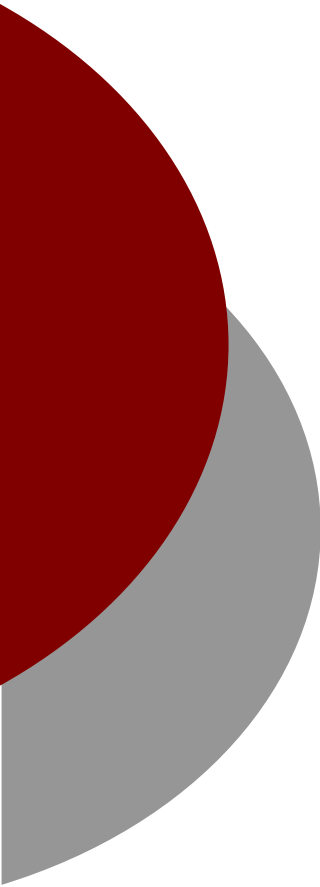




Leading People, Managing Risk

What Today's Dealership Leaders Need to Know
Practical Leadership for a Fast-Paced Dealership Environment

This Is Not an HR Class

This is about what actually happens in dealerships every day.

Fast pace. Strong personalities. Big opinions. High pressure. Thin margins. Customers waiting.

The best dealership leaders know how to drive results without creating chaos.

The goal is simple: lead people, solve problems early, create accountability, and know when to pause before a decision turns into a bigger issue.

What Makes Dealership Leadership Different



The environment moves quickly and decisions happen in real time.



Sales, service, parts, finance, accounting, BDC, inventory, and management all depend on one another.



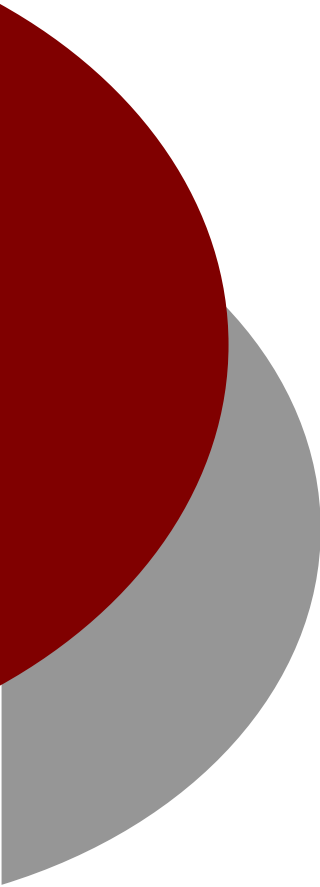
One missed handoff can affect a customer, a deal, a repair order, a survey, or a paycheck.



Employees often have strong opinions about how things should be done.

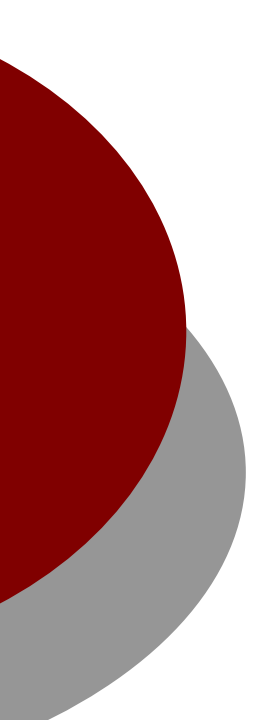


A leader's job is not to eliminate personality—it is to channel it into performance.



1. Dealership Leadership Reality Check

Leadership in a dealership is not theoretical. It happens in real time.



The Dealership Pressure Cooker

A customer is waiting.

A vehicle is not ready.

The RO is wrong.

The deal jacket is incomplete.

The salesperson promised something service cannot deliver.

The technician is frustrated.

The manager is pulled in five directions.

This is where leadership either shows up—or breaks down.

Good Leaders Reduce Noise



They do not add drama to an already fast environment.



They do not make every issue personal.



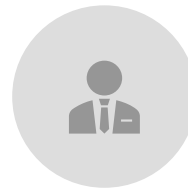
They separate urgency from panic.



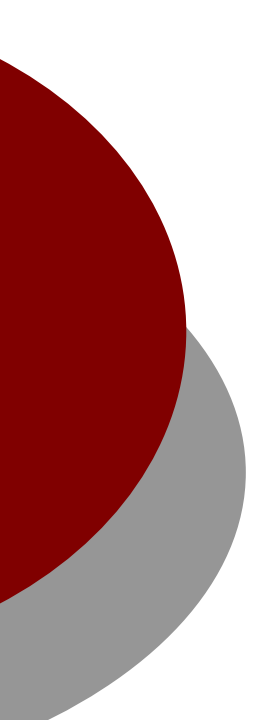
They keep people focused on the next right action.



