

MAINTENANCE MIX

YOUR COUNTER PERSON IS RESPONSIBLE FOR RECOMMENDING MAINTENANCE. AREN'T THEY?

BY CHRIS "CHUBBY" FREDERICK | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

SHOULD your techs be responsible for recommending maintenance? Should your front counter be responsible? Should your customer be responsible? It is their car, after all. ATI coach Brian Hunnicutt has a suggestion that will help shop owners increase revenue, keep it simple, keep from losing customers and stay the best shop in their market. Let's hear what Brian has to say about who is responsible for maintenance.

Let's look at this from the ground up. We know that for the most part the customer is not going to understand what they need and is so misinformed it is not even funny. Our techs each have their own opinions and so do your service writers. You should find out what each of their opinions are, but it is the opinion of the owner of the store that ultimately matters — you sign the checks.

A short list of items would be shocks, struts, flushes, filters, belts, hoses, timing belts, spark plugs, balance and alignment. Please don't forget tires as well. When should each one of these be replaced? I have a mileage interval chart that I can share with you, no problem. It is generic and you have to have your brain attached, but it is pretty comprehensive.

Now that we have a grasp on when we are going to recommend what, we can address who is responsible to educate everyone and take care of the maintenance. If a shock is leaking or a filter is dirty or any of the fluids smell bad or are looking bad, then we are talking about repairs, not maintenance, right? Read the previous sentence again. Maintenance means that these items are being replaced before leaking, smelling or clogging. Why do we change the oil before it is looking or smelling bad — same thing, right?



So I think the front counter person is responsible for building the relationship with the customer and educating them about what we are going to do with them and for them, so they don't feel like we are doing anything to them. To do this is simple and hard at the same time. If you use a hybrid of the five steps to a tire sale to get the maintenance sold today, in the way the tire salespeople get tires sold today, then we stand a great chance of winning.

Five steps to selling

What are the five steps to a tire sale? Stop and write them down if you know them — meet and greet; determine needs; qualify customer; features and benefits; and then ask for the sale. These steps were designed to make a shopping customer a buying customer. Back in the day before phones were everywhere, the normal customer would drive to at least three tire stores to price the tires before buying. If we had told the manager back then that

they needed to build a relationship with the client, talk about push back. But by making them do the five-step process, the shop owner had the manager build a relationship with the customer without even knowing they were. By showing interest in the customer and going out to their car, they were building relationships. Determining the need and qualifying the customer is done at the car. How do you like the car? What kind of driving do you do? Oh, I see you have a trailer hitch; what do you tow and how often do you do it? Would you buy another car like this one? How long do you plan on keeping the car? Who else drives the car?

Going out to the car and doing the walk around is critical. The thing that takes the most time in a shop's life is not making the sale. You go through the entire process and get nothing out of it. That takes more time than any other piece of the five-step process. More time than diagnostics, parts, doing the courtesy check, building estimates or

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“WHAT IS THE FASTEST WAY TO START SELLING MAINTENANCE GOALS? GIVE YOUR ASSOCIATES THE SMELL TEST CHECKLIST AND FIND OUT WHOSE BELIEFS ARE SLOWING DOWN THE SALES PROCESS.”

-FREDERICK [ATI CEO]

even paperwork; you cannot spend all that time and money to make the phone ring and then leave it to chance about making the sale. So if we don't start with the walk around, then we may not get as many customers to understand what we are doing with them and for them. They might not just say no, but even think we are trying to rip them off. With the proper relationship and education, we put ourselves in their shoes, and they learn to trust us.

Six bridges into maintenance discussions

So we have the six basic items of bridging into maintenance: relationship, education, courtesy check, estimating, asking for the sale and service after the sale. While we do the walk around, we should start the car and make sure the warning lights go out while we are getting the mileage. Making sure the warning lights are out in association with the walk around will get rid of most of your customer complaints. With the mileage, we can start educating them about the specific maintenance items we are going to be looking at as part of the multi-point courtesy check that we are going to perform today. We will be calling them later. That way they will not feel like a baby seal that you are sneaking up on to club over the head when you ask for the sale.

If they are a new customer, then you have the conversation about who has been maintaining their car, and ask if you may make copies of the records so that you can build a plan for saving them money by maintaining their car properly. When was the last maintenance performed and so on?

Hang the work order on the board and open the work order on your com-

puter; we are going to build the estimate before the courtesy check is performed or while it is being performed. Remember, the tech is not responsible for maintenance, your front counter staff is. Now based on time and mileage, we are going to go down the list and put maintenance items on the estimate as needed. This should save time for when we get the courtesy check back and help ensure the customer will not be tapping their foot or looking at their watch.


If the customer is returning and has an appointment, before the day even starts we could make the work order for what they are coming in for and then print it. Open the work order, and based on the history, we should have a good idea what the mileage is and what maintenance items the car will need. We start to build the estimate based on maintenance, and when we do the walk around, we are even better armed to educate the customer. I am not saying to show the preliminary estimate to the customer at that time, but start the education process.

How much time will we save if the estimate is started with maintenance and all we have to add to it is what the techs find as a safety or repair item during the courtesy check? It will also give us a chance to double check the preliminary estimate and make sure we did not forget anything.

Not only is this great for your customers, but you can use lower-line techs

to get the bulk of this done. Except for alignments, some hoses and timing belts, your C-almost-B tech can do almost everything else. By having your lower-line employees knock it out, you can also maximize your gross profit.

Smell test checklist

If you would like a tool to make sure that all of your staff is on the same page when it comes to making recommendations on the courtesy check, you can use our Courtesy Check Smell Test. This can be used to help the entire staff determine what to recommend and when. This way every customer gets the same quality check-over that matches your shop's brand. Simply go to www.ationlinetraining.com/2016-06 for a limited time. 



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Chris "Chubby" Frederick is the CEO and founder of the Automotive Training Institute. ATI's 115 associates train and coach more than 1,400 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 former shop owner and current coach Brian Hunnicutt.

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