

THE AUTO DEALER'S ORIGINAL FIXED OPERATIONS RESOURCE

VOL. 13, NO. 6 - NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2016

# FIXED OPS

## HOW DO THE PIECES COME TOGETHER?

IS YOUR DEALERSHIP A SITTING DUCK?

REPAIR ORDER 101

HIRE THE HEROES

SHOULD 'LIFETIME FLUIDS' BE TRUSTED?

# MAKING CONNECTIONS

## APPOINTMENT SYSTEMS A KEY START TO STRONG CUSTOMER RELATIONS

BY JOHN J. NAPOLEON

The initial 30 seconds dictates a customer's first impression when entering your Service Drive.

Half a minute will dictate the customer's attitude when they speak to the Service Adviser. Will the conversation start positively or will the Service Adviser have to overcome a cold welcome?

Our customers all dread coming in to service their vehicles, even as nice as we have made our customer lounges. We all have coffee, water and Wi-Fi, while some even have diners and spas. None of this matters if we don't handle the Service visit professionally and in a friendly manner.

What better way to greet them than by name? This is much easier to do when you are expecting them. Everyone responds better when they are greeted warmly. Let's not forget this.

Many Service Departments have processes that don't include excellent customer service. But Service Departments are the main reason that automobile dealerships will always be a brick-and-mortar business.



### How Problems Occur

Let's look at an example of how customer service issues are created.

We've all bought meat and cheese at the deli inside of a grocery store. One of the problems with grocery store delis is that one hour before closing, the attention turns from the customer to the employee leaving on time.

Here's what I mean: If four people are working in a deli department one hour before closing, two or three of them will be cleaning and one or two will be servicing the seven customers waiting. As a shopper, we're unhappy to see

more people cleaning than serving the paying customers. This is an example where the customers' time is clearly valued less than the deli clerk.

Now take our dealership Service customer who pulls in for his or her appointment and we have Bob on the phone with a customer, Mary on the phone with an extended warranty company, Bill helping a customer and Lisa is in the back speaking with the Technician about a customer's car. Now our customer is waiting for someone to help him or, at a minimum, to acknowledge him.

After three minutes, Bob becomes available and finally greets the customer with, "Hi, can I help you?" Our customer replies with, "I am here for my 11 o'clock appointment." Bob replies with, "OK so what will you need done today?" Our customer tells Bob, "When I made my appointment I told the girl that I needed an oil change and my brakes were squeaking."

A nicer greeting would have been, "Hi, Mr. Smith. I saw you on the schedule today for an oil change and we are going to be seeing why your brakes are squeaking. Is there anything else we should be looking at?"

When a customer comes in who we don't recognize, we should ask, "Are you here for your appointment?" Doing

so reconfirms with our customer that we respect their appointment and if the customer does not have an appointment, we nicely state that appointments are what most of our customers have. It also buys the Service Department time, as you are politely saying that appointments must be taken care of first.

But let's go back to the original scenario. How do you think our customer feels right now after making an appointment? No one acknowledging him for 10 minutes and then Bob doesn't know who is coming in today. Our customer will be asking himself, "Why did I make an appointment?"

And why did he make an appointment? Because we promote appointments.

**MANY SERVICE DEPARTMENTS HAVE PROCESSES THAT DO NOT INCLUDE EXCELLENT CUSTOMER SERVICE. BUT SERVICE DEPARTMENTS ARE THE MAIN REASON THAT AUTO DEALERSHIPS WILL ALWAYS BE A BRICK-AND-MORTAR BUSINESS.**

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### **Improving Your Appointment System**

In general, there's a large disconnect from our appointment spreadsheet and our Service Advisor's knowledge of who is coming in. We need to do a better job connecting the dots from appointment boards to our customer welcome on the Service drive.

The Service Advisor position is arguably the toughest job in the dealership. If you don't understand that, please stand on the Service drive any hot day in June for 10 hours.

With that said, it's most important for the Service Advisor to take care of the customer in front of him and the vehicles he has open repair orders on. Everything else is secondary.

Because Service Advisors are juggling many balls during the day, appointment setting is not something they should be handling. This should be left for a business development center (BDC) member or a Service Appointment Scheduler.

What happens when a Service Advisor takes a call for an appointment? They most often don't record it on the appointment board and if they do, usually

none of the customer notes are documented because they don't have the proper time to spend with an appointment call.

Someone other than the Service Advisors should be making appointments for your Service Department. The more appointments you're able to make, the better you can service your customers. Customers like appointments because it shows that you value their time.

Your customers can be trained to make appointments but you better honor them and treat them like they have an appointment. Service Departments that have a strong appointment system in place get 70 to 75 percent of their daily traffic from the appointments.

### **Improving Workflow**

There are many avenues for Service appointments, such as, phone, online and apps. For example, the Salesperson can help his new customer schedule his first Service appointment with your app while waiting to get into finance.

This is the first step in teaching our customers to make appointments. The Salesperson should be making the introduction to the Service Department.

This is another avenue to making their first appointment. If we demonstrate to our customers that we value our appointments and customers' time, they will make appointments. If we don't, they won't believe an appointment has value and will not make one.

We all know that we don't walk into our dentist on a Thursday morning without an appointment, ask to have a cleaning and expect them to see us. This is because the dentist has trained us to make an appointment.

Appointments help with your workflow and the amount of time a Service Advisor can spend with the customer. They also can help during vacation time and when we send our staff to training so we don't get backed up.

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Because we work on vehicles, there will always be emergencies and walk-in traffic; we simply want to limit that part of the business. Once you start a real appointment system, you'll be able to ascertain the daily walk-in traffic your Service Department gets. And once you understand that, you can back into your appointment needs.

Service Departments that are fully dialled-in on appointments typically set up their schedules as follows:

- 1) Appointments on a 20-minute interval, for example, 8:00, 8:20, 8:40.
- 2) Never more appointments per interval than Service Advisors scheduled.
- 3) No appointments made during the lunch hour.
- 4) A confirmation phone call the day before the appointment.
- 5) A re-schedule appointment call if the customer is a no-show.
- 6) The Appointment Scheduler tries to fill the next open appointment first.
- 7) Every customer is greeted within 30 seconds of arrival (this does not need to be done by a Service Advisor).

Let's elaborate on filling the next open appointment.

We need to treat the next open appointment times like a vacant hotel room. Once the night passes, you can never sell that night again. Our appointment schedule works the same way. Too many times, our scheduler asks the customer when he would like to come in, instead of suggesting the next available appointment.

Again, if we go back to our dentist, when you call for an appointment, the scheduler tells you the dentist's next appointment. We need to get our scheduler to do the same thing. Additionally, many forget or are discouraged to set appointments in the afternoon. Many customers have very tight

time commitments in the morning and would prefer to drop off their vehicle on the way home from work rather than on the way to work.

With coordination between the scheduler and the Service Advisors' schedules, the customer experience will be much improved. This improvement will also allow the Service Advisors enough time to spend with each of the dealership's customers.



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