They hold standards without creating unnecessary conflict.



They make it easier for employees to do the right thing.



The New Leader Mindset

You are no longer just responsible for your own numbers.



You are responsible for how your team gets results.



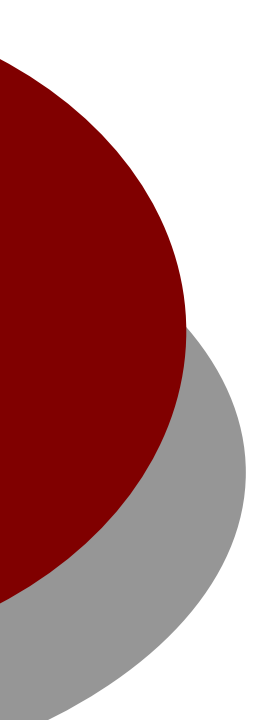
You set the tone for what is normal, acceptable, and tolerated.



Your reactions matter as much as your instructions.



Your team will copy what you reward, what you ignore, and what you excuse.



Leadership Is Not Being Liked All the Time

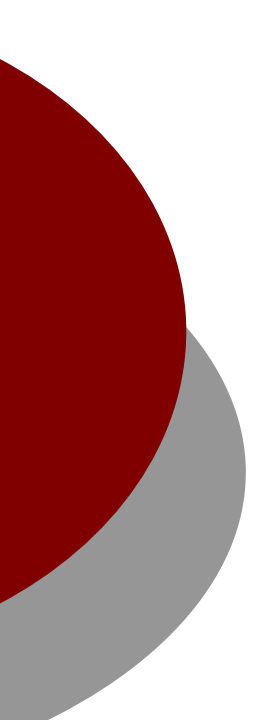
You can be respected without being everyone's favorite person.

You can be direct without being disrespectful.

You can be fair without giving everyone the answer they wanted.

You can care about employees and still hold them accountable.

The goal is not popularity. The goal is trust, clarity, and follow-through.



Culture Is What Managers Allow

The employee who is a top producer does not get a separate behavior policy.



The longtime technician does not get a free pass to harass the new hire.



The sales manager who “gets results” still has to treat people professionally.



If leaders laugh, ignore, or participate, employees reasonably assume the behavior is accepted.

The Difference Between a Boss and a Leader



A boss reacts. A leader responds.



A boss blames. A leader clarifies ownership.



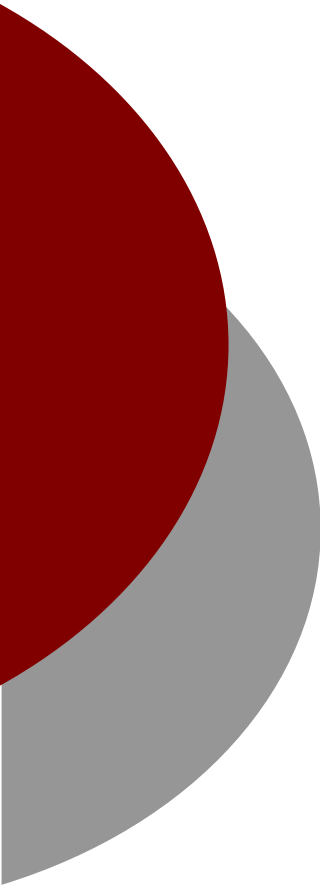
A boss avoids difficult people. A leader addresses behavior.



A boss talks about accountability. A leader follows through.



A boss says, “That is just how dealerships are.” A leader says, “That is not how we are going to operate.”



2. Personality, Attitude & Communication

Strong personalities are normal. Unprofessional behavior is not.

Dealerships Have Big Personalities



High-energy salespeople



Direct service managers



Detail-oriented accounting staff



Technicians who want facts, not speeches



BDC employees juggling volume and expectations



Finance managers under pressure to move quickly and accurately



Different styles are not the problem. Poor behavior is the problem.

Personality Is Not an Excuse



“That is just how he is” is not a management strategy.



“She is always like that” is not accountability.



