



# Automotive Retail Academy

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An online interactive, executive education  
journey preparing managers today for  
tomorrow's leadership



## **ARA** AUTOMOTIVE RETAIL ACADEMY

The retail industry is responding to rapid, momentous change. Dealerships of the future will be networked mobility hubs that engage, entertain, and delight customers, and now is the time to start creating them.

**Automotive Retail Academy (ARA)** from GP Strategies® provides the tools and experiences needed to excel in the digital age, delivered within a framework that combines expert insight, peer collaboration, and self-paced discovery—all accessible from the participant's keyboard.

ARA represents a modern interpretation of retail industry education that equips the next generation of dealer leadership with proven business acumen and a vision for the future.



# The ARA General Manager Course

A fresh take on dealership education for the leaders of tomorrow's dealerships

The pathway to profitability has evolved. The most successful dealership leaders today will be the ones prepared to build the dealerships of the future—the ones equipped to delight customers, reduce turnover, convert and retain at higher levels, deliver more efficient fixed operations, and improve profitability.

Managing future-ready dealerships requires a three-dimensional approach:

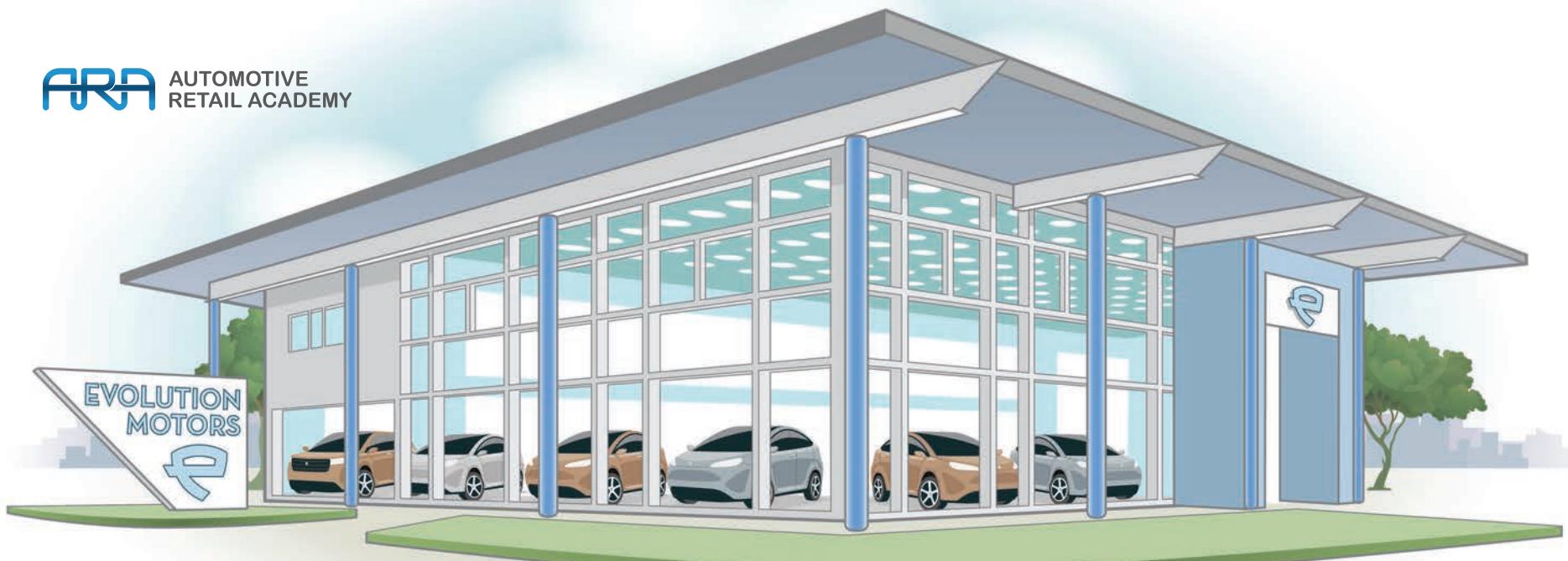
**1 Customer experience**—to meet evolving shopping and purchase expectations

**2 Dealership culture**—to meet multigenerational needs and attract and retain top talent

**3 Growth and profitability**—to ensure future viability

The ARA General Manager course challenges managers to balance all three by developing a broader perspective and a modern approach to leading that powers decision-making through customer, employee, and financial data points.





## ARA: Less Theory. More Practice.

Tomorrow's leaders need the ability to diagnose, reimagine, and pivot—in real time, at the pace of change.

### Introducing Evolution Motors— the leadership proving ground for ARA

What does it take today to run a profitable dealership operation that wows customers and attracts and retains the best talent? ARA takes participants on a journey through the dealership financial statement and explores the strategies, people, processes, policies, and technologies that drive the numbers.

