



IS MY STORY YOUR STORY?

***“We have to make
our stuff WORK in
today’s economy
and PROVE
IT in our shop
every day...”***



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The Beginning...

I started out on the evening shift as an apprentice mechanic and gas pump jockey in a little 2-bay gas station in Littleton, Colorado. I went to automotive trade school in the mornings and had to work nights to support my wife and child. I loved working on cars and learning. As my skills grew so did my confidence and value to the business.

After a few months I found a better job near our apartment. It was a 3- bay service station in a growing area. I worked there as a mechanic until I finished school, then went into the U. S. Marine Corps. Upon my return I worked for two more years as the head tech and then bought the business from my retiring boss.

Over the next ten years I learned many great lessons – some of them hard. My inexperience and young age led to many mistakes. Being an overly trusting and naïve person didn't help either. I was full of energy and optimism but didn't have the wisdom to channel or bridle my direction or drive. I knew I needed better management skills so I hired "professional experts" to help me. I also tried to tap into a few reputable trainers. These people then began to "advise" me on how to grow and expand my business and investments.

Whether it was regarding my shop, or my other business endeavors and assets, every time I was ready to make the next move, the consultants, bankers, accountants, and attorneys were all there cheering me on and telling me how smart I was. I made some amazing money in the late '70s. However, in the early '80s I learned some things I was not prepared for.

“I learned many great lessons – some of them hard.”

The Downfall...

After amassing a small fortune in assets, 1981 brought recession, high interest rates, and other trauma. It was more like the Great Depression for me. One by one, I lost my holdings. Finally, it came down to losing our home, then the cars, and then my ownership of the original service station. My wife was able to retain her ownership, but I had to sell my 50% to our manager.

I ended up losing everything – my empire, my toys, and my pride. I really didn't want to live. I was so depressed I couldn't work. I nearly lost my family – my beautiful wife and two children. As much as I was suffering, it was even worse for them. Fear of the unknown and the loss of trust in me was devastating to them. I believed they would be better off getting away from a loser like me. But for some reason, they stuck with me. Finally, I cranked up my guts and returned to work turning wrenches for my wife and former employee. Over time, I regained some drive and discipline. However, the hole I had dug was so deep that it took me more than ten years just to start seeing daylight.

I had plenty of time to analyze and see what had happened. I took full responsibility for my stupid decisions.

I also understood that all those so-called professional consultants – the business consultants, the CPAs, the attorneys, the brokers, the bankers – all got paid whenever I made that next move, that next investment in improving my businesses or assets. They got paid whether I made any money or not! They got paid even though none of them had EVER actually DONE what I was doing. And they certainly did not have their own butts on the line, nor were they in my BUSINESS helping us then!

The hard lesson was that all THOSE CONSULTANTS WERE ON THE SIDELINES!

They weren't taking risks; they were just parasites – benefitting from my risk-taking and drive while having no risk or involvement. They did not have their own money in the game, *so they really never had to make sure that their advice to me was correct.* When it came time to reap the consequences of my bad decisions and their bad advice, they all but disappeared!

The Downfall...

Where was the INTEGRITY?

The sheer weight of my business failure, the loss of resources, the gossip about my failed enterprise, the fall from social grace...it was enough to choke anyone out.

Added to this, we now had 4 children to care for with newborn twins.

We rented a home, drove old cars, and had to bite and scratch our way along just to put food on the table. I used to be a very good, very fast tech. I was much younger then and hadn't had a butt-kicking that left me exhausted, ashamed, and beaten. Because of all those distractions, fatigue, and inefficiencies, I had to work 75 hours a week just to make ends meet. Somehow, we made it through those hard years. Eventually, we bought out our partner. Things began to improve some.

“I had to work 75 hours a week just to make ends meet.”

The Search...

Even though I thought I had learned my lesson about parasitic consultants and advisors, I knew I lacked the management skills to really take the shop to the next level. So, I continued to seek help. At one point, I was so desperate that I took a chance and hired a well-known and supposedly “reputable” business management consultant for my repair shop.