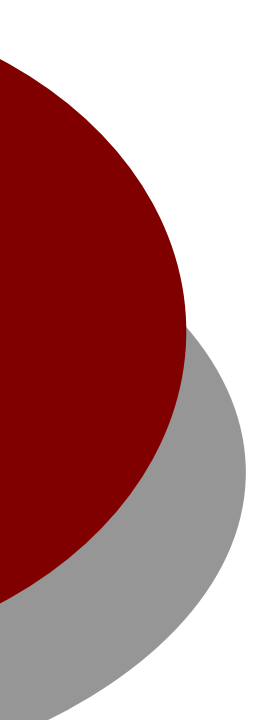
“He sells a lot of cars” does not excuse disrespect.



“They are under pressure” does not excuse yelling, insults, or refusing to cooperate.



Leaders manage behavior—not personality labels.



Attitude: What Are We Actually Talking About?

Attitude is hard to manage when it stays vague.

Translate “bad attitude” into specific behavior.

Examples:

- Rolling eyes and walking away when given direction
- Refusing to help another department during a handoff
- Sarcastic comments in front of employees or customers
- Complaining but offering no solutions
- Ignoring follow-up requests or deadlines

The Opinion Problem



Dealership employees often have strong opinions because they know the work.



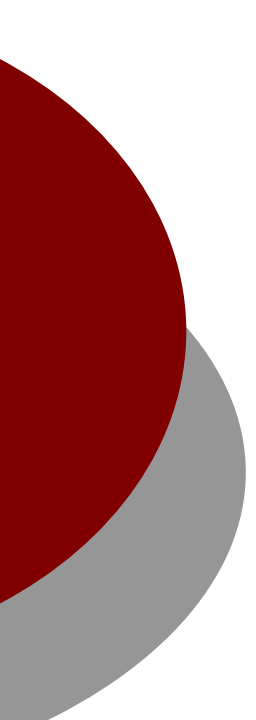
Opinions can improve the process when they are shared professionally.



Opinions create problems when they become resistance, gossip, or refusal to follow direction.



A leader should create room for input—but be clear when the decision has been made.



A Practical Script for Strong Opinions

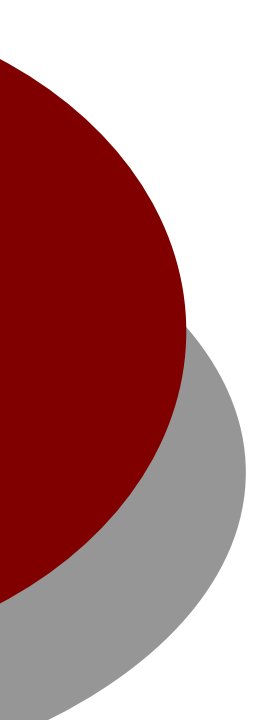
“I want your input
before we decide.”

“Tell me what you are
seeing that I may be
missing.”

“Here is the decision
and why we are going
this direction.”

“You do not have to
love the decision, but I
do need you to support
it professionally.”

“If it is not working,
bring me facts and a
proposed fix.”



Communication Breakdowns That Hurt the Store

Sales promises something service cannot deliver.

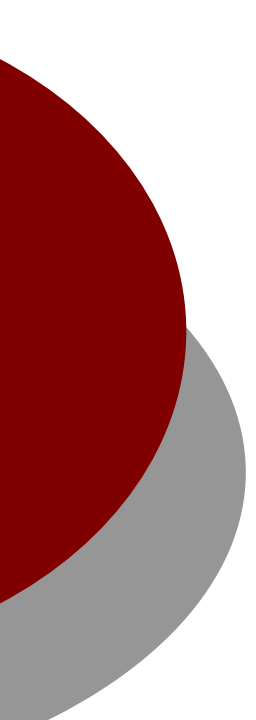
Service blames sales in front of the customer.

Accounting gets incomplete paperwork and becomes the “bad guy.”

BDC schedules without knowing capacity.

Parts delays are not communicated until the customer is already upset.

Everyone is busy, but nobody owns the handoff.



Real Leadership Language

Instead of: “Get your act together.”

Say: “The deal jacket must be complete before it goes to accounting. Missing signatures delay funding and create rework.”

Instead of: “Stop being negative.”

Say: “Bring the concern with one possible solution. Repeating the same complaint without action is not helping the team.”

Instead of: “Figure it out.”

Say: “Here is the outcome I need, here is the deadline, and here is where you have authority to decide.”

Tone Travels Fast



A leader's tone can calm the lane, the tower, the service drive, or the office.



