

The Ultimate Team: Sales, Service and the Customer

Create winning first impressions that bring them back

by Gerry Myers

How many times have you heard, “First impressions are very important”? Indeed, the appearance of your dealership is important to your customers. Their impressions are formed the minute they drive up to your dealership or step out of their vehicle. Yet, how much consideration have you given to how first impressions affect your sales and service processes?

The sales associate’s greeting is the first contact with the customer and where the opinion of the sales experience begins to take shape. If the process goes well, it continues with a purchase, followed by a loyal service customer who returns for future purchases. The customer will probably even send colleagues and friends to you as well. To enhance the experience and turn a one-time buying situation into a customer for life, consider a team approach.

Create a winning team

One of the biggest challenges facing dealers is to create a team that includes sales professionals, a knowledgeable F & I person, a service advisor and the customer. But seamless teamwork is what wins.

If we looked at sports teams, it is easy to list a few concrete things that are essential to having a successful season. For instance, each player must fulfill his or her individual role par excellence. Selecting talented and dedicated team members is first and foremost. Without the proper attitude and ability, the team can only be mediocre. The team members must communicate and understand what each player’s role is and how they work together. They must continually train to refine their skills and innate talents. Without proper training, it is unlikely the team will win. Following the game, they review it and the outcome. They think about what mistakes were made, how the game could have gone better, what the positive plays were, and the like. Selling cars is not much different.

To produce a winning automotive team, a dealer must make sure the team is talented, trained and works together for a common goal. To achieve success with female customers, sales advisors must understand that women want a relationship rather than just a transaction. Thus, the sales associate needs to establish rapport with the female customer. One way to do this is by asking open-ended rather than close-ended questions. Instead of asking what color the customer wants, the sales associates should ask what features are important to the customer. How did the customer hear about your dealership? What do they like best or least about their current vehicle? Have each member of your sales force make a list of six to 10 open-ended questions they can ask women customers.

The most important sales skill when dealing with women, however, is not asking the questions, but listening carefully to the answers. In staff meetings, practice listening

skills. You will be surprised at how much that will increase your staff's ability to communicate with and sell to women.

It is no secret that the service department is one area of most dissatisfaction among customers. Yet, it is also the pivotal point for converting a first-time woman buyer to a long-term customer. Having the sales associate introduce the female customer to a service advisor is important. Perhaps the sales associate should even be the contact point for the first oil change or routine service appointment, letting the woman know that this part of the process isn't over when she drives off. This is how dealerships and sales people build a loyal customer base with women without spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on advertising.

This is not to say that dealerships should abandon an advertising program, but it is to say that insofar as women are concerned, some of the money can be better spent on other things.

Team-building steps

To build a winning team:

- Select your sales force and service advisors carefully
- Ensure they understand the "team approach"
- Train them in product knowledge, sales and communication skills
- Confirm they understand the difference in men and women customers, how to sell most effectively to women and the amount of dollars women can mean to them
- Have your team members evaluate their performance after each sale
- Refine their procedures and improve their techniques.

Make certain you understand the women's market yourself or hire someone to help you who does. No winning team was ever created without talent, dedication, knowledge, practice and evaluation. You and you alone must decide if you want to invest the time, energy and dollars that it takes to make it to the Super Bowl of automotive sales. Women are viable and profitable team players. You can either win or just play the game because the leadership and culture that drives the dealership comes from the top—from you.