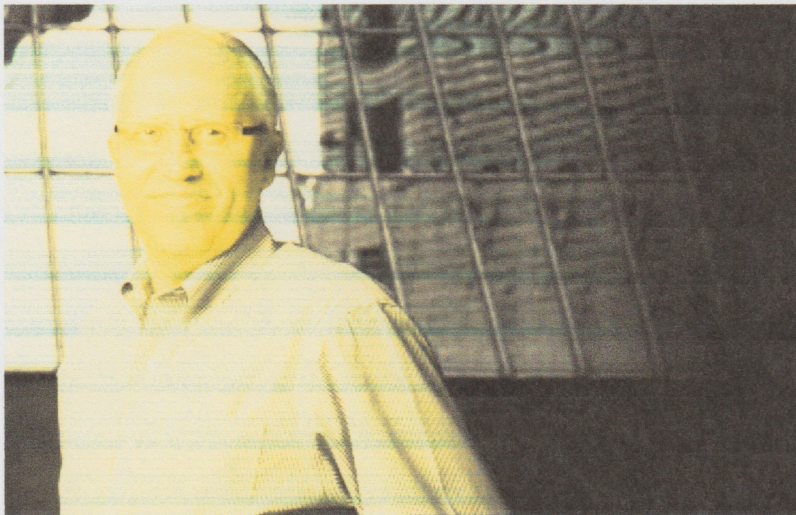


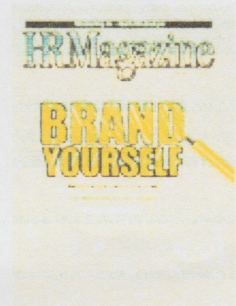
Profiles in HR: Kenneth Barber, Jiffy Lube's Manager of Learning and Development

How Kenneth Barber shifted employee training into high gear at Jiffy Lube International.

By Steve Bates



Jiffy Lube University



(<https://www.jiffylube.com/about/technicians>)
(JLU) might sound like an exalted name for an institution that trains people to get dirty under cars. But the careers it has catapulted and the awards it has won prove that the program is a

well-oiled engine.

Like any machine, JLU needs regular tune-ups and occasional repairs. Fortunately, its chief mechanic, Kenneth Barber (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/ken-barber-a132a3b>), is up to the task. Barber has run Jiffy Lube International (www.shrm.org<https://www.jiffylube.com/about/history>)'s training program for 10 years, having come a long way from the scorching days spent as a boy on his family's small farm in eastern Alabama. It was there that his parents taught him the importance of hard work and instilled in him the confidence that he could accomplish anything.

Today, Barber is manager of learning and development for Houston-based Jiffy Lube International, a wholly owned, indirect subsidiary of Shell Oil. He says he has many people to thank for helping him get to where he is, including his predecessor, Henry Flores, who is now learning manager of external customers for Shell. Flores credits Barber with taking a fledgling training program and turning it into a world-class asset: "I gave birth to JLU. Ken turned it into a runway model."

Hometown: Lafayette, Ala.; population 2,500.

Passionate pursuits: Helping others succeed.

Greatest influence: His faith.

Rock-star moment: Winning first place in the Association for Talent Development (<https://www.td.org/>)BEST award and *Training* (<https://trainingmag.com/>) magazine's Top 125 award for excellence in employer-sponsored training.

Most valuable lesson learned: The principle of giving. "What you give you will receive back in kind."

Connections: Kenneth.barber@shell.com (<mailto:Kenneth.barber@shell.com>).

The program has won many impressive awards, the most recent being first place in *Training* (www.shrm.orghttps://trainingmag.com/) magazine's 2016 Top 125 awards for excellence in employer-sponsored training and development programs. Key business metrics attest that JLU is having a positive impact on the business. In 2015, for example, the initiative provided more than 2.2 million training hours to more than 20,000 service-center employees who work at Jiffy Lube franchises. As training has increased, so have the chain's customer satisfaction scores.

Twists and Turns

Like many HR professionals, Barber has encountered a few potholes and detours during his career. In fact, he doesn't consider himself solely an HR professional; he sees himself as a businessperson who contributes to the bottom line through training. Barber was earning a business degree at Auburn University when he began working as an operations trainee for Texaco during his sophomore year. During one conversation, a supervisor told Barber that he'd be a successful manager someday—words of affirmation that the young man never forgot.

"I've often looked back on them as empowering," Barber says. "I have tried to encourage others during my career with similar words of honest praise and promise."

Following graduation, he worked as an assistant plant manager, supervising employees much older than himself. After five years, he became a manager at a small plant in Chattanooga, Tenn., and later at a large plant in Houston. He then shifted into sales and marketing with Texaco's Xpress Lube, where he worked on boosting training offerings. After a reorganization, he became the chain's training manager. At the time, training was limited to one week of classes. Barber came up with a way for employees to practice their skills outside the classroom by creating a virtual garage—an innovation that earned him kudos both within and outside the company.