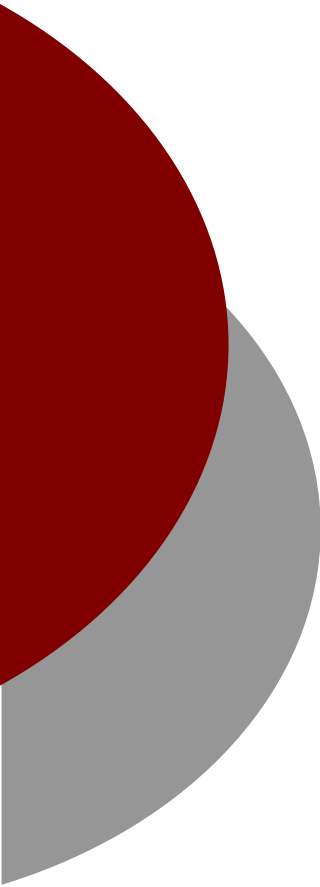
A leader's tone can also escalate the entire store.



People may forget the exact words, but they remember whether they felt blamed, embarrassed, ignored, or supported.



Fast-paced does not have to mean disrespectful.



3. Accountability Without Micromanaging

Accountability means people know what they own and what happens when they do not own it.

What Accountability Is



Clear expectations



Clear ownership



Clear deadlines



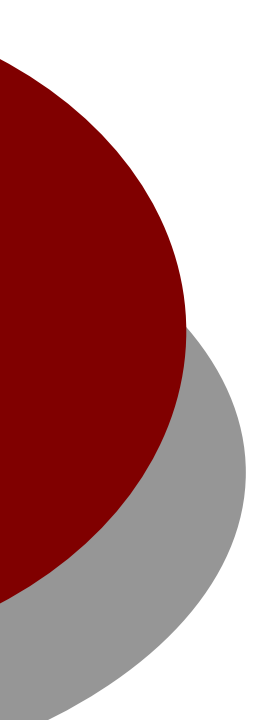
Clear communication when something changes



Clear follow-up



Clear consequences when the same issue keeps happening



What Accountability Is Not

Hovering over
every task

Yelling after
something goes
wrong

Only holding
lower performers
accountable

Letting top
performers do
whatever they
want

Changing the
standard
depending on who
is involved

Doing the
employee's job
because it is faster

The Ownership Question

? For every recurring problem, ask:

🔔 Who owns this step?

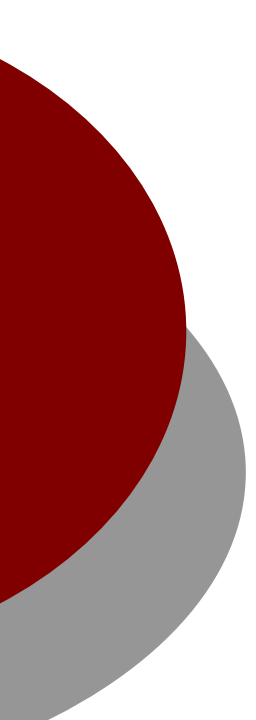
🔍 What does done look like?

📅 When is it due?

🔗 How will we know it is complete?

⌚ What should happen if there is a delay?

📞 Who needs to be notified before the customer is affected?



Initiative: What Leaders Actually Want

Employees who see the next step without being chased.

Employees who raise problems early, not after the deadline passes.

Employees who bring solutions, not just complaints.

Employees who understand how their work affects the customer and the store.

Employees who act within their authority and ask for help when the issue is outside their lane.

Why Employees Do Not Take Initiative



They do not know what they are allowed to decide.



They got criticized the last time they tried.



They have learned that managers will fix everything.



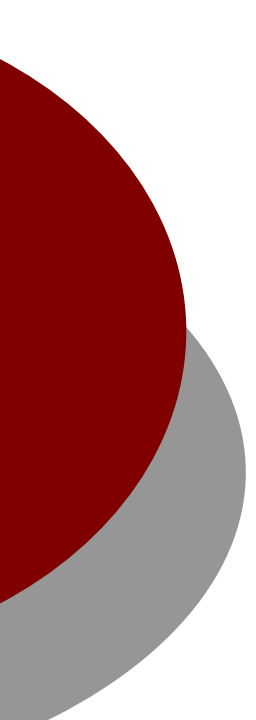
They do not understand the impact of the delay.



They are afraid of being wrong.



They are disengaged, overwhelmed, or not being held accountable.



Create Boundaries for Initiative

What can
employees decide
without approval?

What must be
escalated?

When should they
act first and report
later?

When should they
pause and ask?

What customer-
impact issues
need immediate
attention?

What dollar
limits, policy
limits, or safety
limits apply?

The Initiative Script



“I do not expect you to have every answer.”



“I do expect you to think through the next step.”



“When you bring me a problem, bring me what you know, what you tried, and one possible solution.”



