

Shop Owner[®]

It's more than just fixing cars

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A portrait of a middle-aged man with grey hair and glasses, smiling. He is wearing a maroon polo shirt with "Motor Works" and his name "Greg" on it. He is leaning on a dark surface, possibly a car hood. The background is a blurred image of a car repair shop with a sign that says "SUPER".

Motor Works Inc.

**Shop Success Built
on Trust & Respect**

**Best Practices For
Social Media**

**Time Management &
Achieving Balance**

**Want to Improve
Your Business Model?**



"Always respect others, maintain high standards, don't compromise your ethics and, most importantly, show responsibility and don't be afraid to admit when you're wrong!"

Motor Works, Inc.

Successful Rockville, MD, Shop Is Built on a 'Winning Combination' of Confidence In Staff and Respect For Clientele

When you've been a shop owner as long as Greg Skolnik has — since December 1979, to be exact — you've learned a thing or two about running a successful automotive repair business: Like ways to retain top-notch employees and how to build relationships with customers that keep them coming back year after year.

"We've been blessed not to need new employees for many years," Skolnik says of the staff at Motor Works, Inc., located in Rockville, MD. "I guess they like it here. I always consider that they work 'with' me and not 'for' me. This minor distinction makes a huge difference. This empowers the employee; they're part of a team; their contributions are valued and their opinions matter."

The staff includes three full-time, fully certified technicians, a service consultant, a shop manager and a driver/helper. Skolnik says his earliest experiences as a professional mechanic in other shops helped sculpt his core values and quest for balance — as evidenced by a healthy benefits and time off package that employees in any industry would appreciate.

"We provide paid health insurance, paid vacation, sick time and holidays, and a paid



Greg in 1978

extra week off at Christmas," he says. "In addition to an employer-sponsored 401(k) and annual profit sharing contribution, I think the most popular benefit is that we are open only four days a week; they have every Friday, Saturday and Sunday off."

The conscious choice to be open four days a week started in 1990, and Skolnik admits it's a bit unconventional. "Mostly the clients are positive, supportive and some, even envious, wishing their own employer would follow suit," says Skolnik.



"We are available by phone and e-mail during our closed periods for our clients' peace of mind."

When questioned about

the loss of potential business, Skolnik smiles and quips, "How much money is enough? I don't want to be the richest guy in the graveyard!"

Skolnik says he strives to keep his view from the employee's perspective first and employer second; and he's also trusting — perhaps even to a fault. "Every employee has a key to the shop. I respect the employees and command the same level of respect. My lack of employee turnover is proof-positive that I am on to something here."

Confidence In His Team

Skolnik boasts that his staff is so proficient that he's no longer at the garage daily. "I generally work from my



home office, where it's quiet and I'm not as hindered by my lifelong inability to avoid distractions," he says.

"I go into the shop once or twice a week to see the guys and check on things. I still miss being there every day and seeing all the clients.

"As a recovering 'micromanager,' I think the guys actually do better when I'm not there. I'm learning to leave the space for them to step into, and they do it in fine style! I know they can't do it exactly like me because they're not me — and that's okay! I'm learning to let go, give them the space to grow and champion their successes. I like the Gandhi quote, 'Go for excellence, not perfection. The first will motivate you to be your best. The second will drive you crazy, make everything take too long and cause much to go unfinished.'"

Training, both internally and externally, is always ongoing, Skolnik



says, and he's learned the hard way that the motivation to keep growing and improving is up to the individual employee.

"When it comes to the personality of an employee, what you see is what you get," he says. "I can't change them, no matter how much money they're paid. They have to want to change — to grow. I try to empower them, but the actual growth is their responsibility. It's part of our mission statement. I cheer for them, for they have done the work."

"Our exclusive focus on Honda and Toyota brands gives us a productivity edge, in that our technicians see the same cars and problems over and over and they have the necessary equipment and skills to diagnose and repair the cars efficiently," he continues.

