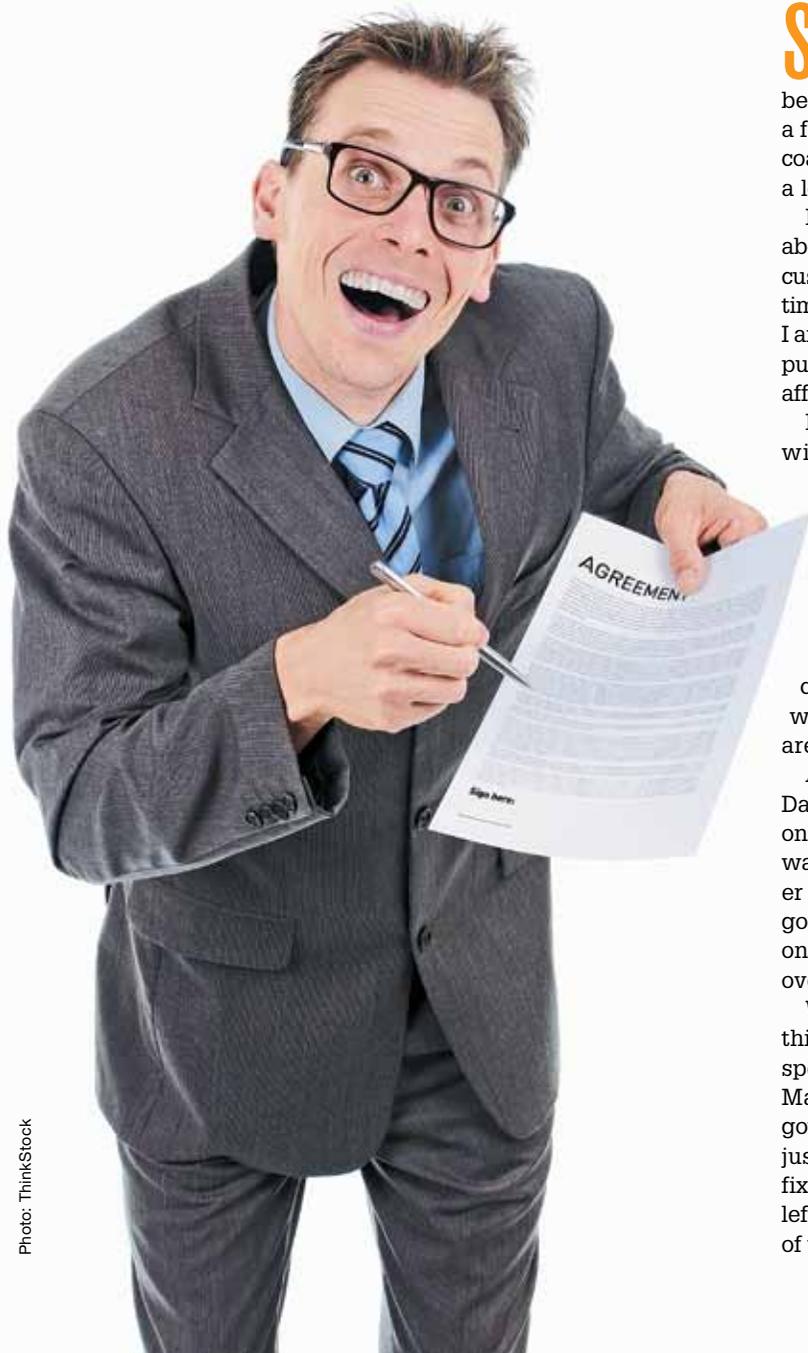


TIME TO GET PUSHY

WHILE YOU MIGHT NOT WANT TO, YOUR SERVICE ADVISORS NEED TO PUSH THE IMPORTANCE OF BRAKES AND SUSPENSION MAINTENANCE AND REPAIR.

BY CHRIS “CHUBBY” FREDERICK | CONTRIBUTOR



SHOP owners have a difficult decision to make when it comes to how aggressive they want service advisors to be with customers. I was listening to Kim Hickey, a former shop owner from Arizona and current ATI coach, suggest a strategy to her clients that made a lot of sense. Let's listen to Kim's suggestions.

During my weekly conversations with my clients about the importance of upselling and educating our customers on benefits and features of services, many times the response I get is, "I don't like to be pushy." I am writing today to tell you that it is your job to "be pushy," especially when it comes to items that can affect safety, like brakes and suspension.

If you are letting customers leave your shop with bad suspension or brakes without doing everything you possibly can to educate them about the safety issues surrounding those needed repairs, you are not doing what you are morally and ethically obligated to do. While I understand that you cannot force your customers to make repairs that they don't want to, you can make sure that you educate your customers, and that they understand exactly what could happen when items affecting safety are not working properly.

A year ago, I spent all day and night on Father's Day, watching a 28-year-old woman named Bridget on life support, with no chance of recovery. I then watched her mother and father agonize over whether they should continue to keep her on it or let her go. Bridget was involved in an automobile accident on Father's Day morning, in which her car rolled over.

