

# Three symptoms of a service advisor problem

Unhappy customers will most likely not complain, but they also may not return

It's easy to look back and see it, and it's easy to give the advice. But the sad fact is, most people don't look beneath the surface until it's too late," said Wendelin Van Draanen.

I have the greatest respect for anyone engaged in selling service at the front counter. It can be the most exciting and frustrating position in the shop. I started my career decades ago teaching service advisors, and I have watched thousands of advisors perform it live in the shop. The interesting thing to me is that in the classroom we all do fairly well and the performance is much easier; however, the front counter reminds me of Vietnam because the customers are firing back at you. We all know to keep cool, show we care and build relationships while we try to teach consumers the value of maintaining their investment. The challenge is that under fire it doesn't always turn out the way we want it and the longer that happens the worse the average repair order becomes. What's worse is service advisors can't see what they're doing wrong because they are under fire and reacting.

This is why they need an immediate supervisor or a shop owner who understands not only the sales process, but also sales management. We have been teaching a sales management course to shop owners for decades, and today we are going to share three symptoms to look for and what to do about it! Let's listen to ATI Coach Eric Twiggs explain to a shop owner how to begin being a sales manager of your front counter folks. Eric's story began with this:

Greg and I were struggling to figure

out why his car count wasn't improving. He had 10 five-star Google reviews. When I Googled all the primary automotive search terms for his area, I found him on the first page and in the top spot.

His website was so strong that I would send the link to my other clients as an example of what to do. Steve, his service advisor, had been with him for seven years and had forgotten more about the automotive business than the average person knew.

## **IF YOU HAVE SEVERAL CUSTOMERS VOICING THE SAME CONCERN, YOU HAVE A MUCH BIGGER PROBLEM BREWING BENEATH THE SURFACE.**

"So how is Steve performing?" I asked. "Eric, Steve isn't the problem. He's my most dependable employee!" In an effort to trust but verify, I decided to have one of my fellow coaches call the shop posing as a customer in need of brake service.

### **Not inviting the customer to the shop**

To my surprise, Steve made no attempt to get the caller's name and phone number or to invite him to the shop. I personally reviewed the results of the mystery call with Steve and he confirmed that he understood and committed to do better.

The only change to the business was Greg taking over at the counter. In the following weeks, I had two different coaches conduct two additional phone

shops, and the results were the same. No attempts were made to invite the caller to the location.

Business declined to the point where Greg had to lay Steve off and take over the service writer duties himself. It took eight weeks to find a qualified replacement. During this time span, the sales and car count trends took an interesting turn — for the better!

When Steve was writing service, the shop averaged \$14,000 per week in sales with 35 cars. Greg averaged \$19,000 per week with 40 cars.

Here's what I learned from this experience: Consistently bad phone shops is a symptom of a service advisor problem. You may be thinking: "Eric, you're being too hard on Steve. Failing multiple phone shops isn't a big problem."

Well, consider the following math: Let's assume that by focusing more on the phones you only acquired two additional customers per day who normally wouldn't have come in.

Over five days, that's 10 customers. If you have a \$400 average repair order, that's an additional \$4,000 per week in revenue. (10 x \$400=\$4,000)

By not answering the phones correctly, your writer would be costing you \$208,000 in potential sales over 52 weeks! (\$4,000 x 52=\$208,000) Therefore, I live by the following motto: If car count drops, do a phone shop.

I am often asked the following question: "Why should I do a phone shop if I don't think I have a service advisor problem?" If this is your question, consider the following findings:

Over the past 10 years, ATI Trainer

Randy Somers has phone shopped more than 1,800 service writers during his Service Advisor Part 1 class. Out of 1,800 calls, only 72 of the advisors offered the customer an appointment to visit the shop. This math works out to only 4 percent of the service advisors in North America answering the phones correctly.

The trend is an indication that you may have a bigger problem than you realize.

Failing multiple shops isn't the only symptom. Keep reading to learn about two more symptoms of a bad service advisor.

### Common complaints

During the eight weeks that Greg covered the counter, he had a total of 13 customers mention how they were glad to see Steve gone! Several of these patrons commented that if Steve was still employed, they wouldn't have come back.

Greg was surprised because he had only heard three customer complaints about Steve in the past six months. All three mentioned that Steve was very short with them and came across as being rude. Greg didn't realize that these common complaints were just the tip of the iceberg.

A 2014 retail industry study concluded that 96 percent of unhappy customers will never complain. The study also found that 91 percent of these patrons will never return.

To make matters worse, they will tell up to 15 of their friends about their experience. If you have several customers voicing the same concern, you have a much bigger problem brewing beneath the surface.

Pay close attention to those common complaints you receive about your writer. The following quote is attributed to noted author Jack Rosenblum: "If one person tells you you're a horse, they are crazy. If three people tell you you're a

horse, there's conspiracy afoot. If 10 people tell you you're a horse, it's time to buy a saddle."

If multiple people who don't know each other share the same opinion, it's just the tip of the iceberg, and the second symptom of a service advisor problem.

### Blaming "they"

A few weeks ago, I was speaking with a service advisor named Jim who was in town attending class. He told me that his shop was struggling to stay afloat. When I asked Jim about using the parts matrix, he said, "They think we're too expensive."

When I suggested offering every customer an exit appointment, he responded: "They don't like to schedule in advance." I asked him about making follow-up calls to which he replied: "They think it's too pushy." The Twigg translation for the word "they" is "I." "They" is the signal of a limiting belief and a symptom of a service advisor problem.

He was really saying, "I think we're too expensive;" "I don't like to schedule in advance;" and "I think making follow-up calls is being pushy."

It's important to get these issues out on the table, because you don't feel accountable for your results until you become responsible for your "reasons."

I've discovered that 80 percent of a struggling shop leader's issues are due to mindset, with only 20 percent resulting from skill set. In other words, how you


think drives what you do.

Simply addressing skill set doesn't solve the problem. The key is to address their mindset by asking them to explain how your request is good for the car, the customer and the company.

This level of dialogue will give you the opportunity to address any limiting beliefs that are causing problems below the surface.

### Conclusion

So, there you have it. Consistently bad phone shops, common complaints and blaming "they" are the three symptoms of a service advisor problem.

If you address these issues head-on, making the top shop list will only be the tip of your success iceberg. You will have more profit and happy customers beneath the surface than you would ever imagine. If you would like to try your hand at being a sales manager simply download our Service Writer Assessment Checklist for a limited time by going to [www.ationlinetraining.com/2017-10](http://www.ationlinetraining.com/2017-10). 



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