to educate potential employees about the opportunities in this industry—starting with a ground-floor opportunity in your shop. Often your employees are an excellent resource for recommending friends or family who might be in the job market. You could provide additional encouragement to your employees via a "finders" financial incentive if their recommendation worked out and ended up joining your team.

After successfully hiring a new employee, you need to have a plan in place to grow and develop their skills so that they continue to learn on the job. An employee that is challenged and learning will have a greater chance of staying with you for the long term. Another key to success is creating a positive work environment in which employees feel valued and want to contribute.

As a small business, you can afford to offer employees a bit more flexibility than, say, a factory job or a chain store. Of course, you don't want to run a lax operation, but if an employee needs a weekday off to attend to a family matter, be open to it. These types of gestures can go a long way towards generating goodwill among your employees, plus they will appreciate your flexibility and hopefully pay you back with increased loyalty and good performance.

Speaking of pay, consider instituting a "success sharing" program. Let your employees know that if the shop does well, they deserve an occasional surprise bonus for doing their part. Keep an eye on employees who show managerial potential, and let them know they have a growth path with your business.

In the current climate, an investment in employees is perhaps the smartest investment you can make in your business. Ultimately, the final key to success comes down to treating your employees well, like a family, and then they will take care of your customers.

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—Bill Beyerle,  
automotive installed  
sales manager at  
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