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THE MOTOR DEALER REPORT FROM AUSWILD & CO
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THE EXCEPTIONAL SERVICE ADVISOR

Have you ever gone out to buy something, found exactly what you were looking for but didn't buy it because –

- a) You had to wait too long to be served,
- b) You couldn't get anyone to serve you, or
- c) You didn't like the way you were treated by the salesperson?

We're certain that most of us have had this unpleasant experience at least once. We are enticed into a store by great advertising and marketing only to find out that no one wants to serve you or the salesperson we deal with has a lousy attitude.

Maybe the salesperson is bored with the job, doesn't really listen when we ask questions, tries to push us into a sale before we're ready or he or she just doesn't care. No matter what the reason is, when most of us encounter a salesperson like that, we tend to put up our barriers.

Similarly, the attitude of your service advisor can make or break the service sale. Service advisors are one of the most visible yet often one of the most overlooked positions in the dealership. They see more customers than almost anyone and therefore have the greatest opportunity to win friends or make enemies.

When a customer pulls up in the service drive way, the first point of contact for him or her in your dealership is your service advisor. What keeps your service department going is not only the marketing, doing the job right, but the face-to-face contact of your service advisor with your customer.

This is the part of selling that lets your customers know you care about them and want to help them solve their problem or choose the service that meets their needs.

Experts say that a great attitude is a service advisor's number one requirement. We maintain that it is more important than product knowledge, education or appearance.

Service advisors with a poor attitude will write fewer repair orders and sell fewer labour hours and demoralise everyone around them, because negative thinking leads to negative talk. Those with good attitudes will not only be leaders, they will make everyone in the department better.

So how do your service advisors measure up? Do they have the following attributes that top service advisors have?

“If it is to be, it’s up to me”: This attitude of being in charge of their own economic destiny is the critical distinction between high performers and low performers. They see themselves as being “self-employed”. When your service advisors accept complete responsibility for everything that happens to them, they stop making excuses and stop blaming others. The top service advisors feel personally responsible for customers, sales, quality and the economic health of the dealership. They are totally engaged with their work. They don’t simply “wing it”. They have consistent procedures to follow that help them navigate through the upsell process.

Consulting rather selling: High-achieving service advisors see themselves as problem solvers with their services rather than “order takers”. They approach their customers with the attitude that they are consultants helping their customers reach an objective. Questions are the number one tool service advisors have for moving the service transaction forward. If used incorrectly, potential business is lost. They take the time to listen to the customer and fully understand their customer's situation completely before they make any recommendations. Some service advisors talk too much and listen too little. The “gift of gab” does not work on the service drive.

Strategic thinking in service: Top service advisors see themselves as professionals, acting in their customers’ best interest and bound by a high code of ethics. They often start the day with setting and accomplishing clear objectives. They set clear goals for what they want and they develop organised plans of action to attain them. They invest the time to think about how they're going to accomplish their performance objectives. They recognise that the more a person focuses and concentrates on achieving clear, written goals, the happier they become with their work.

Getting the job done: The best service advisors are results-oriented. Intense results-orientation requires that people use their time extremely well. Success in the automotive business may well rest on the effective use of time.

Being the best: Top service advisors have high levels of ambition and they identify with other top performers. In their dealerships, they spend time with the best people and exchange advice and information with them. They realise that by setting high standards and relating to other high achievers, they will feel better about themselves.

Being humble: Dealerships lose thousands of customers every year trying to establish their credibility by showing how brilliant they are. Credibility is never established through arrogance or displaying know-it-all tendencies. The top service advisors establish their credibility through humility – by giving clear, comprehensive answers to their customers at their pace and level of understanding.

There is no question that the automotive industry is changing. But regardless of how the conventional selling philosophies that most dealerships currently work with change, one thing is clear — the attitude of the service advisor will remain a critical service indicator.

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