Evolution Motors is a simulated dealership that is modeled on real-world parameters and industry data. Each module within ARA is driven by an Evolution Motors case study that features practical challenges.

ARA is a shared experience that builds the insights and experience to make confident decisions. For a few hours each week, participants will be guided through micro-learning by expert faculty, hear from experienced automotive operators and industry thought leaders, and collaborate with classmates to consider how current and future trends will impact the business.

Then, with skills and knowledge acquired and insights gleaned from ARA expert faculty and their peer network, participants are challenged to evaluate Evolution Motors, address competing priorities, and make executive decisions.

### Know-how demonstrated and proven

Along the way, badges are earned as proof of completion and mastery, and participants come away with methods and tools that they can put to work immediately on the job. At the end of the course, the capstone event provides an overall certification that verifies participants possess and can apply the most up-to-date, real-world knowledge for effectively running the complex business of a dealership.

# ARA: Outcomes Delivered

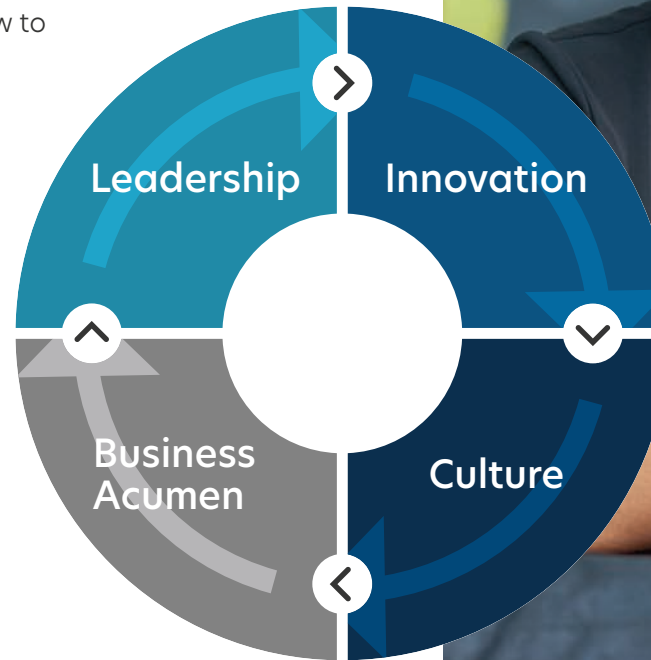
The general manager's success stretches beyond the 30-day income statement. ARA graduates are equipped to optimize teams, facilities, and customer experiences to generate higher profits and create future growth opportunities. Leaders emerge with a future-focused mentality that includes growth, inclusion, and agility—and the capacity to bring about positive change:

**Improve net profit** | ARA uniquely connects financial, customer, and employee data points, helping leaders understand how to evaluate individual decisions to optimize economic impact across the organization.

**Win the war for talent** | Participants tap into GP Strategies' world-class leadership curriculum, developing culture solutions to appeal to a diversity of audiences, ranging from digital immigrants to digital natives. Leaders learn that it's not about control. It's an ongoing exercise in empowerment.

**Foster a modern leader mindset** | The volatility and complexity of the modern market can lure general managers toward a work week spent putting out fires. Graduates develop innovative approaches and routines, managing through data and technology tools, focused on business planning and execution.

**Future-proof the dealership** | Connected cars, digital-first consumers, and a new crop of electric vehicles are just the beginning of the rapid changes facing our industry. ARA builds the skills to innovate and pivot to create a more agile enterprise that is ready to evolve with the marketplace.



## Who Should Enroll

The ARA General Manager course provides foundational knowledge combined with the best practices and next practices automotive professionals need to understand, manage, and lead the dealerships of the future. The tried-and-true content is ruthlessly relevant to today's transforming retail operation and is applicable to anyone who wants to elevate their dealership and business acumen, including:

- Experienced general managers grappling with underperformance or new ways of operating
- Managers new to the role who want to invest in their future success
- Managers aspiring to the general manager role who want to grow their qualifications for the next open position
- OEM field reps who want to increase their effectiveness in calling on dealers



# The ARA Difference

With more than 50 years of automotive experience and hundreds of associates in dealerships every day, we understand the realities of retail and what it takes to succeed in today's highly competitive landscape. Before, during and after the ARA experience, participants will have access to a supportive team, helpful tools and resources, and peer collaboration opportunities.

**Access to thought leaders** | Our faculty is made up of people who understand the car business but have a vision for and insight into where the industry is going; they will challenge participants to see the business not as it is but as it can be.

