

What is a good service advisor worth?

This position drives your shop success — do you have the right person in place?

What is a great service advisor worth? Before we can put a value on this we need to define what a good or great service advisor is. I promise you, there are far more mediocre and even bad service advisors out there than good or great. How can this be? Because hiring and terminating employees is a hard thing to do, and it is easier to keep who you already have at the counter. Let's listen to a former multi-store operator and ATI coach, Paul Marsh, offer some suggestions on this topic.

Personality vs. technical ability

Personality is far more important than experience. I can teach a layperson most everything you would need to know to be a successful service advisor within 60 to 90 days on the job. What I can never teach, and no one can, is the right personality to be successful as a service advisor. What does the right personality look and sound like?

- You can hear them smiling over the phone. Their tone, energy and voice in-

flexion make the caller feel their call is important and their business would be appreciated, rather than feeling that the call is an unwelcome interruption.

- They are social butterflies! The kind of person you can take to a party where they do not know a soul and they are comfortable and happy to meet new people.
- They have a high need for recognition, which drives them to high performance.
- A high sense of urgency. They can't wait to do it all!

CONSIDER HIRING THE RIGHT PERSONALITY AND THEN TEACH THEM THE REST.

- Empathic — they can relate to the level of concern of others and make them feel at ease.
- MONEY MOTIVATED! They thrive in a pay-for-performance position and are focused on what it takes to maximize their income.

How many can say this describes your advisor? When I bring up a concern about their advisor, I have had own-

ers tell me things like, "He is not a people person" and, "Once you get to know her she is a good person." A phone call lasts minutes at best, so how can a customer get to know him or her enough to feel like your shop is the place to go? Indifference from the person a consumer deals with is one of the biggest reasons customers quit a business.

Frequency reports

In a recent coaches' meeting, we were reviewing "frequency reports." This is an invaluable tool to track the frequency of your customer visits and show how many are one-time, two-time, etc., returning customers. I was astonished to see that at a very successful shop, 53 percent of their customers came to the shop only once. This shop spends good money on their website, search engine optimization and ad words. But they are clearly NOT giving their customers a compelling reason to return. Their four- and five-time return customers accounted for over half their sales with hundreds of dollars more in ARO, but only single-digit percentages of their overall car count. If they could double their four- and five-time return rate, they would never need to spend a dime on ad words or social media. They would be rolling in the dough!

I cannot speak to this shop's advisors or customer experience, but I sure do question them. How do you lose more than half of your first-time customers and not think that something is wrong? What impact does a good service advisor have on return rates? They have almost complete control over it except for

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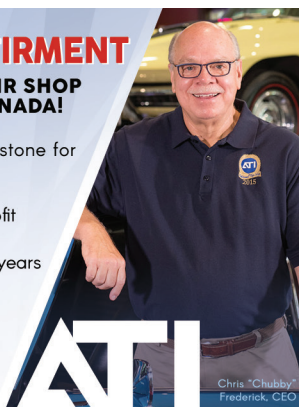
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the percentage of people who move, visitors to the area and other reasons that customers may not return.

It starts with the call prior to visiting. I cannot tell you how many times in my many years running multiple stores and districts that I have seen car count climb substantially within days of changing a store manager. The new manager answered the phone clearly and professionally, spoke with a smile, showed interest, invited the customer in, made it clear that their call was important and their business would be appreciated and all in all, gave the customer a compelling reason to come in.

A great service advisor greets the customer as soon as they walk in and shows warmth and professionalism that puts the customer at ease. The write-up process includes questions that clearly define the customer's concerns; and the customer feels a connection to the service advisor based on their urgency, professionalism and personality. A great service advisor is a great people person who finds commonality quickly and makes others feel comfortable. You CANNOT teach this.

Great service advisors

A great service advisor has a process when contacting the customer about their vehicle that includes the customer in the conversation, paints visuals for the customer to understand, listens to the customer and gives options and advice on the vehicle's health. A great process starts with what is right with the vehicle, then the concern the customer brought the vehicle in for and other concerns or suggestions.

A great service advisor understands the importance of the "goodbye kiss." They take the time to go over all repairs and services and, when applicable, declined work. They answer any questions and make sure in words and in action that the customer knows their business is appreciated.

I hire personality above experience. When we run an ad, the early resumes we see are almost exclusively not who we hoped to hire. The underperformers and job hoppers are looking for work and the great employees are being taken care of. We need a service advisor, and we often settle for experience, as it is easier than training someone. STOP! Bad hires cost you as much as three times their pay in lost or unrealized revenue.


Consider hiring the right personality and teach them the rest. You do NOT need to be a tech to sell service and give customers a great experience. You do NOT! I am living proof of this. You can pay these people less to start, then help them grow into a great career and become a great long-term employee. They do not know at first whether a customer who came in for an oil change should or should not be expected to want to maintain their vehicle. You show, train and tell them what to do and they just do it. There are countless videos and resources to

teach anyone the fundamentals of how an automobile works.

What is a great service advisor worth? Every penny they earn!

Exceptional service advisor checklist

A great way to make sure your shop is providing the best experience to your customers is to use the Exceptional Customer Service Checklist. The function of the checklist is to make sure that we give the same "wow!" experience every time to every customer. You can use it to grade your service advisor and help them grow.

If you would like our Exceptional Customer Service Checklist, you can get it by going to www.ationlinetraining.com/2018-11 for a limited time. 



CHRIS "CHUBBY" FREDERICK is the CEO and founder of the Automotive Training Institute. ATI's 130 full-time associates train and coach more than 1,500 shop owners every week across North America to drive profits and dreams home to their families. Our full-time coaches have helped our members earn over 1 BILLION DOLLARS in a return on their coaching investment since ATI was founded. This month's article was written with the help of ATI Coach Paul Marsh.

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