



SELLING SMART

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The Top 5 Blunders of Tire Dealers

In my work, I provide training and consulting services to tire dealerships across the country. I also provide training based on what we hear when recording and monitoring inbound calls and customer interactions. As you can imagine, I see a lot of good and a lot of bad. Here are the top five blunders I've personally witnessed and what changes I recommend for each.

Blunder #1: Lack of Employee Engagement

Customer engagement, and ultimately the customer experience, begins with employee engagement. If employees are not engaged with the customer experience process and their role in it, they will most certainly not create the exceptional customer service that drives meaningful engagement with your brand. In other words, disengaged employees do not create engaged customers.

As I wrote in my April 2016 article, "Winning Customer Service," building and sustaining a true world-class customer service organization starts at the top with leadership. That means owners and managers must be actively involved in the customer service effort, lead by example, and continuously demonstrate high customer service standards and proper behaviors.

Blunder #2: Not Making the Customer Experience a Priority

According to Forrester Research, 72% of businesses say improving customer experience is their top priority in 2017. Contrary to this, far too many tire dealers I've witnessed focus on sales (their needs) instead of the customer experience. Worse, many tire dealers don't even realize they're doing it. They think and like to say they're "customer focused," but their daily behaviors are much more focused on car count and driving up tickets.

As Einstein said, "Try not to become a man of success, but rather try to become a man of value." This absolutely applies here. When we focus on adding value and maximizing each customer's experience, success takes care of itself.

Blunder #3: Winging It

When businesses don't have a true sales or customer experience process they inevitably end up winging it. Take phone interactions, a critical element of the overall



customer experience. As I mentioned, my company records and evaluates actual calls (not mystery shoppers) between potential customers and the sales associates of many tire dealers across the country. To establish a baseline, I always recommend that we evaluate 1-2 months of calls before I train the team on the sales process. Doing so has confirmed that before training, the majority of salespeople are indeed "winging it." They have no real process and default to, becoming order takers with callers guiding the conversation and most sales made by being in the right place at the right time.

There is a process that leads to successful customer interactions. While client confidentiality prohibits me from disclosing our proprietary phone process here, I can tell you that I know exactly what works, and in what order, and why. And so many shops simply aren't doing it well.

The same goes for the in-store customer experience – it should not happen by default. To create consistency and maximize results, world-class service companies institutionalize their customer service/experience model across all of their locations. Regardless of the number of locations, this principle should apply to your tire and auto service business.

Blunder #4: Not Training Staff

This one is really the reason for the previous problem, Blunder #3. Institutionalizing a successful customer experience model requires a commitment to training the employees that are regularly interacting with customers in your business. As I have written about in the past, most tire dealers treat training like an event, with sporadic training from a variety of sources. With that, employee's behaviors really don't change and the business only realizes random short-term boosts with no sustainable gains.

In short, businesses that are serious about the customer experience are also serious about providing the proper training to employees so they can provide it.

Blunder #5: Not Effectively Managing Customer Complaints and Problems

Left unresolved, complaints and problems are the killer of the customer experience. Back in the pre-internet era, unhappy customers of any service business would typically share their feelings of dissatisfaction with their immediate circle of friends and family. This word-of-mouth communication usually had a limited life span. Today, the spread of information is easier than ever before – and a disgruntled customer can simply access the internet and immediately share their story of dissatisfaction with a large number of people much greater than simply their immediate friends and family network.

Once those negative accounts have been published, they are a permanent marker that endangers the reputation of the business and prevents shoppers from becoming customers. For these reasons alone it is crucial that service personnel are trained on how to effectively manage customer complaints and problem situations to help eliminate this threat.

Of course, ideally we want to provide a quality level of service and overall customer experience that leaves customers with no problems to complain about in the first place. By simply asking "How was your experience with us today?" when the customer is checking out, you can often uncover and address problems before they turn into complaints.

The Challenge of Change

Addressing the blunders above requires strategic changes, requiring some tire dealers to "get out of their own way" to make adjustments for the better. Indeed, the industry has changed quite a bit this century, but most shop owners are still doing business the way they were decades ago. While it may seem to be easier to do nothing, *not* changing is almost always more difficult on the business.

Where I see the challenge is not so much in making

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changes but in the uncertainty that comes along with making moves and wondering what the outcome may be. The thought of making a wrong decision often paralyzes the shop owner so they retreat back to his or her comfort zone and, with that, nothing really changes. It's just more business as usual.

That's why it's so important to follow a proven path. With uncertainty comes risk. A proven path removes risk. Interestingly, this is how franchises work. When you buy a successful franchise, you're buying a proven formula. All the trial and error has already been done; all you need to do is follow the plan. This "no theories" approach is also at the core of my company's training methodology, one that covers the best practices, processes and principles of retail/service industry leaders.

Growth, by definition, is change. The first thing an owner needs to do to get out of his or her own way is admit that what got them where they are is different from what it will take to take the business to the next level and beyond. With that admission, the next step is identifying the resources required to fill the gap between where the business is and the business's maximum potential or desired growth objective. **TR**

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