

Managing an express chain *Part 2*

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Feature

Keeping up with the flow and managing your staff.

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This article is the second in a two-part series that focuses on the management of multiple express carwashes. The first article appeared in the October 2008 issue and covered the definition, the equipment and upkeep involved with a multi-site operation. This article focuses on the production flow and management required for success.

At a management program that I conducted last year, an area manager for an express exterior carwash chain with several of their locations washing over 200,000 cars a year made a statement that many people in the room, especially new operators, were stunned to hear.

He stated that the skill of the carwash attendant in processing vehicles during a busy hour could make as much as a 50 percent difference in the volume of vehicles making it through the wash. In the ensuing discussion, what became clear was that there are many small details that make a difference for one attendant to process a high volume of vehicles.

Maximizing the production flow

Some of the factors that impact on the speed of vehicle processing are:

- How quickly an attendant checks out the potential safety issues, like items in an open truck bed or pre-existing vehicle damage;
- The effective use of hand signals to the customers to guide them onto the conveyor quickly and correctly;
- How closely the vehicles are positioned on the conveyor; and
- How quickly customers who are stepping on their brakes and causing the vehicles to jump the rollers can be corrected, etc.

To maximize the production flow, all of the above situations, and more, have to be spelled out in detail in writing as to how they are to be handled. People then need to be properly trained and, most importantly, held accountable to follow those procedures.

In addition to the primary service attendant at the entrance to the tunnel, on a busy day a manager or another attendant can increase the production flow by being at the pay terminals assisting customers and moving them through the gates more quickly. In fact, there are several express exterior chains that have an additional person stationed at the pay terminals promoting extra services as well as training customers and moving them through the payment process more quickly.

Even in slower, seasonal periods, certain busy hours of the day may get manned by the

manager or by attendants with overlapping shifts.

Regular performance checks improve flow

The manager above the location level needs to conduct performance checks periodically by visiting the site before opening to observe the maintenance being followed, by staying there during the busy times to see that production flow is maximized, and after a site closes by observing the cleaning process.

Although a certain amount of weekly monitoring is always important, the key to optimize site performance is to ensure that the location manager is a good fit for the job, well-trained, and is both motivated and held accountable for results.

Hiring the right personalities

Half of the success of any person in any job is being correctly matched to a position involving work that they want to perform every day. To accomplish a good match there are four components to the process that need to be addressed:

- A written job description is needed;
- A personal profile of the type of individual that matches that job is needed;
- A way is needed to assess individuals from outside or inside the company to see if they fit the profile; and
- An effective interview needs to be conducted.

One of the ways that companies use to match people to the job description for a manager is to have applicants complete a psychological profile that delivers a written assessment describing their strengths and basic character traits.

If handled properly, this process can significantly increase the manager's success rate for a very simple reason: People who are in positions that personally fit who they are and what they really want to do usually do a better job.

Training from within

Once the people have been identified who fit the position of running an express exterior carwash, the next part is to make sure that they are properly trained. The training process will be different if it is someone who has been promoted from within versus someone who has been hired from outside the industry.

For most express exterior carwashes, just like other carwashes, the management is promoted from within the organization once a first location has been established. Although an existing employee is familiar with the basic job duties at their level, a person still has to be oriented to the new position, as well as trained on any areas that they were not responsible for at the employee level.

In a perfect world assistant managers would be the only ones promoted to site managers, and they would already be trained on everything that the location manager needed to know. However, there are always some gaps in knowledge, and these areas need to be covered in order to give the new manager every opportunity for success.

Training from outside

Managers entering the industry with prior management experience but without the knowledge of the carwash business present an entirely different situation. There are two primary issues for these new managers.

First, most people really have no idea what it is like to run a carwash until they actually do it. That's why the assessment process can cut down the recruiting mistakes made because it screens out the people who do not by their nature fit the job.

The second issue is equipment. The training required here is much more complex than most organizations are able to provide in a few weeks' time. Most of the time new managers from outside the industry learn the equipment the hard way over a long period of time.

What most people new to the industry really need is a formal, structured training program. As an example of the type of program needed, there is a CarWash College™ in Florida that conducts weeklong programs in preventive maintenance and carwash equipment repair. Programs such as these train managers in days what it would take for them to learn on their own over many months of ongoing operations.

After a manager is trained, the last part of the equation is that they have to be motivated and held accountable for their results, just like any other management situation. Express exterior carwashes are certainly easier to manage than a full-service carwash; however, they do have to be managed and they have their own special requirements.

*Steve Gaudreau is a 20-year industry veteran and has published a new book entitled *So, You Want to Own a Carwash: Finding and Evaluating Retail Sites for Carwashes*. This book is available through Professional Carwashing & Detailing's bookstore. To order your copy, please visit www.cminstitute.net. Gaudreau can be reached at steve.gaudreau@hotmail.com.*