Ellen Rohr About 1200 words

First Serial Rights

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Thanks, Jim!! ☺ xoxo to you!

BTW…please update my byline, too. New, at the bottom. Thanks!!

Xo$, Ellen

**Riding Shotgun – Part One**

I have zero technical skills. I have a thimbleful of financial knowledge (which is luckily all you really need.) However, I do have the smarts to know that your team, the front line technicians, will help you fix whatever is broken in your company. As a consultant, with my aforementioned limited skills, sometimes I run into resistance as I work with clients and their team members. To break down some of the barriers, I started riding shotgun. It was the smartest thing I have ever done, and continue to do. When I ride along, my intentions are…

1. To make a friend.
2. To learn something.
3. To be of service.

When I hop in the truck, we make conversation and the resistance start to melt. I learn about his family. I discover that he is into Nascar or classical music or Wes Anderson films. Then, I ask questions like…

1. If you were in my shoes, what would you think I should know, or do?
2. What are we doing that is getting in the way of you serving customers or doing your job?
3. What keeps you working here?

And he tells me. Every time I ride along I am struck by how powerful and important it is to spend time with your front line team members. They know what’s happening and they are the key to fixing problems.

When you ride along, you will find that there are one or two things that a technician is doing – or not doing – that is getting in the way of his being more successful. So, hop in the truck…and see what happens. At the very least, you could get to know each other a little better.

Then, you can build on that relationship. That’s when things get really good.

Suppose you have tagged along with Jack at least once. He is a great guy, and has worked for you for a few years. According to his scorecard, he is low man on the totem pole for average ticket. He rarely hits his sales goals. You don’t want to let him go. Can you help him improve his sales? Maybe. The ride along is an essential coaching tool for finding out.

Have this conversation with Jack:

“Jack, I am concerned about your average ticket. I’m hoping that if we spend some time together, I may be able to help you improve your sales performance. Are you open to that?”

“Sure, I just don’t want to be pushy or force my customers to buy something they don’t want.”

“Fair enough. I don’t want you do to that either. I do want to make sure that you and our customers have a great experience and that you are offering the best of what we can provide. How about if I ride shotgun with you today? Once we get to the customer’s home, I am going to be quiet. You’re in charge. After the call, when we get back to the truck, I will share my observations. If I find ONE thing that – if you were to do it – may make life easier for you and our customer, may I share it with you?”

“Yes. That would be great.”

Now, as you drive to the service call, set the stage for success. Check for the proper paperwork and review the service call process. Make sure the diagnostic kit is ready and shoe covers handy. Don’t break his shoes. Just help.

When you get to the customer’s house, shut up. Don’t take over the call. Steer the conversation back to Jack. “You know, I haven’t been in the field in quite a while. Jack, what do you think?” Unless there is a life-threatening situation, don’t jump in, even if Jack fails to make a sale, or misses an obvious add on.

Each tech is different. You won’t know what his doing or not doing until you see for yourself. When you ride along, you will spot one or more things that is causing him to fail, or work harder than he needs to. Take note of what he is doing right, and share that. When you are back in the truck, share ONE thing to work on.

“Jack, you are a friendly fellow. Mrs. Fernwicky appreciates that you are a dog person like she is. Offering her dog a biscuit was a nice touch. You are skilled technically. You successfully diagnosed and solved the primary problem.

“Here’s one thing that you could try on the next call. Ask your customer 2-3 questions before you start fixing the problem. Ask about her family and how they live in the house. Ask about the problem she is experiencing, or the level of comfort she has in the house. On the next call, ask at least 2 questions.”

You and Jack can role play a few questions as you drive to the next call.

If on the next call, Jack attempts to incorporate your suggestion and ask a couple of questions, Jack is capable of changing his default behavior. And this is AWESOME. Because chances are very, very good that Jack can improve his performance. You are looking for willingness and a capacity for change.

After riding along over 100 times, I can attest that there are usually just a few things that need to be “fixed” for a tech to start hitting minimum sales levels. IF he is willing and basically capable of doing the required work. Note that it doesn’t really matter which behavior you give Jack. Pick one, don’t give him a laundry list. Pick something that he may be neglecting to do, or doing poorly. You want to see if he will give it a shot. If he does, you are off and running to Jack’ improved performance.

And what if Jack’s behaviors are so ingrained that he can’t change? Or what if Jack is not technically capable? You will find out when you ride along. Then you and he will be able to have a candid conversation about his future as a service tech for your company. It is not OK for someone to be a chronic loser under your management. Your job is to help your team members be successful in their positions.

Jack will help you improve, too, if you ask him to share his thoughts about your business. If you take one of his suggestions and implement it, he will appreciate it. You may even get his agreement to head up the project. Ride alongs are an easy way to gain understanding and buy-in all around.

Yikes! I am out of space and there is a lot more to share about riding shotgun. I’ll pick it up on my next column. “See” you next month…and in the meantime, hop in the truck!

Xo$, Ellen

NEW BYLINE!!

For more on business planning, check out *The Biz Plan Challenge.* You, me, other business builders…working in real time to craft customized Biz Plans for creating your ideal business and best life. Join in! [www.bizplanchallenge.com](http://www.bizplanchallenge.com)