

Autobell expands training program for management

Pedro Briceno started working for Autobell Car Wash as a young man wiping down cars. Today, he is heading the company's new training program.

Autobell rehired the former school-teacher and assistant principal in late 2005 to create a training program for the managers of the Charlotte-based company's 46 facilities.



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Briceno has led more than 300 employees, including 46 store managers, through the intensive program. It has proven such a success that the goal in 2007 is to create independent programs in Raleigh and Virginia and build permanent training

facilities there.

"People don't expect this kind of a program from a car wash," Briceno says. "But we are leaders in the industry, and people look to us to set an example."

The program consists of eight training modules: orientation, operations/standards, customer focus, training/coaching, sales, concerned-customer claims, safety, and interviewing, hiring and evaluating.

Participants spend 24 hours in classroom instruction and 700 hours in on-the-job training. The next steps are a written exam and skills test, then evaluation and certification.

Briceno declines to say how much the company has invested in the program but says the results show in employee retention rates and in customer satisfaction surveys.

The training costs the company \$1,000 per employee in addition to the \$2,000 bonus they receive for completing the program.

"When employees know how to do a job, they stay longer," Briceno says. "Ninety-nine percent of our managers are promoted from within, so they learn our system and leadership skills."

The program gives employees the tools they need to advance in the company at a quicker rate, Autobell manager David Medlin says. "There are no limits to how high you can go at Autobell," says the 29-year old Medlin. "The better we are, the better image we all have."

The training center is at 201 S. Independence Blvd. — the site of the chain's second-most profitable car wash.

"I don't need to be jealous of Bank of America or IBM because we have all of the technology here," Briceno says.

Autobell was founded in 1969 and is still owned and operated by the Howard family. The company has car washes in 22 N.C. cities and four in Virginia. Others are under construction and slated to open in 2007.

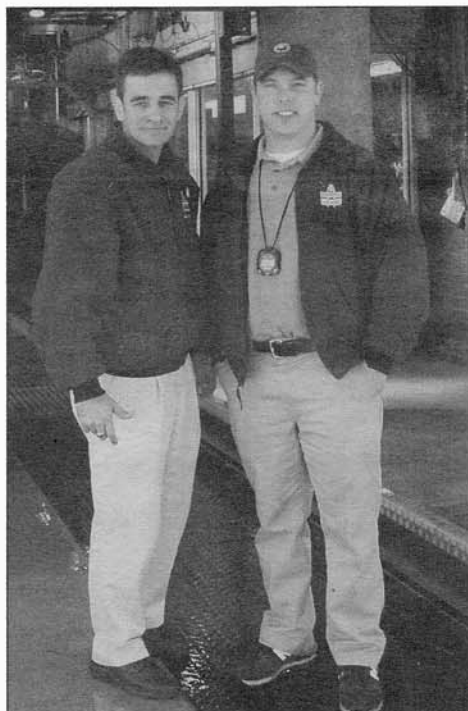


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Pedro Briceno (left) created Autobell's training program for managers such as David Medlin