**A modern learning approach** | Gone are the days of hours in a classroom. Our approach is designed meet the needs of individual learners—byte-sized, always on, and available on any device—allowing working professionals to flex and tailor their learning journey.

**Direct performance results** | Course activities are immediately applicable back at the dealership, converting knowledge gains into business gains.

**A supportive community** | Access to ARA never ends. Whether it's the content and tool library, the future insights of faculty, or the network of peers, we make it easy for alumni to stay connected.

Retooling people, process and technology to unlock new opportunities, drive new growth, deliver new efficiencies, and ensure future relevance. It's what we do every day. Come learn with us.



# General Manager Course Content

The course is made up of 10 modules that roll out over six months. Participants will complete self-study, attend live cohort sessions, submit assignments and receive feedback, and periodically participate in peer-learning activities.

## MODULE 1 | Where Are We Now and Where Are You Going?

Meet your instructors and classmates and get familiar with the ARA learning laboratory—Evolution Motors—including the current state of operations, financials, and feedback from customers and the multigenerational staff. Engage in a leader survey to gain unique insights into your current leadership style that you can immediately use in your own dealership. **Based on the lessons in this module, you'll prepare a purpose statement to discuss with your cohort leader.**

## MODULE 2 | Translating Data into Decisions

Master the fundamentals of the financial statement, learn how to interpret data accurately and trace numbers back to their operational roots, and experiment with the four predictable methods for increasing dealership profit and return on investment. **Using core tools and financial reports, you'll analyze Evolution Motors' statement and identify opportunities.**

## MODULE 3 | Leveraging Technology to Accelerate Decision-Making

Explore the vast array of tools that track finances, manage customer data and transactions, monitor service production, manage inventory and ordering, handle lead generation, and more. Understand the data available from these tools and how best to use it to drive evaluation and decision-making. Learn how to analyze technology costs and benefits and examine cybersecurity and legal regulations for protecting dealership and customer data. **You'll analyze Evolution Motors' technology ecosystem and identify areas for improvement, focusing on efficiency, cost, and security.**

## MODULE 4 | Creating a Modern Buying Experience

Assess and reimagine the customer experience, leveraging mystery-shop, employee, and customer insights. With a focus on removing friction and accelerating speed-to-sale, you will emerge with a clear understanding of the mindset, policies, and processes necessary to enable online and in-store experiences. **You'll complete a detailed touchpoint analysis for Evolution Motors' sales experience and recommend process adjustments.**

## MODULE 5 | Mastering the Business of Variable Operations

Understand the why and how of emerging sales models. Examine various department and team structures (BDC, internet, showroom, F&I, delivery), including pay plans, and learn how to effectively measure and motivate superior performance. Formulate a unique selling proposition (USP) for effectively competing against disruptors. **You'll articulate a USP along with a methodology for testing its effectiveness in Evolution Motors' market.**

## MODULE 6 | The Ownership Process

Explore the future of automotive ownership, including the potential impact of alternative service providers and electric vehicles. Explore and implement new business models that leverage connected data (telematics) to optimize customer convenience alongside efficiency, productivity, and profitability—and discover the competitive advantages that telematics and e-commerce can provide. **You'll map the ownership life cycle and identify opportunities to increase efficiency, productivity, and profitability.**



# General Manager Course Content

## MODULE 7 | The Business of Fixed Operations

Unpack the complexity of production, efficiency, and department health, including performing a rate-and-volume financial analysis—while evaluating and making price adjustments to improve competitiveness. Additionally, you will be challenged to develop a culture strategy and game plan to attract, recruit, train, and retain top talent. **Given a set of challenges and opportunities, you'll develop a plan to improve key productivity and efficiency metrics for Evolution Motors.**

## MODULE 8 | Bringing Customers In

Explore branding and marketing strategies for communicating your USP or value proposition, as well as the role of OEM and agency partners. Learn how to build a marketing plan, craft messages customers want to hear, and manage content across multiple channels. Understand website features and functions and how best to use them for customer engagement. Examine tools for social media and reputation monitoring and learn how to listen and respond to customers, data, and your gut. **Given a set of specific market conditions, you'll create a marketing plan to reach key business targets.**

## MODULE 9 | The Building Blocks of Leadership

Examine your role as a leader and the importance of trust in developing high-performing teams, as well as the role of diversity and inclusion in being a top-rated employer. Learn to hone your communication skills for every type of conversation, how to delegate to achieve your goals and develop your people, and how to become change-resilient to weather the storms of our evolving industry. **Given a series of case studies for Evolution Motors, you'll describe how to address issues regarding diversity and inclusion.**

## MODULE 10 | Capstone Project

Respond to a set of highly detailed case studies by applying your newly gained knowledge, together with ARA methods and tools, to analyze financial data, assess operations, and make decisions. **You'll prepare a final report, and then participate in peer-review and discussion processes.**

# Program Faculty

## Cohort Leaders

Each group of learners will be guided throughout the program by a coach with both automotive and facilitation expertise. Their role is to guide discussions, contextualize content, and provide feedback to assignments and questions.



