



**April 2017**

THE MOTOR DEALER REPORT FROM AUSWILD & CO  
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## **DON'T JUDGE A BOOK BY ITS COVER**

Why is it that automotive salespeople don't provide the same calibre of service to every client? This is an age-old question, yet from dealership to dealership and year after year nothing changes. Even more puzzling, this seems to occur regularly only in the automotive industry.

If these four different customers walked into a dealership on the same day, how would they be treated?

- An elderly gentleman, walking with the aid of a cane.
- A young woman in yoga pants and a T-shirt, wearing her hair up in a bun.
- A woman about age 40, casually dressed.
- A man in dirty pants, ratty boots, and a torn t-shirt, with his wife and 5 kids in tow

Based on actual customer experiences, here's what happened to each of these customers. The elderly man was shown to a chair in the waiting area and asked to wait for a salesperson. Several people who came in after he did were greeted and introduced to a salesperson immediately. After 30 minutes, he left.

The woman in the yoga pants was not taken seriously as a customer. She was left to wander around looking at cars by herself. After some time, she was approached by a salesperson who essentially told her to look around and come back when she was serious. The salesperson never provided specific details on the various models, nor did he ask what she wanted in a vehicle. She left without buying a vehicle.

The 40-something woman was greeted by a salesperson, asked a few questions, shown a couple of showroom models and told to go to the dealership website if she wanted more information. The salesperson told her to come back when she'd decided on a vehicle. She left and didn't come back.

The family was left to wander around the dealership by themselves and was basically ignored. They had already been "blown off" at a couple of other dealerships.

Each of these people and their experiences had two things in common. First, they all ultimately purchased a vehicle, but from another dealership. Second, each of the salespeople they encountered made a conscious decision based on customer appearance. They decided these people would not be buying a car from them.

The salespeople's attitudes and limited willingness to help each of the three customers was determined by first impressions – not by reality, not by talking to the customers about their vehicle needs or wants.

First impressions work both ways. Customers can decide if they want to work with a salesperson based on how they act in the first few minutes of an exchange.

Here's what the salespeople didn't know in each of the above scenarios.

The elderly gentleman was planning to purchase cars for his two grandchildren. The lady in yoga pants was an independently wealthy woman of leisure. The other woman was a soccer mom who really needed a new van. The family man owned a construction company, and had recently sold a 600 acre chicken farm to a large conglomerate and had more money than you could shake a stick at.

These examples underscore how vital it is for dealerships to have a well-structured and clearly defined sales process in place. It is equally important to support the process with training and education for every employee, from managers to the receptionists. When this happens, all customers will be treated in the same manner.

Imagine if this had happened:

Someone greeted customers and welcomed them saying, "Welcome to ABC Motors. My name is Susan." Susan collects the customers' names and introduces them to a salesperson. (This is where management should begin to monitor the process and support the salesperson.)

The salesperson greets customers saying something along the lines of – "Good morning. I'm Michael. I'm glad you are here this morning. My job is to help you select a vehicle."

The salesperson listens and learns what the customer needs and want. The salesperson identifies a product or service that uniquely fits the customer. Throughout the process the salesperson guides the customer as they experience features of the vehicle that will satisfy their needs and wants. This builds excitement for the product.

Price is the last point of discussion, raised only after customers feel at home and have become attached to the product, dealership and salesperson. This process results in more closed sales and in more satisfied long-term customers.

For this to work, management must educate and develop the staff. This has to happen daily using both internal and external resources.

Every dealership employee must treat every guest as a buyer and take time to know them. If staffers make assumptions about them, customers will take their business elsewhere.

The moral of this article? Never judge a book by its cover. You will be wrong more times than right!

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