



PROFIT MATTERS

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

Is Your Service Advisor More Like a Robot?

In today's economy and in talking to many shop owners across the country, I often hear, "I need more cars," and "Customers just aren't buying." If you have made either of these statements yourself, maybe you need to look at the level of customer service on your counter.

Building a relationship with your customers is the key to their becoming repeat customers and spending more money with you. As a bonus, having that relationship with your customers will prompt them to refer more new customers to you. Having said that, way too often in automotive repair and other retail walks of life, the person behind the counter is a robot.

A robot is someone who waits on every customer the same way with the main focus being to complete the transaction without regard to building a relationship. They wait on you with courtesy, address your needs and generally thank you for your business. They do not treat you badly or do anything wrong; they are just not anyone you, as a customer, would remember or refer to a friend or family member.

It is a level of service you can get anywhere, so why would I, as a customer, come back to give my business exclusively to you or refer you?

Obviously bad customer service is something you would not tolerate in your business.

However, robotic customer service often not only is tolerated by many shop owners and managers, but accepted. As long as we are not getting complaints, our people must be doing a good job, right? Well maybe not!

Diagnosing the Problem

Let's listen to Steve Privette's, suggestions on how to remedy this situation. Steve is our ATI Alumni Relationship Manager. Here's what he tells us: As a business coach serving the automotive repair industry, I recently was working with a shop owner on trying to determine why their average repair order (ARO) was so low, and why a large portion of their customer base was not giving all of their automotive service business to them.

The average repair order was hovering around \$225 per car, and often they would



see a current customer of theirs with some other shop's oil change sticker in the window. They would remind their customers about previously recommended services they had suggested when the customer last visited them only to hear, "I already had that done."

To me, as a previous shop owner and a current coach, these were alarming indicators that their customers were not loyal to them. This is very likely because they hadn't built that relation-

QUESTION OF THE MONTH

QUESTION:

Why do my service advisors average repair order decrease at times?

Selling is not like riding a bicycle; it requires enthusiasm and a great attitude!

An annual dose of coaching and training is necessary to maintain even the pros.

Do you have a question for Chubby? E-mail him at cfrederick@autotraining.net.

ship. When the relationship and the trust that goes with it has not been established, a typical customer will be loyal only to price or convenience as opposed to being loyal to the business. When we give customers great reasons to come back and we have built that relationship, they usually will.

I had the shop owner spend the next week closely observing his service advisor's interactions with their customers. Lo and behold we found we had a "robot" on the counter. We found the service advisor to be respectful, informative to the point of telling the customer what was wrong with his car, but very rarely did he go much beyond what brought the customer into the shop on that particular day and never tried to get to know the customer beyond this particular transaction.

Does this sound familiar to you? Are you reading this and saying, "That's exactly how we do it here"? If so, not only do you have a robot behind your counter, you probably are also saying, "I need more cars," and "Customers just aren't buying."

The Solution

In this case we talked to the service advisor about making a few adjustments during his interactions with customers in an effort to begin building a relationship and to show the customer that we genuinely care about them and their vehicle as opposed to just going through the motions.

At write-up or drop-off:

- Smile and make eye contact when greeting the customer. It sounds simple enough, but it rarely happens these days.
- Shake hands. Again, this is a forgotten art. This in itself begins to build the relationship.
- Listen carefully to the customer's concerns and repeat them back to the customer when they finish. It shows the customer that you care and are focused on servicing them.
- Find your relationship clue. Spend one minute building the relationship by talking about a topic the customer is interested in other than auto repair. Find your clue by what the customer is wearing like a sports hat, jewelry, etc. Go out to the car to get the customer's mileage and VIN number and look for

your clue there like a bumper sticker, baby seat in the back, etc.

Clues are easy to find once you start looking for them. That one minute spent with the customer begins to build the relationship and breaks down that invisible defense barrier the customer has between you and them.

Next up is presenting the sale:

- Show and tell. If the customer is waiting, show them the areas that need

attention on the car. If they dropped off, take a few digital pics of the worn, broken or leaking parts and email them to your customer before calling. You did get your customer's email address at write-up didn't you? This again only takes a moment and is perceived as caring and professional by the customer.

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- Be sure to tell your customer about the good things you found that don't need attention. It makes them feel better about their car and tells them you are interested in more than just what YOU can benefit from as a business.

After the service is finished is the step of contacting the customer to inform them of completion and ready for pickup:

- When contacting the customer either by phone or retrieving them from the waiting room, in addition to letting them know the car is ready, tell them that everything went great and that we appreciate their patience. Again, this shows caring and confidence in your service.

- If they dropped off, ask them if they need a shuttle ride to retrieve their car and negotiate a time.

At pickup or checkout:

- Again smile and make eye contact at the greeting.
- Review the invoice thoroughly with the customer including their warranty

on the work performed. Also review the services they declined today and ask if they would like to schedule those services.

- Ask them if they have any questions. Once again, this is showing that you care.

- Shake hands again when handing them their keys and thank them for the opportunity for your shop to have earned their business.

The Benefit to Everyone

All of these subtle changes transform a forgettable service experience into a memorable one. In addition, they require very little additional time or effort by your staff.

Doing this with the shop and service advisor mentioned above immediately increased the average repair order as we began to build that relationship at write-up and broke down that invisible defense barrier. In time, we also have seen our customer visit frequency improve and haven't seen as many com-

petitor oil change stickers in the windows of our customers.

If you have said recently, "I need more cars" or "Customers just aren't buying," take a look at the person interacting with your customers. You just may find a robot!

Interested in finding out if you have a "robot" on the front counter? Send your complete contact information to chubby@autotraining.net and we will be happy to send you a Sales Management Checklist to evaluate yourself or your sales staff. You'll be glad you did! *TM*

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 Chubby at cfrederick@autotraining.net.

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