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## SHUT UP AND LET YOUR SOFTWARE SELL YOUR JOBS

A good service writer consists of a combination of skills. The most obvious one is “good with people”. If they “like” people, then the first hurdle is over. Any sales person worth their salt *wants* to interact and talk with others. And the customer on the other side will *know* that!

Next, he or she needs to know the ins and outs of good communication. If they allow interruptions while the customer is trying to explain their problem, then they are asking for trouble. If they cut off the customer mid explanation with “let’s just get ‘er up on the rack and take a look”, that is ALSO trouble. If they don’t take the time to *acknowledge* and duplicate what the customer is telling them, *that* is trouble. Good solid communication skills include making good eye contact, fully listening to and acknowledging, and making sure you get *all* of the customer’s info or complaints. Add to that not taking the time to *fully* check out the car and preferably a road test *with* the customer is a recipe for NO SALE!.

Enter your software system. How many of you who have systems out there actually *use* the system to close the sale? Not too many I know for a fact since I constantly ask that question and get the same answer – no. I’m always dumbfounded because there are just so many reasons why one *should always* use the system on each and every “close”. Why?

For starters, let’s get into the “now” of the computer age. I don’t think there is one person out there (unless you are perhaps a native living in the jungles of some exotic location with no outside contact) that hasn’t run into commerce and the use of computer systems. In fact, this has gotten so out of hand so to speak, that I’m sure many of you have either experienced or witnessed yourself the following events. You are at the department store and are in line to purchase the new shirt you have in tow. You get to the register, and the clerk looks at you apologetically and says “our system just went down”. You either wait it out, go to another register (if it’s *just* that register that’s down), or you put the shirt back and leave, annoyed that you just wasted an hour of precious time. The clerk could NOT take your credit card info or cash or process anything unless that system

was “up”. Then there’s the clerk who could not “even if their life depended on it” make change if the computer didn’t do the math for them. Forgetaboutit!

Yes, gone are the days of handwritten slips of paper and invoices and math whizzes. Well, there *are* still some math whizzes around, but they have dwindled for sure. The point here is, computers and systems are here and they aren’t going away and they will only get more and more sophisticated. There is the good *and* the bad regarding all this which sort of depends on *your* viewpoint of it all.

The question you should take a look at as a service writer is this: When was the last time you or anyone else you know of *argued* with an amount owed that showed up on the receipt for goods purchased. The grocery stores, theatre tickets, department stores, you name it – they enter your items, up comes a price, and if you don’t have enough money to purchase it, then you eliminate items or cancel the sale altogether. I can see it now – you are at the grocery store in the cash out line. The clerk scans all your items and announces the total. You say “well, that’s a little too high – can you do better than that? Otherwise I’m going to take business down the street.” Yeah, right.

So okay, let’s say *your* customer is standing there in front of you, and you are pulling up in your computer system all the labor and parts you will need to complete an overhaul of their transmission. You get it all on the screen showing the bottom line price, turn the monitor around so the customer can see it, point to the TOTAL at the bottom, or verbally tell them, then SHUT UP. He who speaks first, LOSES! If he says well gosh, that’s a bit too high, couldn’t we shave a little off that? Your response – “Well, I guess we could leave out *reverse*”. SHUT UP again! Chances are they are NOT going to go to the trouble to go elsewhere, they are already there and the problem has been diagnosed and they don’t know if they could get a better price elsewhere anyway. The majority will roll over because well, if the computer says how much it is – it must be right. People RARELY if ever try and argue with a computer’s pricing. It is the *smart* service writer who knows and uses that to his advantage.

We had a client, actually one of our first, who was a very small 2 man shop. The owner/client did all the service writing and shop management and turned the wrenches too. He said he used to “size up” a customer to determine possibly “how much” he could charge. He said all too often he would lose money on a job so have to “make it up” on the next one. His method of “sizing up” consisted of what kind of car it was, how the customer was dressed, was he “clean”, did he “look” like he had cash? Hmmm. In other words, by the seat of his pants and it was hit or miss.

He put our software into his shop and had been trained on using the system as a sales tool. He didn’t think it would work. But he forged ahead. The first guy who walked through the door didn’t fit his “looks like he has some cash” model, but he

decided it was ok to lose the sale trying out his new “technique”. Sure enough, the guy’s tranny was “toast”. He priced out the job with the computer and when the “bottom line” showed up, he got a sick feeling in his gut because “no way is this guy gonna pay this for this job”. But he steeled himself and did as he was instructed. He turned the monitor around to “show” the customer what it was going to take, then SHUT UP. They had the “silent dance” going for what seemed an eternity – with the customer staring at the computer screen, and our client staring at his customer. Finally, the customer looks up, sighs, shakes his head and says, “Well, it’s gotta get fixed”.

Our client nearly fell over, not believing what he just heard, but kept himself together long enough to get the authorization signed and see the guy out the door. Next thing we know he’s on the phone to us really really UPSET! What? What’s the problem? He says to us “Why didn’t you sell me this contraption a long time ago? Do you know how much money I’ve lost by not using it? Yes, we do know! And we ran into him about a year later sporting the latest Lincoln with a big smile on his face and a thumbs up salute!

So summarize, ensure your service writer has good overall skills, put your pricing in your computer system that you NEED in order to make your profit margins, use your computer system to price those jobs out and adjust those profit percentages on the fly if need be, then SHOW the customer and SHUT UP!

***Barbara Lee***