“If it affects the customer, money, safety, pay, or a complaint, escalate it quickly.”

Accountability in a Fast-Paced Store



Be clear before the rush starts.



Use quick check-ins, not long speeches.



Confirm who owns the handoff.



Follow up the same day when possible.



Address patterns, not just one bad day.



Do not let “we were busy” become the default excuse for repeated breakdowns.

When “Busy” Becomes an Excuse



Everyone is busy.



The question is whether the required work still happened.



If the standard cannot be met because of staffing, process, tools, or capacity, fix the system.



If the standard could be met but someone did not follow through, address the behavior.



Good leaders know the difference.

High Performer Accountability



High performers influence culture more than anyone else.



If they are allowed to break rules, others will follow or disengage.



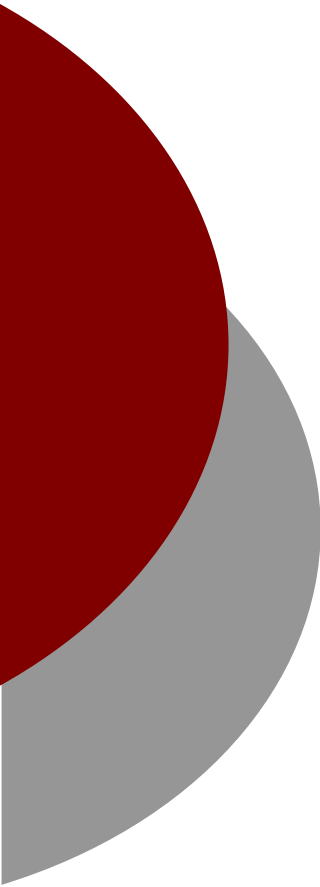
A salesperson with great numbers but poor teamwork still creates cost.



A technician with strong production but constant conflict still creates turnover.



Accountability must apply to results and behavior.



4. Coaching in the Moment

The best coaching is clear, quick, and close to the issue.

Do Not Wait Until Everyone Is Mad



Small coaching moments prevent big blowups.



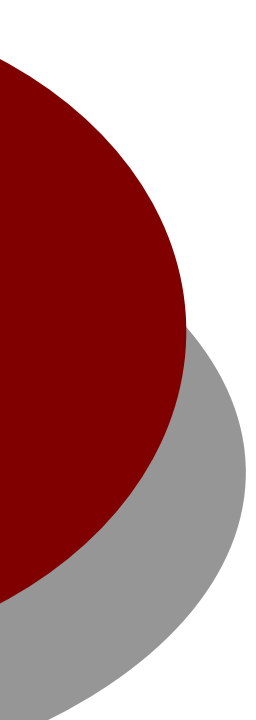
If you see a pattern starting, address it early.



If you are complaining about an employee more than coaching them, that is a leadership problem.



The conversation you avoid today becomes the behavior you tolerate tomorrow.



A Simple Coaching Framework

Name the
issue.

Connect it to
the business
impact.

Ask what
happened.

Clarify the
expectation.

Agree on the
next action.

Follow up.

Example: Service Drive Coaching



“When the customer update is late, the advisor takes the heat even if the delay started elsewhere.”



“What happened with this RO?”



“Going forward, if the vehicle will not be ready by 4:00, the advisor needs that update by 2:30.”



“Let’s check the next three late jobs this week and make sure the update happens earlier.”

Example: Sales Floor Coaching

“When you promise delivery before finance and service confirm timing, it creates a customer issue the rest of the team has to fix.”

“I understand you were trying to close the deal.”

“Going forward, confirm delivery timing before you promise it.”

“If the customer pushes, bring a manager in before making the commitment.”

Example: Accounting Handoff Coaching



“When paperwork comes in incomplete, funding slows down and accounting becomes the cleanup crew.”



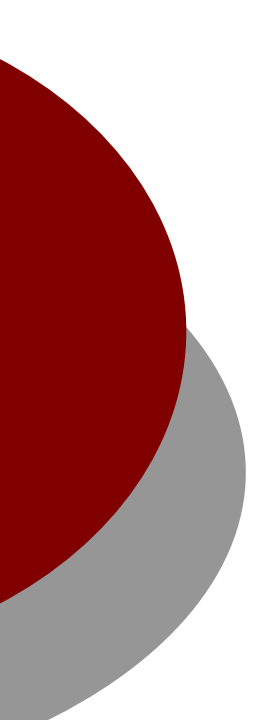
“This is the third missing signature this week.”



“Before turning in the deal, use the checklist and verify the signature page.”



