

AN EXCERPT FROM....

MRAA  
rewards



Marine Retailers Association of the Americas

---

# THE GUIDE TO DEALERSHIP IMPROVEMENT

---

***Inside:** The tools, strategies and resources  
to create a culture of continuous improvement*

Made possible by Bill and Kristin Fenech of Barletta Boat Company



## How to Improve

Any effort you make to develop your team will inevitably have a positive impact. If nothing else, it will demonstrate that you, as an owner or manager, care about the growth of your team and that you're willing to invest in their development, even if that's just an investment of time.

However, as part of this guide, our goal is to help you generate the highest return possible on your investment in training and education. Here are some strategies recommended by experts on how the brain learns.

### Hold on to what is being taught

Research shows us that people usually forget 90 percent of what they learn in a class within 30 days. And the majority of this forgetting occurs within the first few hours after class.

The typical human brain can hold about seven new pieces of information for less than 30 seconds, writes John Medina in his book, "Brain Rules." If something doesn't happen in that short stretch of time, the information becomes lost. It's like a video tape that gets recorded over with new information.

“ *The typical human brain can hold about seven new pieces of information for less than 30 seconds.* ”

To extend that 30 seconds to a few minutes or even an hour or two, you need to consistently re-expose yourself to that information, he suggests. That's what keeps things in working memory.

Think about the stereotype of the student cramming for a test. They might pull an all-nighter, repeating and repeating what they need to know for the test right up until they walk into the classroom.

But our goal here has nothing to do with a test, unless the test is real-life success in your dealership. And in order for that to occur, our goal should be for the most important information you and your team take away from your training and education to be stored in long-term memory. Believe it or not, the process of fixing something you learned permanently in your memory can take years of repetition.

“ *The more you can create a multi-sensory experience for those you are training, the higher the chances they will retain it.* ”

**So, how can you ensure that you and your team don't forget the most critical pieces of what you learn?**

**1. Think and talk about it.** During breaks in training, ask the group to turn to the person next to them and discuss what they learned. Or get together with your team to download the key takeaways of your training.

**2. Make a connection between what you're learning and real life examples.** The more personal the examples, the better. The more that you and your team members can connect what you're learning with experiences and knowledge you already have in your brain, the more likely you are to retain it.

**3. Connect the learning moment with the moment when you'll need to retrieve what you learned.** For example, if you can learn in the same environment where you will later need to retrieve what you learned, you'll be more successful. Sales managers, if you want to teach your sales team a new closing strategy, conduct the training in the showroom.

If you can use the same senses to study what you need to learn that you'll use when you put it to work, that also will help for retrieval. For example, if you're practicing how to close a boat sale, that's an oral exercise, so practice orally, not with a written exam.

**4. Space out your repetition.** Cramming works great if it's only important that you remember something for a short period of time. But if you want to hold onto it for the long haul, space out your repetition. Schedule a once a week practice of a key new process or strategy.

Research shows that such repetition is needed even years after you've supposedly learned something "for good." Even your most experienced team members can gain huge benefit from refresher classes.

**5. The more elaborate and in-depth this practice is, the better.** For example, you tend to retain more when a learning experience involves more senses, such as seeing, hearing and touching. That's why an audio recording is good, but a video is even better. And a course that involves not just video, but also activities, tests and homework is even more effective. Research suggests that if information is presented orally, people remember about 10 percent 72 hours after exposure. Add a picture and that percentage goes up to 65 percent.

The more you can create a multi-sensory experience for those you are training, the higher the chances they will retain it.

Of all of those senses, your vision is the most powerful. Visual processing actually takes up about half of everything your brain does. And in the visual realm, pictures or video provide much more input to your brain than text. If you can see something, it's much more powerful and likely to be retained than simply reading about it.

## Apply training in the dealership

When researchers Michael M. Lombardo and Robert W. Eichinger studied the learning that takes place among working adults, they found that only 10 percent occurs through formal training and educational courses.

Another 20 percent comes from coaching, mentoring and other workplace interactions, while the largest share – 70 percent – is based on real-life, hands-on experiences, according to their 1996 book, “The Career Architect Development Planner.”

**So, what does this mean for you in your dealership? Well, we think it underlines a few key ideas:**

- The Power of Leadership. As a member of your dealership’s leadership team, you have the ability to influence whether your team puts what they’re learning to work or not. It doesn’t matter whether that learning comes from formal educational opportunities



(books, webinars, classes, etc.) or from their experience on the job. When you encourage them and ultimately hold them accountable for applying that knowledge, the likelihood they will put it to work goes up dramatically.

“ Once training is on the calendar for everyone to see, they can better prepare for it, and the whole dealership can see that a plan is in place and must be taken seriously. ”

- Formal Education as a Beginning. If you’re someone who enjoys learning, you may not care whether the education you participate in has direct application to your day-to-day life. But as a dealership owner or manager, your top priority when it comes to training and education – your own or that of your employees – is applying it on the job to improve performance. Formal education can jump-start this improvement, when properly positioned by leadership. For example, some dealers:

*a. Use training as a tool in performance reviews to either help the employee improve in an area of weakness or help them develop toward a career goal, such as being promoted into a new position;*

*b. Ask their employees to set goals for the improvement they expect to see as a result of the training beforehand and then track their performance afterward;*

*c. Require employees who receive training to train the rest of the team on what they learned and how to apply it.*

- The Benefits of a Continuous Improvement Culture. When your team is consistently encouraged, recognized for and perhaps even incentivized for finding and pursuing opportunities to improve themselves, their work and the dealership, then they will be much more likely to seek out ways to apply all that they learn, inside and outside the dealership.

## Develop a plan

Setting aside time to focus on dealership improvement is like putting money into a savings account. It’s easy to overlook when things are good, and can be even easier to ignore when times are tough. But the investment adds up and will eventually payoff in a big way.

The most powerful improvement often comes in the form of training and education, whether inside the dealership or out, formal or informal. The good news is that an effective training plan is not difficult to create and having one will allow your business to maximize the returns it receives from investing in this important work.

With your plan in place, the value that training provides will become much clearer, the rough patches your dealership endures will be smoother, and the good times even better.

To help you create a dealership training plan, we’ve created a Training Matrix, which you can use as a template.

First, consider the short- and long-term goals you’ve identified for the company’s employees, departments and the dealership at large. Prioritize those goals, considering both importance and urgency.

Once you’ve decided which goals to pursue in the time period your plan will cover, it’s time to determine:

- Who needs training
- What training is needed

- The goal of the training
- Where to find the training
- How to schedule the training
- How to track and assess the results

The most overlooked item on that list may also be the most important – scheduling. Taking the time to get training onto the calendar can really help set the process in motion. A good way to do so is by populating the calendar with the dates employees have to be in the store – events, holidays, busy periods, etc. Then everything else is fair

