

# An Inside Look at the Industry's Top Leaders

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John Gustafson, owner of Gustafson Brothers in Huntington Beach, Calif.



**SHOP STATS: Gustafson Brothers** Location: **Huntington Beach, Calif.** Owner: **John Gustafson** Staff Size: **22 (7 body techs, 4 paint and spray techs, 2 detail techs, 3 estimators, 2 parts receivers, 1 sales manager, 1 body shop manager, 1 maintenance tech, 1 general manager)** Shop Size: **15,000 square feet** Average Monthly Car Count: **160** ARO: **\$2500** Annual Revenue: **\$4.6 million**

For a large part of the shop's 40 years, John Gustafson had been the "answer man." Any and all shop questions came to him. But as the years went by and the shop continued to grow, Gustafson slowly assumed the position he has now. As the president of the company, Gustafson has a general manager that oversees the day-to-day operations. Below the general manager are several department managers both in the collision and mechanical sides of the business. Each of them oversee their own team.

That delegation has been important for the growth of the business. And after plenty of years being the hub for all questions and feedback, Gustafson was ready to delegate it out. Now his role is from the 30,000 foot level, analyzing potential expansion, new technology and industry trends. But that doesn't mean he isn't present.

5 a.m.

I start my morning the same way every day: I wake up and set my Jacuzzi for a 30-minute cycle. It's one of the most important parts of my day; it allows me to decompress and analyze the day ahead. After a few minutes, I pull out my phone and go to ColoredNote, a note-taking application that I use to track current and future tasks and my long-term goals. I'll decide what I need to do today and what I need to keep top of mind for the future.

7 a.m.

I arrive at the shop at 7 a.m., along with the rest of the staff. I start the workday first by greeting every employee and having a quick conversation. With several managers between me and some of the shop staff, I think it's an important time to let the rest of the team know I'm present and invested in them and the shop.

8 a.m.

From there, I occasionally sit in on daily meetings that the collision and mechanical teams hold. I'm always present for the weekly leadership meetings and the Friday administration team meetings.

9-11 a.m.

Most of my morning is actually dedicated to reading. For me in my role as a "visionary," I prioritize reading industry news and keeping tabs on anything the business could do to improve. I also read leadership books, which help improve interpersonal skills. You have to learn and continue to learn. If we didn't do that, we'd end up like Blockbuster.

#### **Thoughts from Kevin Rains**

On the reading: "My hunch is John has a real handle on delegating things for others so they can stay out front. That's something that's invaluable, and if there's not someone staying six months to three years ahead of the people they are leading, they won't be leading very long. They'll be trampled by people who will overtake them with knowledge."

1-4 p.m.

In the afternoon, I make the rounds on the shop floor again. It isn't necessarily to make sure my people are staying focused—although that probably does help—but it's just about being with my people.

I don't miss being needed to make every decision or answer every question, but there are aspects of being hands-on that I miss. I come in to work Thursday-Saturday, which might surprise some people, but Saturday is my favorite day on the job. I act as the porter that day! I clean the inside and outside of the shop; I feel like my own "undercover boss." It allows me to interact with customers and feel connected to the day to day of the shop.

#### **Thoughts from Kevin Rains**

"People look at these soft skills and they hear the word 'soft,' especially in an industry dominated by tough male figures, they push it off as irrelevant. But the No. 1 thing people want in their leaders is to know that they are cared for."