“If there is pressure to rush it through, escalate before submitting an incomplete jacket.”



Coaching Is Not a Debate Club

Listen	Listen to the employee's explanation.
Correct	Correct any facts that are wrong.
Be	Be open to process issues that need fixing.
Do not let	But do not let the conversation become a circular argument.
End	End with the expectation, the action, and the follow-up.

The Follow-Up Is the Accountability

If you never follow up, employees learn the issue was not that important.

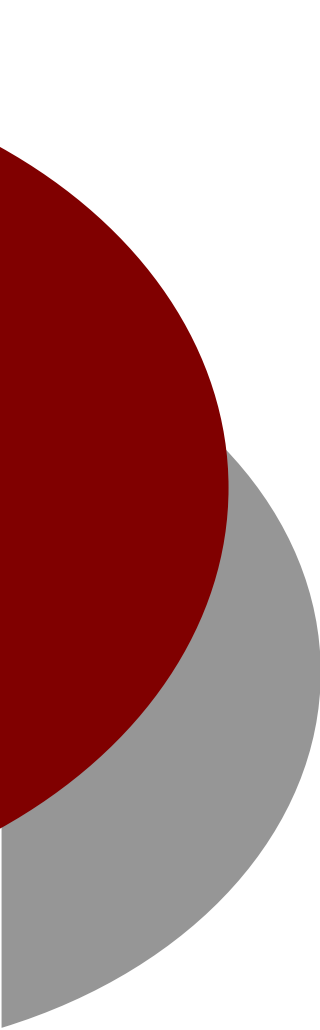
Follow-up can be quick:

Small follow-up creates serious accountability.

“Did the update go out by 2:30 today?”

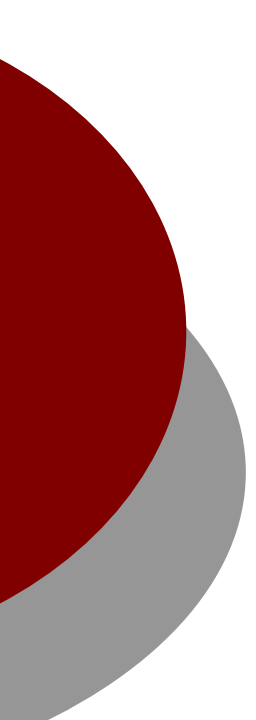
“Did the deal jacket checklist get completed?”

“Did you speak directly with parts before calling the customer?”



5. Drama, Gossip & Resistance

The dealership grapevine moves faster than any official announcement.



Drama Costs Money

It slows decisions.

It damages trust
between departments.

It distracts strong
employees.

It makes new
employees question the
culture.

It turns small issues
into store-wide
narratives.

It creates a place where
people talk about
problems instead of
solving them.

Do Not Feed the Grapevine



Do not vent about one employee to another employee.



Do not share confidential management discussions.



Do not complain about leadership decisions in front of your team.



Do not participate in group-chat pile-ons.



Leaders can listen to concerns without joining the noise.

The Complaint Filter



Is this a real issue or just frustration?



Is there a customer, safety, pay, legal, or policy concern?



Is the employee asking for help or just recruiting agreement?



Does this need coaching, process improvement, HR involvement, or a direct conversation?



What outcome would actually fix the issue?

Handling the Chronic Complainer



Listen once for the real issue.



Ask what outcome they want.



Ask what solution they suggest.



Set a standard for professional communication.



Do not reward repeated complaining with endless attention.



Hold them accountable for their role in solving or escalating appropriately.

Handling Resistance to Change



Explain the why.



Acknowledge what is hard about the change.



Clarify what is not optional.



Ask what support is needed.



Address behavior if disagreement turns into refusal, sabotage, or negativity.



Do not confuse input with permission to opt out.

When Opinions Turn Into Undermining



Healthy: “I see a problem with this process. Can we talk through a better way?”



Unhealthy: “This place has no idea what it is doing.”



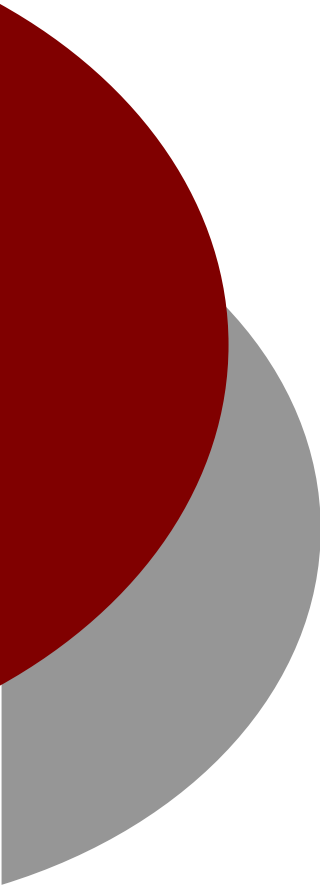
Healthy: “I disagree, but I will support the decision.”