Amid growing volatility in the oil industry, Barber left the business world for four years to work as an assistant to the senior pastor of a large church. His job was to bring business acumen to the ministry, which he did by introducing performance management, goal-setting and accountability systems. But he missed the stimulating environment of training. When he heard about a position at Jiffy Lube, he thought it would be a good match for his skill set. "I just feel like I was being prepared all that time to jump into the role and do well," he says.

Inspiring Others

Growing up on his family's dairy farm, Barber saw firsthand how hard work and discipline can pay off. He attended the local Baptist church and excelled in 4-H, school and sports.

Although Barber might not talk a lot about his faith, he strives to demonstrate it every day. "It's the foundation of who I am and sets the value system from which I operate," he says. "It's what motivates me to want to help others be successful. Facilitating the success of others is, I think, a great personal goal that we should all have. It's the sort of thing that actually turns out to be a blessing in return to you."

His parents' example of serving people was a model he continually tries to emulate. "I love the challenge of helping thousands of individuals—mostly in the 18- to 25-year-old age range—better their lives," he says.

While there are many accomplishments Barber is proud of, one that tops his list is the fact that employees who acquire all 10 JLU certifications can earn 25 college credits. Barber notes that many employees express their gratitude for the employer's commitment to training and advancement opportunities. "We hear stories from individuals over and over who have become managers or who have taken what they learned in Jiffy Lube University to improve their role as a leader at work and as a parent and spouse at home."

Checking Under the Hood

Designing effective training programs requires planning and thoughtful execution. Barber describes himself as a linear thinker, and he applies that approach when developing his company's learning programs. "Things that we put together generally have a start and an end, and they have some order that makes it easier for people to follow—sort of a road map to success," he says.

Yet his thinking does not reside solely within the proverbial box.

Early in his tenure at Jiffy Lube, Barber challenged traditional assumptions that training should happen in a classroom that stands apart from the real world in which people operate. He sent his seven direct reports to visit stores, meet with franchise representatives and perform time-and-motion studies. The inquiry led to the development of a centralized computer-based training system aligned with the business's operations and sales goals.

Then, about five years ago, Barber sought to discover what traits separated top-performing store managers from others. His team went to stores to interview employees and gather data. The most significant variable turned out to be how managers spent their time. Top-performing managers devoted twice as many hours to developing their employees. That spurred JLU to improve its manager training, which is now called leadership training.

"When the managers are willing to invest themselves in their people, to show that they care about their development and their future, then those employees are going to be better with customers, with their own job," Barber explains. "Turnover will be lower, and the success of the store is much more likely."

He also led an initiative called the Jiffy Lube University Roadmap, which lays out career development paths for employees, and partnered with technology vendor Adayana to develop an interactive leadership simulation module. The Web-based game allows managers to practice decision-making skills in a virtual environment where a poor choice won't adversely affect the business.

A Transformational Effort

The success of JLU has not gone unnoticed at Shell headquarters. "In the last two or three years, we have been able to take what we have learned on the JLU journey and share it inside of Shell," Barber says. The company is creating similar training programs around the world.

Barber believes organizations should make training available to everyone, without exception or reservation. "We should provide opportunity for anyone who wants to take advantage of it," he says. "It doesn't matter what your role is. If your aspiration is to become a manager, you should have a clear path to go [down] from your first day as an employee to become a manager, and [you should be able] to do it at your own speed and with the motivation that you have within."

Technology and social media are making his vision possible.

When he joined Jiffy Lube, Barber never imagined that the amount of time the company's workforce spent learning would be three times the national average. To demonstrate the return on investment of that training, Barber analyzes data to show its impact on customer service, sales revenue, turnover, customer claims and more. Company executives have taken note.

"Leaders come to us early in their planning stages of new initiatives so we can help develop training programs that will support the initiatives and improve the likelihood of success," Barber says.

The most important lesson he has learned along the way about designing corporate training efforts: "Keep things simple. Fight for what helps the business succeed and individual learners grow."

As he enters his second decade at the wheel of JLU, Barber says he sees no reason to slow down. "It's been a wonderful, wonderful ride."

Steve Bates is a freelance writer in the Washington, D.C., area and a former writer and editor for SHRM.

Contact Us (www.shrm.org/about-shrm/Pages/Contact-Us.aspx) | 800.283.SHRM (7476)

© 2017 SHRM. All Rights Reserved

SHRM provides content as a service to its readers and members. It does not offer legal advice, and cannot guarantee the accuracy or suitability of its content for a particular purpose.

Disclaimer (www.shrm.org/about-shrm/Pages/Terms-of-Use.aspx#Disclaimer)