

WANT TO KNOW A SECRET?

CONFIDENTIAL TIPS ON KEEPING CUSTOMERS COMING BACK.

BY CHRIS “CHUBBY” FREDERICK | CONTRIBUTOR

FOR THE past couple of years, the economy has affected us all, from long-standing companies going out of business or suffering

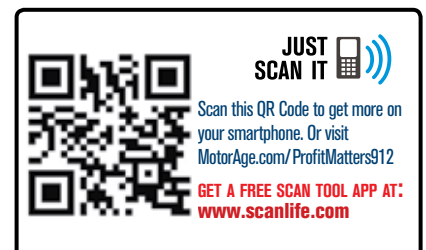
massive layoffs, to people picking and choosing where to spend their dollars. Yet I am astonished at the dreadful customer service I run across daily. At a time when I believe everyone is in a

battle for every dollar earned, owners are putting customer service in the hands of employees who don't know or care what true customer service is. Let's listen as our head coach, Mike Haley, explains to shop owners how to solve this problem so that all your customers keep coming back.

Think about the last negative experience you had with a purchase or a service. Typically this is where I would ask you, “How did it make you feel?” But what I want you to think about is, “How sincere was the employee who was trying to help you?” Were they sincere? Did you feel they genuinely wanted to help? Did you think they had the autonomy to resolve the issue? Did this employee say what they could do or more of what they couldn't do?

The Owner Sets the Stage

What is the very first step of customer service? It is a message — loud and clear, from the owner to the employees — that we are in the customer-service business and we fix customers' problems. I didn't write that we fix cars; we keep their car going, etc. Customers come to us because they have an issue. The job of every employee in our building is to solve the issue for the customer and ensure they have a



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great experience. For this to happen, your employees must sincerely want to satisfy customers' needs. You can have the best equipment and the most knowledgeable people, but if they don't believe the message, it will show in their actions and attitude.

The Basics

The first item is the basic product or service. You need to provide the customer a reason to visit your shop.

An example of a basic product or service is a basic oil change. The customer requests an oil change and you perform the oil change, using the correct oil and filter and completing the work in a timely fashion. The final invoice matches the quoted price, and the customer transaction is concluded. The customer at this point has no feeling of satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

Give Support

The second item required for perceived value is support. Using the example of the basic oil change, this could be a warranty for the parts and labor. Or perform a vehicle inspection and report the results of the inspection to the customer. Provide the customer with contact info if they have any questions or concerns.

At this point the customer feels a little more connected with the shop and service writer. But I'm not sure if he will tell his friends about his experience.

Deliver Enhanced Service

The third and most commonly missed item of perceived value is enhanced service. These are the details that wow the customer, things that surprise them when received as part of the product or service. Continuing with our basic oil change example, these items could include vacuuming the inside of the vehicle or washing the outside. If the vehicle was dropped off, the shop could pick the customer up or deliver the vehicle to the customer's place of work. A gift bag could be placed in the vehicle.

Maybe the waiting room has Wi-Fi, a coffee bar or even a nail salon. How about thank-you calls or a note in the



mail — items that customers don't receive at other shops and personal attention that leaves the customer with a feeling of satisfaction greater than the basic transaction alone would bring.

Bridging Prevents Problems

What can cause this perceived value to go bad? We call this a ricochet. A ricochet is an annoying experience for the customer that is a breakdown or deficiency in any of the three items. An example is not having the proper filters or oil in stock.

A response to a ricochet is called a frantic recovery — the extraordinary effort needed to keep a customer satisfied and minimize a ricochet's damage. A frantic recovery example is the service writer jumping in his vehicle to go and get the proper filter. Though the customer appreciates the efforts of the employee, this is a short-term approach to providing great customer service.

If you find your business in constant frantic recovery, bridging is needed to alleviate this reaction. Bridging is investigating the root cause of the ricochet to determine how the work process can be improved to prevent future ricochets.

The cost of poor customer service is lost revenue and car count. There also are things that are hard to put a cost on: time, energy and resources spent to correct ricochets. Every dollar spent on prevention saves \$10 spent on recovery.

Now we know the three items needed to provide great customer service and how ricochets can break down great customer service, actually costing the shop money and resources. We can measure how we are doing with a Customer Service Survey.

These surveys should be short yes-or-no questions and a simple scoring scale from one to five. They should not take long to complete, and turning in the responses should be convenient.

I have 18 service survey questions for you to select from and use on your next survey. Go to www.ationlinetraining.com/2012-09 and I will send it to you. **ZZ**



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Chris “Chubby” Frederick is CEO and president of the Automotive Training Institute. ATI's 98 associates train and coach over 1,100 shop owners every week across North America to drive profits and dreams home to their families. This month's article was written with the help of Mike Haley, head coach and mentor to ATI's coaching staff.

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