

Learning Without Scars

Quarterly Newsletter

Dynamic Internet Based Learning
TRAINING SOLUTIONS FOR EQUIPMENT DEALERSHIPS
Construction • Mining • Agriculture • Cranes • Trucks • Trailers

The Parts Business

Fall 2021

Our mission in the parts business is rather simple, it is Slee's First Law of Parts: Find every part that every customer needs and do it the same day they ask for it. Tell them where the part is available, if it is not in your stock. Make this contact before you go home for the day. You need to do this every day. Measure it in the same manner as you measure your safety records. Every day and very visibly.



In The Shrinking Talent Pool, Find and Grow Your Leaders Within

Employee assessments and proactive development won't be options in the future – reach the young, match talent to tasks, and nurture the naturals under your own roof. Over previous blogs and articles that I have written, I have talked about technicians, customer contact employees and office personnel including the sales functions needing to be addressed with more employees with more skills and knowledge; now we come to the leadership group.

Let me say this right up front: Management is about leading people not managing people. You can manage process but you lead people. This is a critical job function and one that many misunderstand. Historically, we have taken the individual with the most seniority in the department, and we have made them the supervisors or the managers. As with most of the other job functions, management and supervision need to be developed in-house. This is normally called succession planning and is a very important function. Unfortunately, I do not see many businesses paying attention to this at the moment.

This might have been an acceptable solution, no succession plans, during the middle of the 20th

century, but it clearly is no longer the right answer. It is very clear that we must identify and then develop the right individuals to lead the operating and selling departments in an equipment dealership. Identification of good candidates is not an easy task.

Let me define leadership for the purposes of this discussion. Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of people to achieve a common goal. This influence is achieved through respect and trust, which are gained by achievements that are viewed as important by the followers. You do this through shared experiences on the job, working together on a day-to-day basis or on projects. Leadership is not a trait that is limited to a few people. It is a process that rests in the interactions between people. It can show itself and is very natural. It can be learned and it is not some genetic benefit limited to a few.

There are many companies in the market that specialize in personality profiling and “Personalysis;” there are businesses that develop specific profiles for all job functions. What this is all leading to is managing the individual job functions and the personnel best suited to those functions. This requires what I call a “skill set inventory” for each employee in the company.

What is the educational background and job history, including the performance at each stage in the history, and the specific level of skills of each individual in the business within each department? With this information available for each individual, the company can much more realistically determine the individuals who have the potential to be high performers. For those of you who are interested in pursuing this further, several books come to mind: “What Makes a Leader?” by Daniel Goleman; “What Makes an Effective Executive?” by Peter Drucker; “What Leaders Really Do,” by John P. Kotter.

Then, of course, the company needs to be able to define the specific skill requirements for each of their job functions. This is typically an area in which many dealerships are lacking. Maybe you are thinking, “I am too small for that,” or “I know what they are supposed to do.” I couldn't disagree more. It doesn't matter how

large or small or how well we think we know what needs to be done – we must get very specific about what the job functions are and what the expectations are for each individual within that job function. We need to define and describe every task that has to be performed and what the standard levels of performance are for those tasks.

Employee Development and Your Customers

So, with defined tasks, job functions and a skill set inventory we now can move to employee development programs. In the book “Employee Development: Big Business Results on a Small Business Budget,” the nine contributing authors affirm that, “an investment in the professional development of employees increases employee satisfaction and retention. As organizations grow increasingly more complex, it has become even more important that they retain the knowledge and experience that the best employees have spent years acquiring. It has also been demonstrated that professional development enhances employee satisfaction.”

If you read my columns, or blog postings, or listen to our Podcasts, you have heard about “The Service Profit Chain,” which shows a direct correlation between employee satisfaction/retention and customer satisfaction/retention.

Employee development comes in many shapes and sizes: mentoring, cross training, self-study, local schools and tuition reimbursement, industry-specific classroom learning, webinars, and Internet-based learning systems, to mention a few. In other words, there is a wide variety of options for everyone to choose from for their business.

But dealers must choose to invest in the development of their employees.

In the excellent book, “Future Jobs – Solving the Employment and Skills Crisis” Edward E. Gordon lists the hardest jobs to fill in the United States. They are as follows:

1. Skilled Trades
2. Engineers
3. IT Staff
4. Sales Representatives
5. Accounting/Finance Staff
6. Drivers
7. Mechanics
8. Nurses
9. Machinists/Machine Operators
10. Teachers

We need employees in eight out of the 10 hardest jobs to fill, not just mechanics. We simply cannot continue to approach the business and employee development as we always have. Employee Development is not an expense that gives the employee assets that they can take elsewhere. It is a necessity for your business to be able to succeed.

I believe that the evidence is very clear. Not having the correct number of employees with the right skills is currently inhibiting each and every dealership in their growth right now – today. So, the conclusion that I have come to, and many others have as well, is that you must develop your own employees. You can no longer rely on your ability to hire someone with the skills you need when you need them. It is truly disappointing to hear executives say if they need different skills, they will replace the current employees with people who know what to do. The world is changing too quickly for that kind of thinking.

Did you know that our training courses are offered in English, Spanish and French?

Finding Your Leaders

For management and supervision this becomes even more significant and important if not critical. Your leaders will all be subject matter experts. They will have related experience in specific job functions relating to their field of expertise. They will have earned the respect and trust of their followers through their actions in previous work.

Today, however, you must start the search for employees who are a “good fit” for your company much earlier in the lives of the potential employee. In some cases, this is as early as middle school, if not the end of elementary school. To work with high school guidance counselors, while important, is now almost too late. This means building relationships with your local schools.