**JOEY ZANCA** is an industry veteran who started her automotive career in her father's dealership. She's been an F&I manager, run a fixed-operations consulting practice, extensively advocated for and supported the movement to digital sales, and experienced every channel of the business with positions at Toyota, J.D. Power, Farmers Insurance, and Edmunds.com.



**TED INGS** has successfully implemented dozens of initiatives for OEMs and Total Quality Management processes at thousands of dealerships in North America and around the world, changing the way vehicles are sold and serviced. He is the executive director at the Fixed Ops Roundtable and a five-time NADA Show speaker—one of its highest-rated presenters.



**KATHI KRUSE** is an automotive dealership profitability and social media expert, speaker, and author of *Automotive Social Business 2.0: How to Captivate Your Customers, Sell More Cars and Be Generally Remarkable on Social Media*. Her Kruse Control Blog is the leading automotive social media resource in the US.



**SCOTT SETTLE** is an experienced facilitator and former customer experience specialist for FCA. He specializes in helping dealers maximize go-to-market strategy, product launches, sales, owner retention, and profitability—all while satisfying digital consumers.



**KIRSTEN GILES** has over 20 years of experience in training and performance improvement for the automotive industry. With a master of science in adult learning (University of Southern California) and demonstrated consulting and organizational development skills in a variety of dealership and corporate settings, she specializes in the customer and employee experience.



**DAVE REPPER** has 20 years of automotive industry experience, and his background includes training, management development, and organizational development. He has a master's degree in industrial and organizational psychology and an MBA. Through his OEM experience, he has worked closely with dealerships to address customer concerns related to product, service, sales, and parts.

# Program Faculty

## Guest Speakers

Throughout the program, our industry experts will weigh in on their specific focus areas through both video and live interaction, adding a unique, real-world perspective to the learner experience.



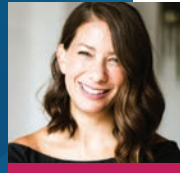
**CATHY PALOCHKO** has over 30 years of automotive experience in wholesale and retail and serves as GP Strategies' Automotive Industry Lead. She is best known for her work in designing technology-powered customer experiences and is a passionate advocate for automotive retail careers.



**FLEMING FORD**, managing partner of ESI Trends, empowers automotive dealerships to make data-driven decisions and execute on human capital strategies that positively impact business outcomes.



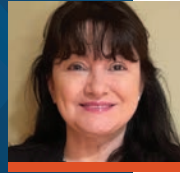
**BEN ABRAHAMS** leads GP Strategies' ancillary products service line covering certified pre-owned, F&I, and accessories. He has over 30 years' experience in automotive retail, wholesale, remarketing, and BDC, and he holds a Lean Six Sigma Black Belt.



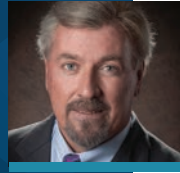
**CANDICE CRANE** has extensive experience in talent management, specializing in recruiting and retention strategies for high-turnover environments. She has designed management training and led transformational programs to improve the customer experience and reduce employee turnover.



**MIKE ARON** has shaped leadership cultures through solutions emphasizing pragmatism and applicability. His facilitation and coaching reinforce the critical nature of the connections leaders build with one another and their teams.



**MONICA OROZCO** specializes in the facilitation, in both English and Spanish, of leadership-development programs for middle managers, first-line managers, and individual contributors.



**DAVE ZUCHOWSKI** is a respected and accomplished automotive industry veteran with over 40 years of broad-based experience, including executive positions in each of the most influential sectors: OEM, retail, agency, and solution provider.

# A Results-Driven Learning Experience

Learning and Coaching from Industry Experts			Application Exercises & Capstone Projects
Peer Learning & Feedback			Management Toolkit
Real World Case Studies			Dedicated Program Support Team
Leadership Assessments			Learning Platform (web and mobile)
Learn in Place at Your Convenience			Accredited Badging & Certification

## About GP Strategies

Our people are operational leaders and educators; they have served the automotive industry in distribution, marketing, dealership operations, and every facet of the customer experience, from the showroom to the service drive. We work with OEMs and dealers to instill a culture of innovative performance, applying next-generation learning practices to the most pressing issues facing retail today.

Prepare for the future of retail

● ● ● **Empower your employees and build the future of your organization.**

Visit [www.gpstrategies.com/automotive-retail-academy](http://www.gpstrategies.com/automotive-retail-academy) to learn more.



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