Skolnik admits his own learning curve for marketing and promotion



has been long. With his sensitivity to the overall perception by their clients, he feels they've come a long way. His mantra is, "Identify and find ways to remove the barrier for the client."

Motor Works pioneered the use of loaner vehicles with the purchase of its first car in 1984, Skolnik explains. "This was a program we started to alleviate some of the stress a client would feel when their car needed repairs or servicing. Providing a client with a free loaner vehicle was unheard of in the D.C. area at that time. I actually received calls from other shop owners calling us crazy."

Similarly, 1984 saw the birth of



Chris Soares, technician



*Scott Talbott,
driver and facilities
manager*



*Aaron Skolnik,
I.T. magician*



Todd Lewis, technician



Mike Winokur, shop manager



Keith Koval, technician



*Dave Henkin,
service consultant*

their Metro Shuttle program, which coincided with the opening of the nearby Rockville Metro rail station. This convenience helped to increase the range of their clientele and remains a staple program to this day.

Another innovative program that promotes repeat business is a credit for pre-scheduling. "This simple and effective benefit for our clients also incentivizes the behavior we are seeking: A habit of visiting Motor Works, Inc. three to four times each year. It's working well and fits in beautifully with our long-standing culture and belief in preventive maintenance," Skolnik says.

it's worth it in the long run."

Skolnik says he also cannot overemphasize the importance of his commitment to the changing technology of business. "Having a clear, functional website and social media presence has become a 'must' for us. We started our website in 1996 as something 'cool.' It is now an essential component of our marketing plan and is one of the most valuable client informational tools we have. Using our shop's computer management software and information systems to their maximum is what gives us the edge."

Education was instrumental in Skolnik's start in the industry, and he

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Add to these systems an electronic e-mail appointment reminder system, an automated instant client feedback system, personalized reminder postcards for those without e-mail and several others, and it's not hard to see how focused they've been on the entire client experience. "I am pretty good at seeing our shop through their eyes," he says. "Whether it's the layout of the front office, the shape of the waiting tables, the color of the paint on the walls, the lighting, the photography and imagery they see, or the video display content, the list goes on and on. I try to implement the 360-degree touch-point review that evaluates every point of contact with a client. It's exhausting, it's never completed and

says he has been in a "continuous learning mode" since he was very young. He was that kid who was always asking questions and assisting an older brother under one of their cars. His high school had no garage, so they worked on VWs outside because they could remove and carry the engine upstairs to the second-floor classroom. He learned much during this time and built a dune buggy with a close friend. After graduating from Lincoln Technical Institute with a degree in automotive technology, he started his career as a professional technician.

Over the years, he's been through countless programs, seminars, training sessions, and earned an A.A.M. degree from AMI. "I always come



away with something from each class or program I attend. The challenge for me is to sort through the truck-loads of information and develop some basic ‘gauges’ that I like to keep my eye on,” he says. “Too much data just locks me up in ‘analysis paralysis.’ I’m addicted to learning and have a fairly substantial library of business and improvement books.” Even the translation of his last name from his Russian heritage into English means, “School Boy.”

When asked for his advice on pricing, Skolnik says, “Don’t be afraid to command a fair price for a job well done. At the same time, remain sensitive and empathic toward your client’s personal situation, especially in our current economic climate. We’ve established our pricing structures, team pay plans, parts margin matrixes all based upon our costs and, while there will always be someone out



there offering to do a job cheaper, we choose to focus our communication on the relationships with our clients and why they need these repairs. This ideology bolsters our overarching commitment to keeping the client’s vehicle in ‘like new’ condition during its lifetime.”

On suggestions to others in business he says, “Always respect others, maintain high standards, don’t compromise your ethics and most importantly, show responsibility and don’t be afraid to admit when you’re wrong!”

Wise words to live by for any shop owner — at least one who wants to enjoy success in business and life like Greg Skolnik does. **SO**