

"OPERATOR GURU" FINDS 9 STEPS TO SUCCESS

How to create opportunities through skills training

By Roy Bardowell, CDDC

Many refer to me as "the operator guru." After years of working in this industry, I have acquired a great deal of knowledge about garage door and gate automation. Like most, I stumbled into this profession by chance. One job opportunity led to another, and I gained essential experience along the way.

By sharing my story, I hope to demonstrate the value of acquiring new skills and training others and, ultimately, open doors for employees and businesses that are driven to succeed in the industry.

My journey begins

Forty-eight years ago, I accepted a job with Automatic Doorman Manufacturing (ADM), formerly Hunt & Hunt Manufacturing, in Paterson, N.J. At that time, I had no idea it would launch my long and fruitful career.

Leon Hunt owned the house directly behind mine, and we became close friends. In March 1971, ADM's production fell behind, and they needed to hire more people. Hunt offered me a job at 17, which was the beginning of my door operator career.



Bardowell

STEP 1: Manufacturing experience

ADM manufactured mostly residential and commercial door operators. When I asked for a wider variety of work, company management allowed me to fill in for any position. When someone called in sick, I was the first in line to learn something new and gain more experience. Taking on new roles was challenging, but I was determined to learn about every facet of the door operator industry.

STEP 2: Technical experience

Over the following years, I plunged deeper into operator products—examining how they worked, dissecting and rebuilding components, and determining how they could be improved. In 1978, I moved to Canada to help Robert Schram start up a commercial operator line called Lynx Industries.

The company promoted itself as a one-stop shop for garage door products, and being a part of its growth was a wonderful opportunity for me to acquire more skills and knowledge about garage door products.

STEP 3: Training experience

When I was 24, I was asked to conduct a training session for the Canadian Door Institute in Ontario. During this event, I realized that I knew much more about operators than most of the attendees. I also learned the value of group training.

At first I was a little uncomfortable speaking in front of a group of strangers, but it became easy after doing a few 60-minute operator seminars and receiving positive feedback.

STEP 4: Hands-on project experience

In 1994, I joined George Manaras at Manaras Inc. in Dorval, Quebec. I was asked to set up the company's Research and Development Center and build a dedicated training area.

It was one of my first big projects. I installed four working doors and two gates with gate operators for the display center used to showcase various products.

STEP 5: Sales experience

In the summer of 1995, Manaras was sold to Simu USA. The year after, a Simu sister company, Somfy International, took over Manaras' operations. As a result, the sales force increased considerably. Unfortunately, most of the new representatives knew very little about commercial door operators (CDOs) and even less about our industry.

They were out of their element working with door dealers. As salespeople, they had trouble answering most technical operator questions. So, I started traveling with the team whenever possible, sometimes even providing technical training in dealers' shops.

For two years, I traveled across Canada with various sales reps, selling products and recruiting new customers. There was a huge need for technical information, and being on the road gave me a perfect platform to share it.



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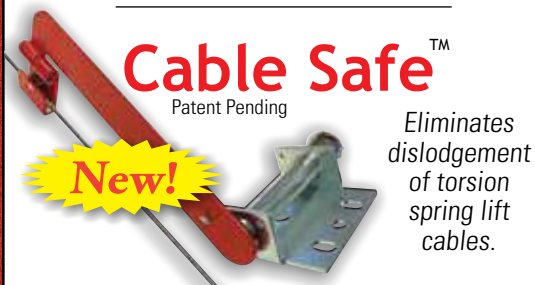
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STEP 6:

Tech support

Eventually, I became recognized as a technical resource, and it became my job to bring new employees up to speed. While working in tech support for five years, I noticed that most calls required quick and easy responses. I realized then that there was a need for basic training—not just in the field, but also in the office where people were taking orders.

STEP 7:

Training materials

Most industry veterans were already familiar with CDO mechanics, but when it came to door applications, operator function, and technical features, most installers were lost.

So, I created training materials on the installation and troubleshooting of operators—some designed for Manaras employees and others made specifically for installers. I was one of the first people to both combine and present the technical information needed for a successful installation.

Since every CDO installation is unique, and the variables of each job are different, creating troubleshooting materials for CDOs is a never-ending job. My training phase has lasted over 35 years and continues to evolve with every new product and new technology that is developed, which is something I never anticipated.

STEP 8:

Building a reputation

Today, training has become a way for a company to build its reputation and grow its sales, and it offers people in the industry a way to gain valuable experience. My career was one long journey of various training opportunities, which led me to create some of the first operator training programs in the industry.

STEP 9:

Learning by example

In manufacturing, the assemblers, engineers, and salespeople usually operate in separate worlds. When employees are trained in all areas, they are given the opportunity to gain firsthand understanding of the duties and expectations of every position.

Comprehensive training creates well-rounded employees who can work together more effectively toward a common goal. It also gives your employees exposure to other positions, which may open doors for them within your company or in the industry.

You can also open doors for your customers by showing them the power to grow their businesses. Provide product samples, distribute literature and instruction booklets, and conduct one-on-one product training. Believe me, this will not only be appreciated, but it will also lead to more sales or even new customers. But don't take my word for it—try it and see for yourself! ■