As it turned out, that accomplished two things:

- 1) It drained my bank account** - and when I realized they gave me nothing that helped me sustain improvement, I fired them.
- 2) It reconfirmed previous lessons about parasitic consultants.** I thought, “Never again would I trust anyone who did not have their own money in the game – who had nothing to lose if their advice did not work.”

I continued to search and attended many industry classes. Some suggested valuable ideas and principles. These were mostly taught by current shop owners who were in the trenches every day, just like me. However, most of the others were a waste of my time and money. These were taught by so-called gurus who had no skin in the game.

THEY HADN'T OWNED AND RUN A SUCCESSFUL SHOP in decades – IF EVER!

They were selling their “theories” and had ulterior motives for posturing themselves as “professional experts.” This is not uncommon...for individuals or companies to PURCHASE posture FROM industry associations, publications, and other powerful entities within an industry!

I'd been to *that* rodeo before!

I also tried collaborating with a few other shop owners around the country with 20 Groups and so on. Some of this interaction was helpful, but **MOST** of it was not applicable to finding the solutions I was seeking, and it was expensive and experimental at best. This is because **they were struggling in most of the same ways I was, or they didn't believe in the same ethics** I was trying to follow.

The Search...

It just didn't make sense to duplicate something a shop owner was doing that wasn't any more successful than what I was already doing.

When we computerized the shop, a whole new world opened up to me. For years, I had used simple hand-written grid sheets to track my numbers. Now I had reports I could study. The reports did not show all the numbers I wanted to see or display them in a way that helped me really "see" what was going on because they were written by some software developer or bean counter who had never run a shop and simply didn't know what was important and what was just useless fluff.

Soon, I was using Excel to display and analyze the important numbers in the shop on a daily basis. Since 1970, as a young technician, I understood the importance of measuring the right things and measuring them accurately. I also understood the process of comparing those measurements to a spec. or standard in order to determine what was wrong. That process was simple.

I had been searching for a set of repair shop benchmarks and the proper processes to meet those standards. **No one out there had this information readily available or deliverable in a way that my staff could train and sustain!** But that did not deter me from establishing my own specs and systems and seeking to verify those standards with someone WHO **KNEW WHAT THEY WERE DOING**. Over the next few years, I built a dozen spreadsheets that helped me track and measure the shop in very valuable ways. Understanding historical trends and future projections became a way of life.

In 1994, we moved from the 3-bay shop to an 11-bay shop – not because I wanted to, but because we lost our lease. This proved to be a huge challenge that almost ended in disaster. We almost sank the ship because of the larger size, the increased overhead, and more employees. *Most of the systems that worked in the 3-bay bogged us down or broke down completely in the larger shop.* Cash flow problems were exaggerated. Customer service suffered. **My personnel management skills were inadequate** for the larger crew we now had.

By now, I had made about every mistake you could make in a shop. I kept thinking, "When will all this trouble end...will it EVER end?"

The Solution...

Then, by sheer circumstance, we hired a 29-year-old kid as a service writer who was different than any employee I had ever seen. He immediately took responsibility for everything in his department and for his customers. Wow! That was new! 99% of the employees or hired professionals I had seen made a point of avoiding personal responsibility and accountability when things got tough or went wrong. They jumped at the chance to take full credit only when things turned out perfect.



Soon, David was making things run much smoother. He had a knack for understanding how people felt and what they wanted. He was great with the customers. Some of my techs really resisted his approach with them at first. Soon, however, most of them developed a respect for him because of his willingness to help them get their jobs done and make some money. They became willing to follow him because they came to trust him. A couple of hard-nosed techs didn't make it, but that turned out to be okay. We hired new ones that fit better into the new system David was training into our team.

He continued demonstrating loyalty to the company, the highest level of ethics, and a willingness to sacrifice for his customers and co-workers. In a short period of time, the business was finally making some money.

Because of the larger overhead and shop size, we knew we needed to grow sales. I was on my third high-powered advertising agency within the last year.

As it turned out, **none of them knew how to bring in the right customers** – ones who were **ready to buy and who wanted to be loyal.**

David suggested that he take a shot at creating and managing our advertising, and since he had done such a great job with our customer service, I let him go for it.