While there were several things contributing to this, including Bridget not wearing a seatbelt and speeding, I can't forget the conversation her mom, Mary, and I had the day before. Bridget had just gotten a "new" car. It was an older Taurus, and she just loved it. Mary told me that Bridget had been fixing it up and was so proud of it, and all that was left to repair was the suspension. All I could think of while I was listening was saying, "Oh, Mary, the

“HOW CAN YOU MAKE SURE YOUR ADVISORS ARE DOING EVERYTHING THEY SHOULD WITHOUT STANDING OVER THEM? YOU CAN’T EXPECT WHAT YOU DON’T INSPECT. CREATE FORMS, LOGS, CHECKLIST AND ESTIMATES THAT YOU CAN INSPECT.”

CHRIS “CHUBBY” FREDERICK [ATI CEO]

way Bridget drives, she better get that suspension done right away!”

I was all ready to get on my soapbox and explain what the suspension does, and how it can affect braking, your ability to swerve, etc. But just as I began to start my speech, Bridget called with news of finally meeting her “Prince Charming” and how she knew this time she had found the one. They were going to a baseball game Saturday night. Excited for her news, I left my speech for another day.

Could I have prevented the accident she had early the next morning? Chances are slim to none. Even if I had dampened her exciting news with my boring talk of suspension and safety, I am quite sure Bridget would not have taken her car somewhere on Saturday night to have it repaired.

Could her auto repair facility have prevented the accident? Did they do a good enough job of explaining to Bridget the importance of her needed repairs? When they prioritized her repairs, were the services and flushes given priority because they are gravy work? I will never know. I can’t imagine that if the service advisor had done a good job of telling Bridget about the possible safety issues regarding suspension, that Bridget would have ignored them. We will never know.

What we do know is that there were no skid marks at the scene, no drug or alcohol impairment and she wasn’t texting or talking on the phone. According to witnesses, there were no other cars involved, no animals darting out into the road and no obvious reason to cause Bridget’s car to roll over so many times. The question I can’t answer is, was the suspension the cause of the accident? I’ll never know for sure, but living with the lingering doubt is something none of us want to do.

Going forward, I ask that you do your due diligence when explaining needed repairs that affect safety. I would go so far as to say that after you do your best, if they still decline the



repair(s), you type something on the work order regarding your advice and that the customer declined the recommended safety repair and have them sign it. I ask you to have them sign it, not so much as to protect yourself, but as a last-ditch attempt to make them understand the importance of your advice.

What About Stopping?

Brakes, because they are more readily seen as being a safety issue, are easy to explain to customers. Customers generally understand that brakes affect their vehicle’s ability to stop. But does your service advisor explain to your customers that shocks and struts also affect their vehicle’s ability to stop? Most people still think of shocks and struts as a ride comfort item, not a safety concern. Does your advisor explain that shocks and struts performing at 50 percent efficiency can add 12 feet of stopping distance for a car traveling 60 mph?

The reason the front brakes wear out so much faster after being replaced has nothing to do with the new brake pads. If the vehicle has older shocks or struts, the weight shifts more to the front of the car and the front brakes have to pick up that extra load. Do your customers understand that worn struts or shocks will allow tires to bounce or dribble after hitting a bump and dip forward during braking, affecting both handling and braking performance, and that any time a tire bounces or dribbles it does not have full contact with the road?

Do your service advisors and technicians even think about suspension as a safety item, or do they still feel that if the shocks or struts are not broken or leaking that they are good to go? How

many of your techs are still judging suspension by performing the bounce test? When was the last time you had a meeting with your employees to review when to recommend certain services? At ATI, we recommend having your employees complete a “smell test” quarterly.

One of the tools I use a couple of times a year to bring awareness to this issue is a suspension log. For a period of one month, I have my service advisors log the year and mileage of every vehicle along with marking if the shocks or struts are original. You would be amazed at what an eye-opener it can be to see a long list of vehicles with high mileage that still have original shocks and struts. I usually have them fill this out in conjunction with the shock manufacturers’ spring and fall promotions.

For a limited time, you can find more information and statistics on shocks and struts and see a copy of my Suspension Log and The Smell Test by going to www.ationlinetraining.com/2014-10.

Remember that every vehicle that comes into your shop has a person that comes with it. That person is someone’s parent, child, cousin, etc. Don’t be the cause of anyone spending Father’s Day or any day in the hospital.

Is it your job to push? You better believe it is. **ZZZ**



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Chris “Chubby” Frederick is the CEO and founder of the Automotive Training Institute. ATI’s 108 associates train and coach more than 1,150 shop owners every week across North America to drive profits and dreams home to their families. Our associates love helping shop owners who are having the same struggle as many of them have had, and who are looking for the same answers – and in some cases looking for a lifeline. This month’s article was written with the help of Kim Hickey, former shop owner Arizona shop owner and current ATI coach.

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