



SELLING SMART

STEVE FERRANTE | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

What a Customer-Focused Culture Really Means

It has been 10 years this month since I began working with the tire/auto service industry. Over that time, I have worked with many of the very best tire/auto service businesses in all of North America. One of those businesses is my client Virginia Tire & Auto, Tire Review's 2011 Top Shop winner.

Since winning the Top Shop Award, the business has become even more successful. I began my Pinnacle Performance Training relationship with Virginia Tire in 2012, and, like with all my clients, I provided semi-annual onsite training supported by ongoing online training, plus evaluations and coaching on incoming sales calls managed by their 120 or so customer-facing associates. The founder and patriarch of the family-owned business, Myron Boncarosky, is not only one of the best people I've met in this industry, he's also one of the best people I've met, period. In a business sense, he reminds me of my dad (who passed away in 2013). My dad started with a Citgo gas station back in 1966 and went on to be the R (Rocky) at R & A Automotive, my family's auto service business that I grew up in.

In 1976, Myron started with a Shell station and

went on to develop Virginia Tire & Auto, now with 17 shops. I first met Myron when I spoke at the Virginia Auto Association Convention. I'll never forget the first in-house training I conducted for the business. Myron attended every session of the four-day program and made a point of introducing me to the team. In doing so, he said, "Steve's going to be working with us for many years." When I asked him about that comment, he told me he understood "it's a culture thing" and "what we're looking to achieve doesn't happen overnight."

Of course, I still had to deliver. He not only positioned the program to succeed, but also demonstrated he clearly understood what many (if not most) business owners do not — it really is a culture thing. More specifically, it's a customer-focused culture thing.

Myron has since phased out of day-to-day operations, and his daughter and son-in-law, Julie and Mike Holmes, have done an outstanding job moving the business forward with the same commitment to building a winning team and fostering a customer-focused culture.

Need evidence? Here's an excerpt from their 2011 Top Shop profile that's aligned with this principle:

"Myron, who visits each location once a week, knows all employees by name and greets them with a smile and a handshake. Further proof of the employees-as-family mindset of the organization is John Miller, store manager of the Centreville location, who personally thanks each of his employees and gives them

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a hug or handshake on paydays.”

Miller recently celebrated his 40th year with Virginia Tire & Auto. Over my years working with the business, he has become a good friend. He embodies everything you look for in a leader to support a customer-focused culture. From the big pile of rave customer reviews that have come

The average shop would have been unresponsive on a holiday, deferring the matter until business reopened and, ultimately, leaving the customer stranded.

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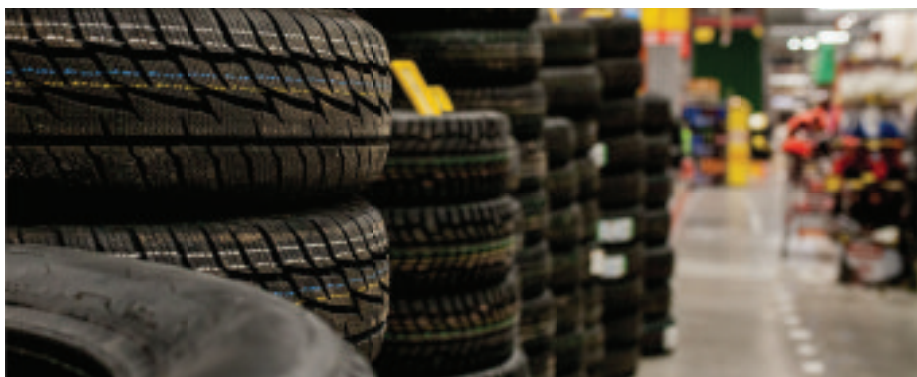
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in for John and his team, here's my personal favorite:

"Without a doubt, I had the greatest customer service experience at Virginia Tire in Centreville, VA, that I have ever had in my life... I want to especially commend John Miller and Travis at that location for all they did to make my visit so great. I went to the location because I noticed I had a flat tire. My wife and I were planning a trip in the car the next morning. I went to Virginia Tire on my spare tire and they plugged my other tire... Later that evening, I noticed that the tire was flat again. I changed plans for the trip but emailed John to explain that my tire was flat again. John emailed and called me the next day, Easter Sunday, when he was off to see what he could do. John had Travis go to my house, remove the wheel, take it to Virginia Tire and check out the tire. John stayed in touch with me throughout the day to let me know what he was doing. I wanted a new tire, and John got it for me, had Travis mount it, balance it and go back to my house and put it on my car in the driveway. The fact that he and Travis did all of this work for me ...simply amazed me. I could not ask for better service. I have already told a dozen people about the excellent service that I received, and I will continue to tell people about Virginia Tire....Thank you so much for your caring about your customers and the work that you do!!!"

This may just seem like a great review for a job well done, but it's so much more than that. It's really about a customer-focused culture. None of this would have happened without it. The average shop would have been unresponsive on a holiday, deferring the matter until business reopened and, ultimately, leaving the customer stranded. When you're truly customer-focused, you do whatever you can do to help a customer in need, whenever that might be. **TR**





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