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## No Excuses for Less Service

By Lee Harkins

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I am sick of hearing all the excuses that are being used to explain why service department sales are down.

I was in a store a few weeks ago where the service director told me every reason why his operation was doomed for failure. He had convinced himself (and the advisors), that it would never get any better. His attitude depressed me, and I know better. No wonder his service sales are down. I told the dealer that he might as well close down the service department because it's doomed by that attitude. That got his attention. He didn't realize until we spoke that he too was buying into the "doom and gloom" being spread around by the service director.

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Here are the top excuses for poor sales that I have heard lately, followed by my responses:

- Excuse #1: The real estate market is the worst in the country in our area!

This is an issue, but cars and trucks still need maintenance and repair work. Are you top of mind with your customers? How can you make that happen? One way is to never apply sales pressure on your service customers. The advisors are feeling the heat from the managers to get the sales, so they start pushing the customer harder for the sale. The hoped-for result is the exact opposite of what happens — the customer defection rate continues to climb. If you find repairs the customer needs and they decline the first time, be sure to follow-up with them. Have someone call the customer a week or two after the visit and ask again for the sale.

- Excuses #2: Gas prices are so high our customers are not buying anything!

Are your advisors spending out of their pockets or the customer's? Are they qualifying the customer's ability to purchase based on their own beliefs? I feel ripped off every time I fill up my truck. But I still need to have my oil changed. Customers still need to have maintenance on their vehicles. Have you reviewed

your pricing? Have you reviewed the labor times to allow for lower prices without taking a hit on the effective labor rate? We need to shift our focus from the “home-run” mentality to the “single-hit” mentality. Do what it takes to keep your customers coming back.

- Excuse #3: Our customers are not buying anything other than an oil change!

When advisors buy into this “doom- and-gloom” attitude, it becomes the rule and they stop asking for the sale. Your service management needs to be holding a sales meeting every morning to keep your advisors focused on the store’s mission. The next customer is *always* the buyer! You should attend the service department meetings and pump them up. Consider offering simple spiffs for added focus. Manage the most important asset we have right now — the attitude of our people. Keep them asking for the sale.

- Excuse #4: We lease 70% of the cars we sell and they don't buy anything!

Maybe this is true. It just requires another approach. It starts at the time of delivery. When reviewing the lease agreement with the customer, make sure you include a detailed review of the section that outlines what maintenance is required of the customer. Pull out your service menu and show the customer what is expected of them and give the price. Maybe this is a great time for presenting pre-paid maintenance packages.

- Excuse #5: We are recommending work but our customers are different. They are not buying anything.

Don't allow the advisory staff to get messed up with this one. The first lesson we learn in sales and the last one we perfect is asking for the sale! Keep them asking. If the customer's car or truck needs work, we have an obligation to advise them of such. Each and every car and truck must have a formal inspection process that should be reviewed with the customer at the time of write up.

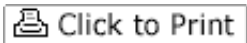
*Lee Harkins is an industry consultant and speaker. He is at [LeeSV40SW@aol.com](mailto:LeeSV40SW@aol.com).*

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