

Successful retailers have habits they build into their business practices that help them excel. *Hardware Retailing* checked in with Bobby Fuller and Jason Haley, past honorees from the North American Retail Hardware Association (NRHA) Top Guns program, to learn about the habits that make them successful. Top Gun honorees are high-achieving independent home improvement retailers who are excellent business operators and active contributors to their communities and the industry. ➔



Bobby Fuller

Fuller owns Fuller and Son Hardware, which opened in 1921 and now has six locations in central Arkansas. He operates the business with his sons, Jeff and J.R.

I consider whether everyone benefits from a business deal.

A deal isn't honest or fair if it doesn't benefit everyone involved, according to Fuller. For example, a contractor offered to paint a Fuller and Son store for a price so low Fuller knew the man wouldn't make much, if any, money on the project. Fuller paid the painter more than his asking price.

I use courteous words.

Fuller doesn't believe in barking orders or threatening to fire employees. "If I want somebody to do something, I say, 'Come help me do this.' At the very worst, I say, 'Would you do this for me?'" he says. "If you're in a position of authority and you say, 'Would you do this for me?' it's going to get a lot better reaction than a rude, 'Hey, do this.'"

I work alongside my employees.

Leading by example is important to Fuller, and doing that means working side by side with his employees. That's why he will ask workers to come help him with tasks more often than he asks them to do things for him. By continuing to work in the stores, Fuller knows what his workers face every day in their jobs and they know he values them.

I stay busy at the stores.

If business is slower, Fuller and his staff will straighten up shelves, blow leaves off the parking lot or clean the lumberyard. There is always work to do, and idleness is not an option. Fuller's example rubs off on employees. "If the manager's working hard, they're going to help him," he says. "I will never ask anyone to do anything I won't do."

I directly tell customers that my goal is to make them happy.

When Fuller gets calls from upset customers, he pauses the conversations to say, "I want you to know this—when you get off the phone, you're going to be happy." He is generous with exchanges and returns because losing some money matters less to him than satisfying customers.



Jason Haley

Haley owns Ace Hardware of Clarkston in Michigan. He previously held leadership roles with CNRG Stores and Great Lakes Ace Hardware, and worked for Ace corporate for many years before that.

I make deliveries personally.

Haley and his teenage sons deliver nearly every grill the store sells. "If you get to go to a customer's home and make a connection with them, they become intensely more loyal to you," Haley says. "When people deal with an owner, it changes their whole relationship with that business."

I work individually with new hires to instill company values.

Haley and his wife Melanie make sure one of them can spend an entire day working with every new employee. They believe instilling a positive company culture is paramount. So, they take a personal interest in developing these values in new hires, especially if the employees don't have work experience.

I work at least one full day per week on the salesfloor.

When Haley opened his store in 2016, he knew he could get sucked into a growing amount of office work and lose touch with customers if he wasn't proactive. "My goal is to work every Saturday on the salesfloor as an associate so I'm face to face with customers," he says.

I debrief weekly with my business partner.

Haley recommends retailers sit down weekly with their business partners or spouses to debrief from the workweek. He and Melanie set aside focused time on Sundays to discuss how business is going. They share feedback they received from customers and thoughts on how they can improve their store.

I thank customers with handwritten notes.

When customers make large purchases, such as high-end grills, Haley personally handwrites and mails thank you cards after delivery. Because he has met the customers in person while making deliveries to their homes, Haley can add a personal touch to strengthen connections.

