



CADEOC AWARDS



No magic recipe for cooking up employee morale

▲ **Lawrence Papoff**

MARKHAM, ONT. – The recipe for high employee morale at Town+Country BMW has many ingredients. Some are obvious. But there is no magic elixir.

If anyone is looking for the recipe, they won't find it in a book on dealer Jim Cochrane's desk or dealership general manager, Cynthia Cochrane-Little's desk either.

Cochrane-Little recalls the dealership was in need of a major renovation, in particular, the service department was painfully small.

"Techs were working until nine p.m. to get the work done. The wait times were frustrating for customers."

The logical solution was expansion, but expansion takes time. Planning began in 2009 with work starting in 2013.

The dealership moved to its present location on Kennedy Rd. in Markham, Ont., just north of Toronto in 2002.

The service department was finally able to meet staff's and customers' needs in October 2014. The department doubled in size; skylights let the sun in. The workbenches and all the equipment was state-of-the-art.

The parts department also got bigger.

But the reno didn't stop there. The new-car showroom grew to showcase 16 to 18 cars. They added a delivery bay or area with a three-car capacity and space to position 15 more waiting for their new

owners to drive them away.

The dealership also got its first BDC as part of the move away from the more traditional sales approach.

But what happened to morale in the mean time? Cochrane-Little says it flourished.

Cochrane-Little began working at her father's dealership in 2002 after graduating from Georgian College and working at General Motors Canada.

Measuring and fostering both customer and staff relations were some of her first assignments at the dealership.

"We did employee satisfaction surveys which asked staff what needed improving, including what would help the customers," she says.

The surveys, recommended by BMW,

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also asked staff what would help them work happier. They got requests to put a new coat of paint on their office.

Management consulted every member of staff, including car jockeys, when the reno plans were being drawn up. Suggestions included buying a golf cart to let the sales people tour the large facility – it covers seven acres – when they need to show customers a car. That became part of the plan.

"We encourage people to bring their problems to us. We have an open-door policy," she says.

That means staff trust that management will respond with insight.

She recalls a sales staffer whose totals began to slump. The sales person wasn't offered sales training. Instead, the manager offered the staffer a chance to talk, a shoulder to cry on, and found out the problem was at home.

Cochrane-Little says promoting from within gives staff an incentive to stay.

"Our turnover is low. We have sales reps who started as jockeys ... people who started as greeters are in admin or accounting. So just because you drive a car around doesn't mean that's all there is."

When someone starts at the dealership, she says, the new hire is made to feel part of the operation no matter where the job might rank on the dealership totem pole.

"We want to make sure every new employee gets an overview of our operation, right down to the car jockey.

"Vehicle orientation," she calls it.

"We have a staff of valet drivers. They pick up customers' cars for service and it's critical they know what to do if someone has a warning light on or a customer needs to pair their new phone with Bluetooth."

Does it work?

Yes, she insists.

"Current employees recommend working here. We have brothers, sisters and cousins working here."

Is there ROI?

Cochrane-Little points proudly to the fact that the dealership lead all BMW stores in Ontario in 2015 when it came to new sales and was the top dealership in Canada last year when it came to used sales.

"We were also number 1 in CSIs in Canada. BMW Canada came in with a cake and we had everyone share in that." **AW**

Best practices:

- Promote from within.
- When you make changes, encourage staff to take part.
- Keep an open door policy. Encourage staff to come to you or their department manager with problems.
- Share the good news – a birth or graduation – and the bad – a death in a staffer's family and be sure to send a card.
- Ask staff what they find good and bad about their work and how they would have it improved.
- When a staff member earns praise from a customer, share the praise.
- Share the product knowledge. Your car jockey should know as much about the cars they drive as the sales people.

Town+Country BMW by the numbers

STAFF: **200**

TOTAL AREA OCCUPIED: **7 ACRES**

BUILDING SIZE: **92,000 SQ. FT.**

TOTAL NEW SOLD IN 2015: **1,635**

TOTAL USED SOLD IN 2015: **635**

