

Using failures as a learning opportunity



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I have failed at many, many things. I have failed at all of the roles I have ever been in—

mother; wife, sister; daughter; business owner; employee, I could go on and on, but you get the picture. In my failures, I have also sinned. If we are all honest, we can all admit that we all sin and fall short of the glory of God and we have all been failures at something, if not many things, we have tried.

But I am encouraged by two truths. The first is from one of my favorite authors, Dale Carnegie. He says that failure is one of the surest stepping stones to success. If you are anything like me, you might be thinking right now that you are wildly successful because you have failed many times. And you'd be right. It is in our failures, if we are teachable, that we grow and learn the most and ultimately change and do better.

Case in point: Four and a half years ago, a year after opening our new auto repair shop, we opened our Express Lane. We had done research about fast oil change lanes and since the shop we were leasing already had a lane for it, it seemed like a no-brainer. From the fall of 2012 on, we have been striving to make our Express Lane successful by providing convenient and expedient service with quality inspections. We have been diligent in trying to seek the right manager and technicians to offer the service we wanted to give. Though our efforts were successful on many fronts, it has been a constant challenge to find the right team members to properly manage and build the relationships we strive for. We have wondered how this can be and why the Express Lane model is so difficult.

As we started pondering these things, we were reminded of what some colleagues of ours said in the past. Two years ago, you might remember an article I wrote about how our 20-group (a group of automotive shop owners around the country) came to our shop to offer suggestions and advice as well as learn from the things we were doing well. It was during their visit that we first heard a flickering sentence of failure: You should close your Express Lane. Our entire group agreed with this advice. The problem was, it fell on deaf ears. We were quite outraged; in fact, we were thinking “our shop has the lane already built in, certainly we should not close it!”

Turns out, that brilliant crew was spot on. From the outside, they could see what we were blind to: we were working far too hard to staff a lane that separated our business into two. It has not been cohesive, it's been tough to build the customer relationships that we desire, and it has been difficult to find the right, caring people to serve in it. Here is a bit of insight into our deliberation.

STAFFING

In my recent inquiries, I have found that the express lane model is a difficult one to make successful, the key reason being the turnaround for lube technicians, which makes managers frustrated to be constantly looking for and training new people. Being a lube technician is not a glorious job. They get dirty and splattered with oil and other fluids. They are either very busy or not busy at all—yielding either high stress or high boredom. Unless they have significant mechanical skills outside of the process-oriented position, there is not much room for advancement. It's cold in the winter and hot in the summer. It's an entry-level position.



It's no wonder why this position has been so difficult for many express lane owners/managers to keep staffed and why it's the biggest challenge for most centers with this model.

EXPRESS MENTALITY

We all want to get things done fast—especially the oil changes we all dread. Besides being fast, we want convenience, quality and cheap too, right? The reality is, we can't have it all. Here is something you may have never considered before: oil prices have risen considerably over the years, but an oil change service cost for you has not. For most companies, after paying for the oil and the technicians, your oil change actually costs the company money. Perhaps there are some shops that use cheap oil changes to get you through the door to sell you all sorts of stuff you don't want or need, but reputable repair shops do it to build relationships and as a convenience to you so you can have all your services performed under one roof. They want to perform your oil

change while at the same time doing a quality inspection so you can make informed decisions on other maintenance or repairs needed. Faster is not always better.

INNOVATION

Innovation was a topic at a recent conference my husband and I attended. By definition, it is “a new idea, method or device.” The speaker shared with us why innovation is important and how we can take steps to make sure we stay relevant with the changing times. As luck would have it, my innovative husband came up with a creative idea that allows for both quality and convenience. We will use technology that allows our customers to schedule an oil change right on our website. We've blocked out time slots for you to choose from based on our staffing model of quality technicians, so we know when you are coming.

Also with this new model, our three service advisors can build the relationships we crave. We cannot wait to try this new approach, and if it fails, I suppose it will just be a stepping stone!

Let's end by coming full circle so that I can reveal the other “truth” I spoke of at the beginning. “God ... because of His great love for us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ.” Ephesians 2:4-5. My friends, I wish you a glorious Easter, I encourage you to be teachable—learning and growing from your failures, and I hope that you will be innovative and wildly successful. As always, if you want to learn about the Lord I know and love, come on by—no appointment needed.

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