

## Grand Award – Large Company Don Johnson Auto Group

The nomination for this award stated that the sixth generation of this business, two individuals, are currently dealing with the challenges of potty training, but hopes are high that they will one day be part of the leadership team. For now, the fifth generation of this 100-year-old car dealership is at the helm, and by all accounts, continuing a winning game plan for success.

Don Johnson Auto Group was started in 1915, in Star Prairie, Wisconsin, by J.P. Johnson, great-grandfather of the current CEO, Josh Johnson. The family business passed down from father to sons or sons-in-law, occasionally changing locations or name. But from the beginning, one thing never changed: a “family first” culture that treats customers, the sales force and even auto manufacturers with the same respect one would treat a beloved family member. In fact, customers are called guests, and sales people are called team members.

From the first job interview, everyone who works for the company learns the “28 fundamental behaviors” that serve as a daily road map. These fundamentals, such as “always do the right thing,” “honor commitments,” and “be a great listener,” guide every aspect of the business. Sales teams are noncommissioned to help avoid potential conflicts of interest with guests. This is almost unheard of in the auto sales industry. And as a family-first business, the company provides flexible schedules that allow staff to attend important family events or care for an ill relative.

With three locations, 120 employees, and franchises for just about every brand of vehicle, Don Johnson Motors gives its team members a lot of autonomy. Every member is empowered to make decisions, so long as they first ask: 1) Is it best for the guest? 2) Is it best for the company? And 3) Is it best for the manufacturers we represent?

Community involvement is part of the company’s everyday landscape. Each dealership location has a community room available for public use 24/7. The organization also donates a 15-passenger van to the local Boys and Girls Club. The company has sponsored car seat clinics, and contributes to a variety of local youth baseball, hockey, and soccer teams.

Family members who wish to go into the business are encouraged to begin their experience at a young age (after potty training, that is), and all are expected to go to college and then work in another field for at least two years before coming back. Once with the company, team members are cross-trained in a variety of departments to provide a better understanding of the big picture.

To a one, the judges proclaimed, “I wish I needed a new car so I could buy it from Don Johnson Motors.” What higher praise could there be?

The Grand Award in the Large Company category goes to Don Johnson Auto Group, of Rice Lake, Wisconsin.

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