

Failure to COMMUNICATE

By Alex Keenan

If information isn't passed down the right way from leadership to coworkers to customers, that's a problem you need to fix right away—and you can't do it with a wrench.

[IN VEHICLE]

There's nothing quite like the stomach-dropping feeling of realizing that you've forgotten something important, especially when that something is a Peterbilt 378. But that's what happened to Jamie Wendt, CEO of HM Repairs and Services, and also alignment shop Madison Spring, both based in Wisconsin.

It was a busy Monday morning, and Wendt was expecting a customer's truck to roll in that day. In preparation, he told the shop manager to get the vehicle on the schedule before it arrived.

"Well, he probably got busy, so it didn't get put on the schedule, and the driver didn't talk to [the employee], so the truck got forgotten," Wendt recalled.

Two and a half hours passed before the customer called the shop to check on their vehicle. Realizing what had happened, Wendt pushed back another project and assigned two technicians to the truck to make up for lost time. They worked late to get the vehicle fixed that very evening, and the truck was picked up first thing on Tuesday morning.

While Wendt was able to save the situation with the Peterbilt, looking back, the CEO noted that he could have chosen another method of notifying his scheduler of the incoming vehicle, such as an instant message, so the shop manager would have been reminded of the task that needed to be done.

Such reminders are important when shops and fleets have to keep track of innumerable critical details on several vehicles at once. This can be especially difficult for shops like HM Repairs that have grown from a small operation to a busier one.

For example, while Wendt used to be the one fielding customer calls, they must now be directed to the service writer. But even so, longtime customers still may reach out to him about their vehicles, providing all the information that needs to be ferried to the service writer anyway, said the shop owner's wife Jessica Wendt, who is CFO of both shops.

"The more people who you have on your team, the more important communication is to be able to make sure that everybody knows [critical information]," Jessica explained. "And I think that was a struggle for us initially—and still is a struggle here, too."

But HM Repairs is not alone in experiencing miscommunication problems that affect the business. According to Forbes Advisor's 2024 report on workplace communication, nearly half of workers surveyed said ineffective communication hampers their productivity.

And it's even more important for leadership to cultivate their communication skills. That Forbes report noted 43% of on-site workers lost trust in leaders who could not effectively connect with them.

Having strong communication is not only critical for those in operations but also between those in the back office and on the shop floor. Without it, busy technicians may rush to fix a truck without getting enough information from the driver.

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