



# PROFIT MATTERS

HOW DO YOUR NUMBERS LINE UP? | BY CHRIS "CHUBBY" FREDERICK

## Answering Your Phone Effectively

This month, one of our top coaches, Matt Winslow, is going to share our secret super-powered tip to keep your bays full of cars and your cash register ringing with sales: "Give good phone and you'll never be alone." All of your marketing and advertising is designed to do one thing: make your phone ring. Answering your phone effectively is critical to the success of your business. Taking the time to make sure your employees do it right will help you stay the best and keep your customers from going to your competition.

It all starts with what the customer wants to know. Most customers want to know four things when they call you on the phone. First, do you work on my kind of car? Your response should be, "What kind of car do you have?"

When can you do it? Your response, "When would you like to bring it in?"

How much will it cost? Your response, "We'll be able to give you a complete estimate after we see your car." And finally, when will it be ready? Your response should be, "When do you need it back?"

To make all of this work, use phone scripts. You need at least four phone scripts to effectively get customers into your shop with your phone.

- Diagnostic: "Bring it in, drop it off. We'll call you when it's ready."

- Menu services: "Yes, we do have a special price. What kind of car do you have?"

- Tires: "What kind of car do you have, NOT what size tire do you need. Yes, we have that tire and here's the price (for the tire only). We also have other tires in your size starting at..."

- Wait: "Of course you can wait. I have two appointments today and tomorrow, 9 a.m. or 1 p.m. Which do you prefer?"

### Setting the Tone

Have you ever called someone and felt they were having a bad day just by the way they answered their phone? Sure. Humans use words, tone and body language to transfer messages. Over the phone, your tone communicates 84 percent of your message, so what are you really saying?

"Hi, I'm thrilled you called and am ready to help!" or, "Oh no, not another interruption. Don't these people know I have better things to do than talk to them?"



Remember, you're not in business to take care of cars. Cars don't have check-books, cash or credit cards and aren't loyal to anyone. You're in business to take care of people.

You also need to remember that you have three opportunities to make a great impression.

- Initial phone call
- Sales presentation
- Follow-up

You have three objectives for initial calls:

- Take control. Ask questions.
- Build a relationship.
- Invite them in. Get them to commit to an appointment.

## QUESTION OF THE MONTH

QUESTION:

**What shocks even successful shop owners?**

**Listening to mystery shopper recordings of their front line!**

Do you have a question for Chubby? E-mail him at [cfrederick@autotraining.net](mailto:cfrederick@autotraining.net).

Take control. The best way to take control on the phone is to ask questions instead of just giving answers. What kind of car do you have? How many miles are on it? How long has your car been doing that?

Build a relationship. Give them your name and ask for theirs. Use their name several times during the conversation. Build the relationship by asking open-ended questions and get them to talk about themselves. After they have told you about the problem, repeat it back to them and let them know you want to understand the problem so you can help them.

Invite them in. The whole point of the call is to get your customer to commit to bringing in their car. You can't help them over the phone. Offer them an appointment and tell them now is a good time, too! Tell them you'll be looking for them when they drop off their car, and use their name when you meet them in person.

### Sales presentation

Most people drop off their car and go to work, so most of your presentations will be over the phone. Start by sounding cheerful and helpful. Tell them the good news: You found their problem and can fix it!

Expect a price objection like, "Wow, that's a lot of money!" Respond with "Yeah, it really is!" Be empathetic when they complain about the cost or inconvenience but don't lower your price. Most of the time, their objection is an emotional one, not a logical one, and 90 percent of the time it isn't their real buying decision. Let's look at each reason most people mention price.

### Trust

You may hear, "My brother is a mechanic and he says brakes should cost just \$59." I know what you want to say, "Well, why didn't your brother fix it, moron?" The problem is, you won't get their money by insulting them.

Try this: "Sometimes your brother is right. We've often fixed brake problems for just \$59. Unfortunately, your car's problem is a little more involved. Let's go out into the shop so I can show you why it's going to cost more." How can you show them what's wrong over the phone?

You have three options. Describe in detail what's wrong. Send them photos by email or MMS messaging on your phone. You also can send them a short video by email or MMS messaging on your phone.

### Time

You may hear, "Well, I can't leave the car that long. I have to pick up my kid at school at 3 p.m." Can you fix that? Sure. Shuttle service, loaner car or change your workflow to get their car finished earlier in the day.

### Affordability

This is the big one. Most people don't keep a lot of cash in their bank accounts. A big repair is usually unexpected and unplanned for. Your price isn't the problem, their cash flow is. Offer them a payment plan (but don't lend them any money).

How do you do that? Simple. Mention you take credit cards and can even split the payment between cards: one-third on Visa, one-third on MasterCard and one-third cash because you love them. Or maybe you offer a third party financing option like a CarCareOne, Goodyear or Firestone card.

And finally, you can always break the repairs into piles. Do some today based on their budget and schedule a follow-up visit, or visits, to get the rest of the work done.

Don't assume your customer will come up with these solutions on their own. Offer them when you get the "I can't afford it" objection. Helping them fit this unexpected expense into their budget will earn their appreciation and get their business.

### Follow Up

The price of gas is rising, so the time between customer visits is getting longer. It's more important than ever before to stay in touch with your customers. We recommend you touch them at least three times.

Start with a thank-you call three days after their visit. Most customers are stunned you took the time to follow up and appreciate the call. Tell them you'll check with them next week to make sure all is OK.

After seven days, follow up with a call to verify they're satisfied. Tell them you'll see them in 90 days for their next service visit. Finally, contact them in 90 days to confirm their next service visit.

Ask how they prefer to be contacted, phone call, email or by a text to their cell phone, and contact them using whichever method they prefer. Many people now prefer email or a text to their cell phone to a phone call.

### No Voice Mail

Here's a killer of potential sales — your answering machine or voice mail system.

Today, most people find your number on the Internet. Every other shop in your area is just a click or tap away. Most people hang up and call someone else when they get a recorded message, so your customers should always get a live person answering your phone, ready to help! The problem is, your service advisor can only talk to one person at a time. Here are a few strategies.

Create a phone answering hierarchy for your shop. Determine who's first, second, third and fourth in line to answer your phone. Train everyone what to say and how to sound helpful and friendly.

Or you can hire an outside phone answering service. Set up your phone to roll over to your answering service when you can't pick up the phone right away. Ask your answering service to get the customer's name, cell phone number and reason for the call. Have them tell your customer you'll call them back in a few moments, then ask your answering service to send you an email or text message to make calling your customer back easy. You'll look more professional and keep your customer from calling someone else!

### Mystery Shopping

Have a friend call your stores frequently and record the conversation. Discover the real tone and messages your employees share with your customers. Play back the recording for your employees. Celebrate the good and point out the bad. Give them phone outlines and make them practice in front of you.

This month I have a special treat for you: a 30-minute interview with master instructor John Bishop on how to answer the phone to drive customers into your shop and keep your pockets full of cash. Simply send your contact information via email to [cfrederick@autotraining.net](mailto:cfrederick@autotraining.net) and I'll send you a link to download the interview. You can listen on your computer, iPad or iPod. 

*Chris "Chubby" Frederick is CEO and president of the Automotive Training Institute. He is thankful for assistance from George Zeeks, Brian Hunnicutt, Bryan Stasch and Matt Winslow in preparing this monthly column. Contact him at [cfrederick@autotraining.net](mailto:cfrederick@autotraining.net).*

