

Hendrick Automotive Group

The second-largest privately owned dealership group in the U.S., Hendrick Automotive sells new and used cars and light trucks manufactured by more than 20 automakers. Hendrick has a network of over 60 dealerships in 9 states from the Carolinas to California. The company also offers financing, as well as automobile parts, accessories, service, and body repair. One of the company's core values is "Passion for Winning," a reflection of another Hendrick enterprise, NASCAR champion Hendrick Motorsports. At the heart of this winning recipe are a very organized process for building relationships with customers, and a step-by-step plan for integrating new dealerships and employees, which includes the Management By Strengths program in its employee training and coaching. "We use Management By Strengths because of its simplicity," said John Lamkin, Director of Training. "We make sure that all our new employees understand and align with the Hendrick culture; it is a benevolent and gracious culture."

The company's focus on "customer enthusiasm" stresses the importance of stability, visibility, accountability, and empowerment. At company headquarters and at dealerships, employees wear name badges that include a Management By Strengths grid indicating their preferred communication style. When customers ask about the grids, sales associates tell them that the badges help them remember to purposefully engage each other in order to better serve customers.

During acquisition activities, MBS communication skills help managers work through integration processes. Since people are stressed, managers need to over-communicate, observed Lamkin. "As we went through the two acquisitions this past spring, it's my belief that their understanding of MBS was just as important as the understanding of those of us who work within the company. From the standpoint of a new employee, the consistency of message, both in style and content, was critical in completing a smooth changeover."

The attention to effective communication and best-in-class processes extends beyond the company's internal teams. Due to Hendrick Automotive Group's reputation, manufacturers seek out opportunities to do business with the company. Lamkin added, "When we enter into a partnership with a vendor we have them go through the MBS and Hendrick Culture classes so they will be better equipped to deal with our employees. Sometimes the process of them learning how to communicate appropriately with our employees takes quite some time. It's not just in the spoken word but the written word, as well." Hendrick Automotive Group is committed to this process, as it supports another core value – continuous improvement. "Every day we take the initiative to find ways to do our work better, smarter, and faster. Seeking opportunities for personal growth and development will only lead to increased vitality for our business and greater satisfaction to you (the customer)." ¹⁰