

Increase Sales and Service Profits by Addressing Female Customer Concerns

by Gerry Myers

Things I hear dealers say that are sure signs they aren't getting as many sales as they could, are:

- We have always done it that way
- We treat men and women the same
- We tried that and it didn't work
- We have hired women salespeople before, and they didn't work out
- Our sales staff changes too frequently to invest in much training
- There really is no difference in selling to men and women.

These and many more archaic attitudes keep dealers from cashing in on sales to women and couples where the woman has veto power. Learning to change with the times is not easy, but necessary. Making sure your business leverages state-of-the-art technology is just one way. As we all learned by the devastating September 11 events, the world imposes catastrophic changes in our lives without our consent. But along with shocking events and natural disasters, we all experience wonderful scientific discoveries and technological inventions that make our lives healthier, more productive and more comfortable. The world changes. People change. And businesses must change as well.

Quick and easy tips to increased sales

- When a woman arrives on the lot and is looking around, approach her within two to three minutes. Greet her appropriately and offer assistance, but don't pressure her.
- When a couple is browsing on the lot or enters the dealership, approach and speak to both of them. Hand both of them a business card and make it clear you are there to assist them both in any way you can. Be customer-oriented first, transaction-oriented last.
- When test driving with a couple, be sure and offer both a chance to drive the vehicle.
- Address some questions to the woman, especially if she is in the back seat.

Long-term success takes more effort and thought

Four things important to increasing sales and service profitability are to:

- Make sure your dealership has a female-friendly work environment.

- Train your salespeople to be sensitive to body language, especially when dealing with female customers. Hiring consultants who specialize in gender-buying habits, gender communication and differences will increase sales tremendously.
- Create a Women's Advisory Board.
- Find out what your customers think about your dealership, salespeople and service area.

Build a female-friendly work environment

If you presently don't have women salespersons, you probably don't have a female-friendly environment. If you don't currently have female salespersons, it is best to hire two women rather than just one. To increase their chances of success, offer them enough product education so they are confident, involve them in training and other meetings, and make sure the existing sales force includes them and makes them comfortable. Feeling excluded is not a friendly environment and will cause you to lose good women who would become loyal, successful salespeople and managers.

Rude, crude language and sexually oriented materials don't belong in the workplace. Make sure that both the men and women in your dealership are professional in their dress and conduct, whether it is with a customer or co-worker.

Gender training is important too

When you quit learning, you quit growing and become stale, outdated and less valuable. Training and diversified experiences increase a person's ability to deal with situations in a more effective manner. While product training is critical to selling vehicles, too often dealers neglect the people skills that are also important in establishing long-term relationships and satisfied, repeat customers.

The Myers Group has worked with dealers and manufacturers since the early 1990s to better educate salespeople and managers on the secrets to selling more successfully to women (and men). Understanding that little things matter to women, how women's buying habits differ from men's, and cost-effective, simple tips and techniques that work with women are just a few of the topics covered.

Create a Women's Advisory Board

Creating a Women's Advisory Board (WAB) is one of the best ways to establish visibility and rapport with female buyers. Advisory Link has helped numerous businesses increase their recruitment and retention success with women, as well as their marketing and sales efforts. Advisory Link can create a WAB to fit your specific needs. A WAB is a flexible vehicle that is multipurpose and can be used by dealers:

- To increase sales and service business
- To monitor the community's pulse on your company, the competition, etc.
- For recruitment and retention strategies and referrals
- As a support system for female employees

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- As a focus group for advertising campaigns, collateral materials, sales tools and marketing strategies and promotions
- To serve as ambassadors of goodwill
- As hostesses for in-house functions, at charity events and new car launchers.

Next month:

Everything You Want to Know About Women Advisory Boards and More

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