Unhealthy: “I am going to do it my way because management does not get it.”



Leaders should allow input and stop undermining.



6. Cross-Department Leadership

The customer experiences one dealership, not separate departments.

Department Silos Create Customer Problems



Sales blames service.



Service blames parts.



Accounting blames sales.



BDC blames managers.



Managers blame employees.



The customer does not care whose fault it is. They care whether the dealership fixes it.

Lead the Handoff



Who owns the next step?



What information must be passed along?



What is the deadline?



What should happen if the deadline cannot be met?



Who tells the customer?



What gets documented?

Real-World Handoff Example



Sales promises accessories before delivery.



Parts does not have them.



Service cannot install before the customer arrives.



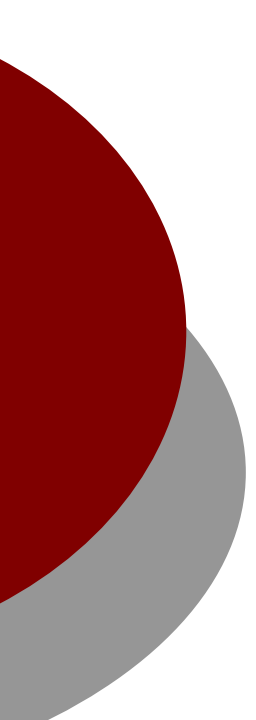
The customer is angry.



Leadership question: Where did the handoff fail?



Better process: no promise until availability, installation timing, and ownership are confirmed.



How Leaders Stop the Blame Loop

Ask	Ask what happened, not who we can blame.
Identify	Identify the process breakdown.
Clarify	Clarify the next owner.
Fix	Fix the customer issue first.
Address	Address the employee accountability issue second.
Change	Change the process if the same issue keeps repeating.

The Best Dealership Leaders Think Store-Wide



They understand how one department's shortcut becomes another department's emergency.



They do not protect their own department at the expense of the store.



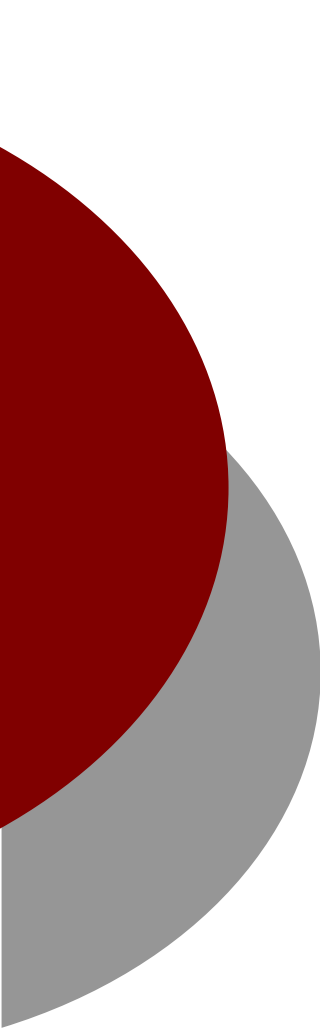
They train employees to think about the customer journey.



They expect speed and accuracy.

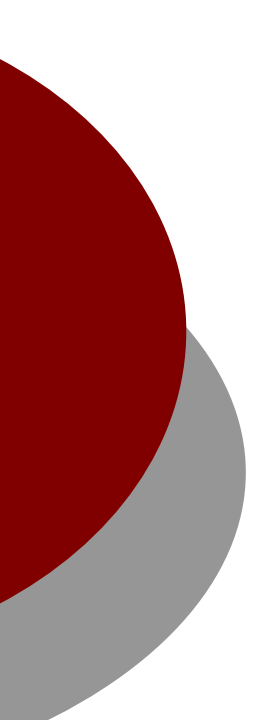


They reward collaboration, not just individual wins.



7. Risk Without Making It an HR Lecture

Some issues require a leadership pause.



The Leadership Pause

Most issues can be handled directly by a good manager.



