



PROFIT MATTERS

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

Will You Please Answer the Cash Register?

One of the most common complaints from shop owners is the need for more customers and more cars. Shop owners spend their hard earned money on a multitude of marketing ideas, but they forget to focus on the most important part of the marketing process.

The idea behind all of this marketing is to get the phone to ring — a customer calling to ask for your services. Few shop owners spend the time needed to develop the proper system for answering the phone. Fewer still measure the effectiveness of the employees who are answering the phone and have tools in place to gauge how many incoming calls result in the customer coming into your shop.

There have been many variations on this theme, but let's look at this problem from another point of view and keep it as simple as possible. I want to share a great story from one of our senior coaches, George Zeeks, and his dad. After all, when the phone rings, you should be hearing the cash register ringing even louder.

The success or failure of most tasks that take place in the average shop can be broken down to the effectiveness of three basic areas: motivation, measurability and

accountability. Motivation needs to be looked at from both the employee's motivation to answer the phone and the customer's motivation to come to your shop after the phone call is done.

As a public school boy, I soon learned to rely on experience to be my guide. At times, however, I would listen to my dad and save myself some pain. We did a fair amount of fishing together, and the lessons I learned became invaluable. One of the first lessons was to think like a fish. What is the motivation of the fish? (My dad would never have said anything like that. His motivation usually involved some sort of pain: either a gentle slap in the back of the head or self-inflicted due to some oversight on my part that he allowed.) The fish just wants what he wants — the worm.

We all know why the owner wants the person on the phone to come to his or her

shop, but why does the employee? It might be financial reward, the sense of accomplishment or just a little bit of praise for having a good day. Each individual is different, and it is important that we are intimately aware of how our staff perceives their roles in the workplace and what motivates them to do it. Otherwise, you might find that you are fishing with the wrong bait. Find the right bait, and you will be successful.

The customer is a different story. Many times, if they are calling the shop and never have been there before, their motivation could be that they have already been to another shop and did not make the purchase (this could be due to a lack of trust, the amount of the purchase or maybe they just didn't like the staff) or perhaps they do not have a shop to call "home." The resulting calls are, at the least, an inconvenience, and for a good many people it can be almost painful to sit down and make all those calls and talk to all of those people.

What do we do about it? What does the fish want? He wants a nice juicy worm in his belly. It makes him feel good. What does the prospective customer want? What will make him feel good? How about not

QUESTION OF THE MONTH

QUESTION:

How do most shop owners react to someone mystery shopping their counter?

The vast majority thought they were much better than they actually scored, and they took action immediately to regain the car count.

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

having to make all those calls. They want someone to listen to them. They need to feel like a person, and they need to interact with another person on the other end of the phone who cares.

The next time you talk to someone on the phone and they want a phone quote, find out their name and use it at least three times in the conversation. Ask open-ended questions. After all, the person most people like to talk about mainly is himself. Ask them what problems they are having, and pay attention. Repeat it back to them so they know you are listening, and then tell them that you understand their needs and invite them in so you can work together to solve the problem.

In my mind, it is easier to think of it as “speed dating.” You have three minutes to make the date before the gong sounds, and you have about three minutes to build enough of a relationship to get the customer to not want to pick up the phone again. In the end, you’re doing both of you a favor, because they really don’t like making the phone calls. Practice this, use it every call and have your co-workers listen to you and provide feedback. You’ll be amazed at how much more successful you are on the phone.

While I was learning how to catch fish, I also was learning how they would try to get away. One memorable time, I had caught my first fish just as the sun was rising. What a great way to start the day. Feeling very proud of myself, and too busy showing my dad the prize to pay attention to what was going on, something quickly went bad. I’m not quite sure how it happened, but the hook was not in the bass’ mouth, it was deep in my finger, nowhere to be found. I ended up with quite a different prize than I had hoped. My dear dad’s response was

to cut the line, leave the hook in my finger and duct tape it flat to my finger so we could continue fishing. This was a perfect example of self-inflicted pain I will always remember. When you are bringing in goods, pay attention until the job is done.

Measuring success is always a touchy subject. Many of my clients are reluctant to measure and compare their employees’ work performance. They don’t want to set



Your phone can be one of the most overlooked money making tools in your shop.

up an atmosphere of competition. Again, you must know your staff. Competition by itself can be good or bad. It is what you do with it, how you shape it and guide it that makes all the difference. The measurement of performance allows you to reward those who strive for excellence. The people who make winning a part of their lives tend to win not just for themselves, but also for everyone involved. Remember, the customer has to feel that winning sensation, too. If not, they will not come in, they will not make a purchase or, worst of all, they make the purchase, never return and you will never know why.

A very simple way to measure success on the phone is with a phone log. I have found it very easy to use, and it produces results. If a customer calls and we are able to make an appointment, the staff member involved puts his or her name next to the appointment. It soon becomes clear who is making appointments and who is

not. Then we find out what the successful advisors are doing right and we reproduce it in the rest of the staff.

However, if we do not make an appointment, we should have the customer’s name, type of car and what was wrong. We record this information, time and date for future reference, and when the customer does come in, we can initial another successful phone conversation.

It is important to know how many times the phone rings with a possible customer on the phone and how many times that results in the customer coming in. Each employee will develop a percentage of calls vs. people coming in, which allows us to determine who is doing what, what is effective and what is not. The basics, outlined above, will work.

To be accountable for something is to take some form of ownership. Whether it is good or bad, we must be accountable for our actions and our time. I would much rather use praise with an employee to let them know that I appreciate their hard work than to resort to criticism for a job done poorly. The key between the two concepts is the measurement strategy for gauging employee success you are using and consistently monitoring the situation on a regular basis in a way that communicates what is expected.

Too often, accountability is done far too late. The damage has been done, and we are left only with negative consequences. If we are proactive, we should constantly give our staff guidelines and feedback on the areas we find to be most important. We can use the guidelines of measurement and accountability to solve problems while they are small and, most importantly, train the staff as soon as it becomes apparent that training is needed.



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