

A how-to guide to losing your best repeat customers

Know what to do — and what not to do — to keep clients coming back

Trying to make sure all of your customers return and are consistently loyal can be more than just fixing their car right the first time. Let's listen to a shop owner and ATI coach, Rick Johnson, explain how easy it is to lose even your best repeat customers: Recently I had to have my knee replaced and during the time I was off work, I got to do something that I rarely get to do — I got to be a customer!

The weekend before I was going to get my surgery, I had two of my grandsons come down and stay at the lake, and I was going to take them fishing. I loaded up the boat with supplies and snacks and fishing gear and got the life jackets on the kids — and the boat would not start! I thought it was the battery, had it tested and it was fine. Tapped on the starter and it turned over. Now not being one to take a four-year-old and a two-year-old out on the lake with a starter you have to tap, I decided to call off the fishing trip.

I then took the boat and dropped it off at the boat shop where I had bought it new in 2000. I left a message on the answering machine and said who I was and that I thought it was the starter, and that if in fact it was the starter to go ahead and replace it. If it was more than that to let me know. I also said I was having my knee replaced the next day so no big rush, but wanted it done by Labor Day weekend. Now to set the table here so to speak, I have a relationship with this shop. I have spent lots of money over the years there and they have done maintenance and repair on my boat since it

was new. The owner and I traded cell numbers a long time ago and we communicate a few times a year.

Make customers call to check on their car

A week later I called and said I was just wondering if they had had time to look at the boat and he said, "It's done." I asked what they found and he said, "We replaced the starter." I said ok, he said ok and hung up. I thought about it for a minute and thought, well, he really didn't do anything wrong; he fixed my boat, right? But then I thought he really didn't do anything right, either!

TAKE A FEW MINUTES TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUR CUSTOMERS; ASK THEM IF THERE IS ANYTHING ELSE THEY NEED.

I don't think I should have had to call to find out my boat was fixed, and I think with just a little effort he could have made this a great interaction between the shop and the customer (me). He could have turned it into a "relationship" instead of a "transaction." What if he had taken 30 seconds and sent me a text and said something like this: "Hey Rick, how did your surgery go? I hope everything is fine and recovery is going smoothly. By the way, we have your boat done and it was in fact the starter. And if you like, we could deliver the boat back to the lake for you. Let me know."

Wow, what a difference that would have made to me, the customer! It would have impressed me and wowed me — that's for sure. All my neighbors at the lake have boats, and who do you think I would recommend when they need maintenance or repair? As it stands now, if a new boat shop opened up in my area, I would sure give them a try as I have no reason to feel loyalty to this shop.

Have your technician talk to the customer

On the way to pick up my boat, the low tire light came on in my pickup. I took it to a place with an air hose and when I went to air it up, the valve stem broke. So I drove to a repair shop and went inside. I told the service manager that I needed a tire fixed and wanted him to come and look at it. He said that he would have his tech look at it and sent him out with me. Now I have coached for years not to let your techs talk to customers; it is not a good idea and here is one reason why. He looked at it and said that the TPMS sensor would have to be replaced. I asked him if they did that kind of work, and he said yes, all the time. I asked if he could do it today, and he said no, as the sensor would need to be ordered. Now comes the part that shows why I say don't let techs talk to customers. He said, "Rick, if I were you, I would go across the street to Carquest and get it yourself; it will be a lot cheaper that way. If you let my boss get it, he is going to mark it up and it will be a lot more expensive!" Wow again! So I told him that when he fixed the sensor

I wanted him to check for nails in all four tires and he said he would.

Don't ask what else your customer would like

The next day he came to get my truck, and I went to the door to give him the key. I started talking to him — and he turned and started walking away. I said, “John, I want to remind you...” and he said, “I know, you want the other tires checked; you told me that yesterday!” Then he got in my truck and drove off!!! Along with reminding him to check my other tires, I wanted him to rotate and balance my tires and do a synthetic oil change! But away he went with the truck and replaced the sensor and brought it back with a \$15 charge. I would have had the other work done and anything else they might have found on an inspection. But he was in too big of a hurry just to replace the sensor. Now he would argue that he did nothing wrong; after all he replaced the sensor and the low pressure light is off, right? Again he did nothing right, and neither did his service manager. Just a couple of minutes spent asking me if there was anything else I needed on the truck while it was in the shop would have resulted in a lot more work than replacing a customer-supplied TPMS sensor! I remember years ago reading that a consumer’s ability to consume far exceeds your ability to sell, and in this case it sure did. Again, the next time I need service or maintenance, I have no compelling reason to go back to this shop at all.

Don't bother building relationships

I would like to tell you about a place in town that does in fact have great customer service figured out. It is not a repair shop, but rather a hardware store. When I bought my cabin in 1999, I went to this place for the first time, and that is where I met Gary. I introduced myself to

Gary and told him that I had just bought a cabin on the lake and I needed a ceiling fan, and he sold me one along with a few other things. I told Gary that he would probably see a lot of me, as I like to support local business. Gary said that he knows how the weekend cabin warriors work, and that we work all week and then drive to the cabin on Friday night and often find that we need something for the cabin (turned out he was right!). He gave me his cell phone number and said if I ever needed anything after hours to call him and he would meet me there. Now that is the WOW that we are looking for as a customer!

Over the years I have been in Gary’s store many times and have always had a great relationship with him while giving him my money. In fact, it dawned on me a while back that no one in town or within a 25-mile radius calls his store “Trustworthy Hardware.” We all call it Gary’s.

Then last winter while working on a house and installing Formica, I ran out of contact cement — at 7 p.m. Sunday night. I had, until this time, never called Gary after hours, but I did and he said he would meet me at the store in five minutes. When I got there, he was standing at the door with the glue and said, “Take the glue and stop in tomorrow to pay for it.” He knew I was busy and needed to get my work done. Again WOW! Just unbelievable how I feel about this store. I am very loyal to Gary’s and go out of my

way to buy all my hardware needs there.

So I would strongly recommend that we all become “Gary.” Take a few minutes and develop relationships with your customers, ask them if there is anything else that they need. Listen to them and slow it down at the counter and bring back some good old customer service! You will be surprised what it will do to your bottom line and the number of loyal customers you have.

Teach the customer service checklist

My clients use the ATI Exceptional Customer Service Checklist, which will help all your associates remember the basics and help you inspect your service advisor’s performance. I use it to try to diagnose in my meetings why we might have lost a great repeat customer. If you would like a copy of our Customer Service Checklist, simply download it at www.ationlinetraining.com/2016-12 for a limited time for your own copy. **ZZ**



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. This month’s article was written with the help of Coach Rick Johnson. cfrederick@autotraining.net

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