Again, the lesson of the parasitic consultant played out. Those three ad agencies and all our advertising vendors got paid on the money I spent, not on the effectiveness of their advertising. In fact, they all misled me about the definition of "effective" advertising. I discovered after wasting a lot of money that "RESPONSE" AND EVEN "MORE CARS" DOES NOT NECESSARILY MEAN IT WAS EFFECTIVE OR PROFITABLE!

The Solution...

David had good incentives built into his pay plan if the business grew and was profitable and sustainable.

In other words, HE HAD SKIN IN THE GAME!

The other huge factor was that he understood people. He knew how they felt when it came to buying auto repair. He understood their concerns and fears. His advertising approach addressed these things head-on. They began to really work.

We turned over all those no-value customers and brought in a whole new crop of the best customers I have ever seen!

Sales grew, profits grew, confidence grew, customer satisfaction grew, and employee morale grew.

WITHIN 3 1/2 YEARS, HE NEARLY TRIPLED THE REVENUES OF MY SHOP!

He has expanded our advertising strategies in important areas and completely stopped the ones that did not work. Our marketing and precise measurement program has continued to work in my shop for the last 12 years.

As management systems were trained, chaos disappeared, and happiness increased. Our management team and systems became so solid that my guys convinced me they could handle daily operations.

So I MOVED MY OFFICE TO MY HOME.

The Outcome...

David Rogers, by now our Chief Operating Officer and the rest of the crew were doing such a good job, one day, I said to him, "If we could package you and what you do and deliver it to others who are struggling, we could help a lot of people." That's when we went to work and started helping our fellow shop owners/managers. Within a year, David had replaced himself at the shop, and we became partners in Auto Profit Masters.

In 2006, we began a career-long dream of putting ALL of our measurement and management systems into an online software program that tracks trends projects, compares all the important numbers of repair shops daily, and then provides specific solutions for the problem areas. We've turned all these years of first-hand experiences and hard-earned lessons into the RPM Tool Kit™. Imagine a scan tool for your business crossed with the newest video game...plug it in, find the problems in your business

and get the exact solutions you need as you compete to be the best.

It's the most effective business management software out there along with the most accurate set of benchmarks and most precise trouble trees, repair solutions, and procedures – all just one click away!

It is the culmination of my 37 years in the business – I'm confident in calling it the most well-rounded, effective management and advertising system out there in our industry.

WE MEASURE, AND BENCHMARK THINGS NO ONE ELSE HAS EVEN THOUGHT ABOUT – VERY IMPORTANT AND **SIMPLE THINGS THAT MAKE IT EASY TO FIX YOUR SHOP!**

Now, lest you suspect I have forgotten the hard lessons about parasitic consultants or am somehow confused about what I am doing here today...let me say this! Remember the principle of having skin in the game?

Well, **we do have skin in the game!** WE STILL OPERATE OUR SHOP! We live it every day just like you do.

The Outcome...

We still own and run our shop. We still know what it's like to have 30+ employees' families depend on us. We still feel the pressure of having thousands of customers' families depend on us. Having our butts on the line makes us very careful and very sure of every move we make.

If we didn't still own our shop, we would have to rely on untested theories. We'd have to ask our clients to follow advice that we had no way of testing ourselves. Owning a shop makes us better consultants because it means we still have the knowledge and experience needed to run a shop today.

We have to make our stuff WORK in today's economy and PROVE IT in our shop every day. Only then do we teach our clients exactly how we do it and all the reasons why.

WE DON'T TEACH ANYTHING TO OTHERS WE DON'T DO OURSELVES AND DO SUCCESSFULLY!

Is my story *your* story?

There was a time when I couldn't make house payments – now, my grandchildren don't have to worry about paying for college. I once had to sell my cars – now my family spends summers on our houseboat on Lake Powell. Long ago, I lost my savings and had to start from scratch – now I sleep easy knowing that my retirement is assured.

Can your story be like my story? Do you want what I have? You can spend 30 years figuring it out on your own, or you can tap into what we have learned to do what we do.

Let us show you how.

Wishing you the best of luck,



Terry Keller