It also means that you must start to work with and understand the value of “career assessment.” Career assessments will help you identify personal strengths and preferences and match them to potential career and job opportunities. By now it should be clear why we need to have job function definitions and descriptions

down to the level of personal attributes of successful candidates.

Harvard University psychologist Howard Gartner stated “The single most important contribution education can make to a child’s development is to help him toward a field where his talents best suit him, where he will be satisfied and competent.”

This is very significant and quite different than the goals that the education system operates within today. To assist the potential employee, employer and student there is a job tool available at Career Outlook called the “Interest Profiler,” which will help you understand this process and the ultimate solutions for each student and potential employee. This tool helps individuals find out what their interests are and how they relate to specific occupations. I hope I am leading you to the conclusion that the selection of a supervisor or manager is not a hit or miss proposition but is a well calibrated process that matches the employees’ interests and competencies with the needs of the job.

When I was working at Hewitt Equipment and also Finning Tractor & Equipment, the companies had a program where they hired what I will call interns. These young men and women were between their last two years in college studying engineering, science or business. The dealership would employ these people and use the summer period as a time to screen them for their interests and personal attributes. In those days, the scientific evaluation tools were not available. These potential employees would start in the warehouse picking and receiving parts, and this job function would screen out nearly half of the candidates. It was a job function much below their self-image and interest. One of the most important attributes that we need in our leaders is what has been called “a servant’s heart;” we want individuals who are not above doing any task that helps others. Customer service, after all, is our primary objective, isn’t it?

Demographics

One more thing to consider is the changing demographics of the workplace. Between the years 2010 and 2030, 79 million people in the U.S. will be retiring and leaving the workforce. Where will all the employees come from to replace the skills and experiences of these people? Is our current education system providing these talents and skills? Unfortunately, we all know the answer to that question.

So, what is it we have to do? We have to work with the educators and the students, determine which students have the aptitudes and attitudes that we require, and

start these individuals working with you earlier than has previously been the case. Have them work after school, on school holidays, during the summers. Match each of them up with mentors. Then create a specific plan for each individual employee that matches their interests and competencies. Yes, this is a much more difficult task and much more diligence will be required to operate it. But it is necessary.



Consider the fact that the retiring workers are much more educated than past retirees; as a result, we are very likely to be adding many less-educated workers than we lost to retirement unless we act and prepare ourselves. Additionally, as you review the current labor market you will find that despite the high level of unemployment it is more and more difficult to find the right candidates for a range of skilled positions.

In 2011, Manpower, one of the largest staffing firms in the world stated, “the world stands on the brink of a global employability crisis.” Then in 2012, they warned for the seventh year in a row the world faced an acute talent mismatch. Yet only 25 percent of the employers were addressing skill shortages through employee training and education.

We are now critically short of what Peter Drucker called “knowledge technologists.” I call them managers and supervisors.

Competing For a Smaller Pool

For a considerable period of time the business competition for scarce talent will be unprecedented. Companies large and small will be hard-pressed to find good employees and retain them. Salaries and wages, which have so far in this recovery been kept in line with the past, are about to explode in the competition to obtain the right people with the right skills. This will be a fools’ errand. At some point, businesses will come to realize that employee development and training is the proper and correct answer to the skills shortage dilemma.

This employee development will rely on the definitions of the requirements of each job function. It will require a skills inventory of the current employees. A specific development plan for each employee will need to be created and followed. This plan will be adjusted frequently as the employee grows in his or her skills.

Save Yourself

The quick, the cheap, and the easy, drive most business talent development strategies. The weakest link in this business culture fantasy is the continuing focus on outside hiring to get the skills the business needs. I contend that we must develop the personnel that the business needs internally.

It is work, but it should be done now.

Create a profile for each job function and task that you have in your company. Find a reputable source to use for career profiling and personnel evaluation. Develop an ability to annually obtain the skill sets of each employee in your company. Develop a career development plan for each employee. From this it will become clearer which ones have the aptitude and competencies for promotion to management and supervisory positions.

Get involved with the local educators at the middle school and high school levels, not just technical schools and universities. What I am describing here are the tools that you will need to succeed in the coming decades. If you decide to change your approach to personnel development, thus adapting to the new reality, you will succeed in an increasingly complex and demanding business climate. If you don't change, you will face an ever-increasing risk to your business. The choice is yours.

Class References

[Management](#) | [Customer Loyalty](#) | [What's Your Why](#)

Learning Without Scars



As a third-generation educator, it is easy to say that teaching and training are in the blood for Ron Slee. From his beginnings as a coach, through his time at McGill University, Ron developed a foundation for the work he does today.

Learning Without Scars provides comprehensive online learning programs for employees starting with an individualized skills assessment. These assessments allow us to then create a personalized employee development program. From their assessed skills, the employee is asked to select from classes designed for their skill level which allow them to address the gaps in their knowledge level. This allows the employees to move through four progressive categories of learning: Basic, Intermediate, Advanced and Expert.



We have numerous contributors to our 'Socrates Says' blog from all over the world covering a range of topics. There is industry specific contributions and we are sure you will find something that is relevant to your job. Please see our website for more details.



We have a range of podcasts for your listening pleasure. Please visit our website to discover a series of Candid Conversations with industry leaders and experts, Class overviews to learn more about our online education, Lessons Learned in teaching and podcasts on general topics of interest.



This quarterly newsletter is offered for free. Please visit our website to sign up to receive industry specific information in areas such as parts, service and sales. We highlight some of the issues people face in their jobs. We ask that you share this newsletter with your peers.



Your opinion is important to us! We are always looking to help people through engaging material. If you have a question or a specific topic you would like us to cover in a future newsletter, please email Ron ron@learningwithoutscars.com

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