



Are you investing in your ambassadors?

BUSINESS SENSE by TIM KELLY

I have had an extremely busy start to the year providing training to bodyshops. The industry is experiencing some of the worst difficulties it has ever encountered, but what I have identified across nearly every bodyshop I have visited is a lack of investment in training for front-of-house staff.

Over the nine bodyshops I visited, I met ATA MET technicians, ATA Panel, ATA Paint and ATA VDAs, yet the customer-facing staff and many bodyshop managers had not had any such training.

Your reception staff are the most important people in your business. Why? Because they are the “ambassadors” for your business. They promote your brand, your identity, who you are, and what you are about.

It is important to understand that you not only repair vehicles, you also sell “peace of mind”.

When a customer walks in, your ambassadors need to know how to advise what services you offer, and also how to retain that customer. If you cannot retain that customer, you do not have a business. That is why they are so important.

They are also the gatekeepers to your profitability, so have you trained your staff to ask the right questions?

When a customer walks in and asks for an estimate to repair their damaged vehicle, nine times out of 10 they’ll be left alone while the staff member goes out to do the estimate or goes to find an estimator. This is the premium time to work out how to make profit, retain the customer, and for the customer to realise you have empathy for their situation, and you want to help them.

Questions you should be asking
Is this your vehicle? Or your partner’s? This might seem innocuous, but many women feel uncomfortable bringing a vehicle into a garage or workshop. If it’s their partner’s, ask if they also have a vehicle of their own? You now have two people to sell to with one interaction. You have just doubled the potential of profit.

While looking over the incident damage, **ask yourself whether the vehicle needs anything else.**

I have a friend with a bodyshop who will remain nameless but who is very good at upselling, as the following conversation will show:

“Yep, no problem, we can repair that side and make it like new again, but isn’t it your wife’s birthday soon? Yep, it is. Why don’t you treat her? While we repair the side, why don’t we give it a full machine polish and make it look like a new car?”

Ever the romantic and struggling for birthday ideas, we continued: “Good idea, go on then. It would be a shame to have everything else looking mint when the wheels let it down, they could really do with a refurb.” He nailed me good and proper, and I could hardly say no now could I? He saw an opportunity, knew how to present it, how to make it attractive, and how to sell it.

Is this a company car? This question has masses of potential, could you repair all of that company’s vehicles? If they are self-insuring, can you arrange a meeting with the transport manager?

Did the incident involve any other vehicles? And did you hit them or did they hit you? You are establishing the likelihood

of an insurance claim, whether you can direct them through a non-fault accident management company, or whether they are going through their own insurer. They might say they’ll pay for it themselves – they usually do until they find out how much it costs. But you need to get out of the mindset of doing cash jobs for walk-ins, then getting cheated off when they submit your estimate to an insurer, because you have created a “contract in principle”.

Do the job right, estimate correctly and provide one price consistent. Much easier to work backwards if needed, than the other direction. Having your staff provide information that helps the customer on “how best to claim” will make them feel that you have their interest at heart and will look after them.

Take the customer’s full details. It might seem odd to take someone’s date of birth, but it can be used as a security question to identify callers and it can also be used as a marketing tool to keep in contact with customers by wishing them a happy birthday.

Do your “ambassadors” know how to educate the customer about the barriers an insurer will put up? What their consumer rights are? Educating the customer before the insurer speaks to them is a very powerful tool.

Do your front of staff also know how to deal with unhappy customers? Knowledge of the 2015 Consumer Rights Act is imperative, controlling that complaint more so.

Build a better business, invest in your ambassadors.