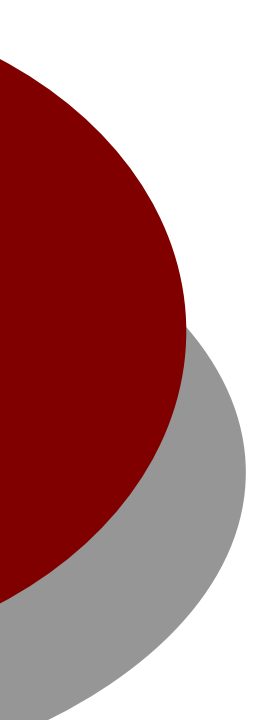
Some issues need a pause before action.



Pause when the issue involves complaints, pay, leave, medical concerns, harassment, discrimination, retaliation, threats, safety, or termination.



A pause is not weakness. It is disciplined leadership.



Know When to Call HR

An employee complains about harassment, discrimination, unfair treatment, or retaliation.

An employee mentions a medical condition, pregnancy, leave, accommodation, or injury.

There is a pay, timekeeping, commission, or off-the-clock work issue.

Employees are discussing pay, schedules, staffing, or working conditions as a group.

You are considering serious discipline or termination.

You are not sure whether the situation is routine or risky.

Why Documentation Still Matters



Documentation is not about being corporate.



It is about remembering what happened, what was expected, and what was communicated.



It protects consistency.



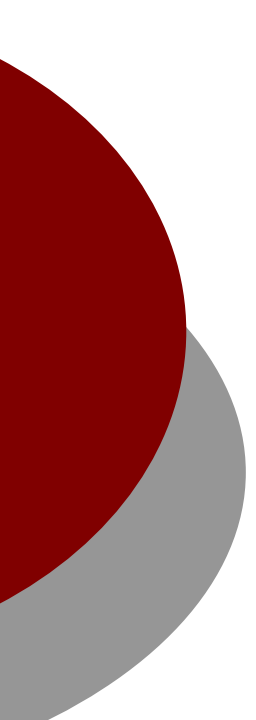
It helps the next manager understand the history.



It separates facts from emotion.



It makes accountability real.



Document Like a Leader

What happened?

When did it happen?

What standard applied?

What was the impact?

What did the employee say?

What needs to change?

When will we follow up?

The DRIVE Framework



D — Define the expectation.



R — Respond early before the issue becomes culture.



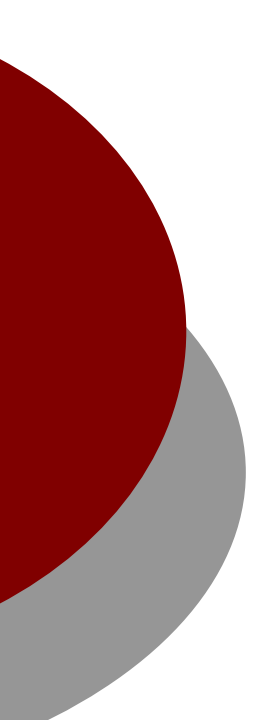
I — Insist on ownership and initiative.



V — Verify consistency before making major decisions.



E — Explain, document, and follow through.



Final Takeaways

Dealership leadership is fast, practical, and people-heavy.

Strong personalities are normal; disrespect is not.

Opinions are useful when they help solve problems.

Initiative requires clear authority and follow-up.

Accountability applies to performance and behavior.

The best leaders reduce noise, create ownership, and keep people focused on the customer and the business.

Questions & Discussion



Where do employees in your dealership most often avoid ownership?



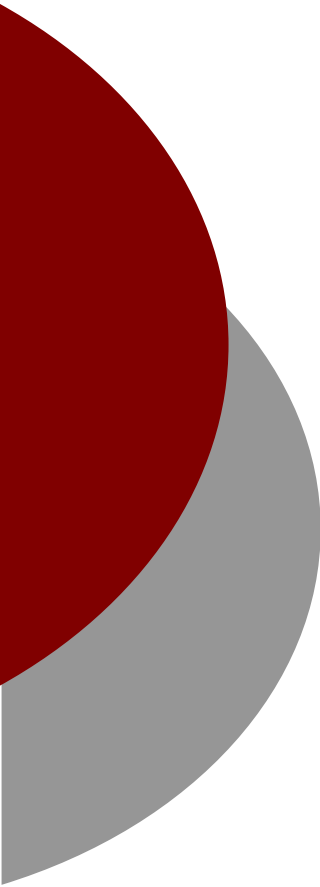
What behavior gets excused because someone is a high performer?



Where does the store lose time because of poor handoffs?



What is one thing you can do this week to lead more clearly?



Program Conclusion

“Thank you for your attention and participation”

Ms. Jamie M. Hasty, Vice President

