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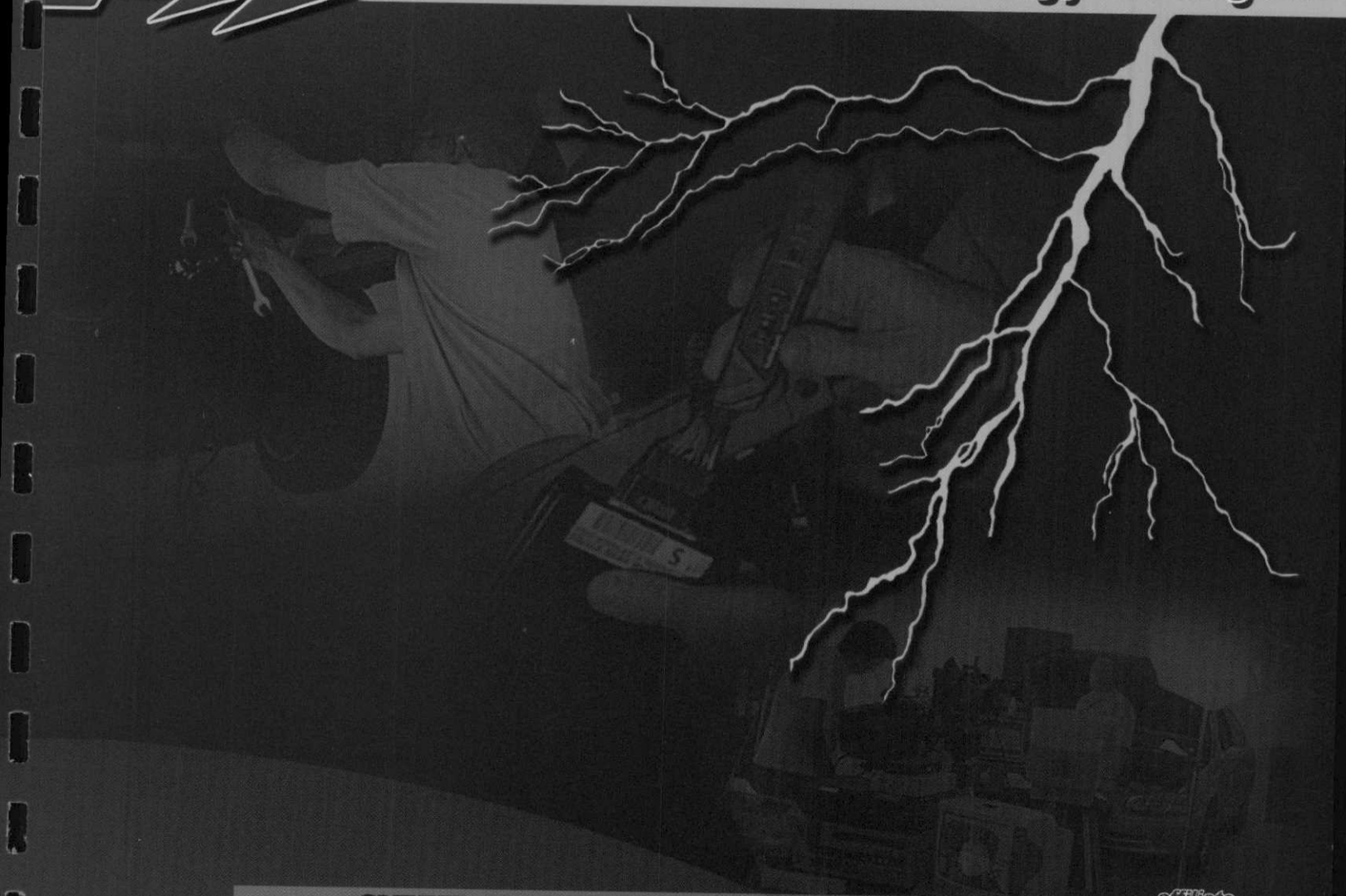

SURVIVAL SKILLS FOR THE SERVICE ADVISOR

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WE ENCOURAGE PROFESSIONALISM

ASE CERTIFIED

THROUGH TECHNICIAN CERTIFICATION

"Before everything else, getting ready is the secret of success."

- Henry Ford

Survival Skills for the Service Advisor

By

George Witt, AAM

National Award Winner!

Women's Board

Be Car Care Aware CAR CARE COUNCIL

Women's Automotive Communication Award 2003

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Introduction

The position of Service Advisor is a hectic and sometimes thankless job. The customers hold you responsible for the job quality even though you just don't have a lot of control over that aspect of the transaction. The position involves multi-tasking at its finest. The customers come in too quickly and the phone sometimes just won't quit ringing. The phrase "the hurrier I go, the behinder I get" is never so true as it is for a Service Advisor on a busy day.

Having actually done this job personally for many years and then having hired, trained and supervised others to do it, I've developed some unique insights and some proven techniques to make it a lot easier. Most of these techniques will work at any location and many may cause some raised eyebrows. Keep an open mind.

Scheduling, the Key to the Pace

To set the right pace, you need to spend enough time with each customer on the initial write up. The more time you spend writing up the job, the easier it'll be the rest of the day. The largest obstacle any Service Advisor has to overcome is controlling the transaction. The Service Advisor must always be in control of the situation.

The first thing you need to control is the flow of customers in the door. Start by scheduling customer arrivals at 15 minute intervals. Sure, some will come in early and some will arrive late, but scheduling is the key to the pace. If you schedule 3 people to all arrive at the same time, you have a sure-fire recipe for disaster.

We always want to avoid saying "no" to a customer at any time. If the 8AM time slot is full and a customer wants to come in at 8, don't say, "No". Say, "What I *can do* is take you at 7:45 or 8:15. Or would the next day be better?" Basically, instead of saying no, you're going to ignore the request and tell them when you *can* do it. Most customers either have a day or a particular time that's better for them. Let them tell you what works best for them. Don't hesitate to explain the reason for the time shift. If they still show up early or late, then they'll be the ones who wait for the customers who were "on time".

By controlling the schedule, you'll start controlling the flow. That helps you spend the time you need with each customer.

Provide a place on your appointment form to indicate which customers need rides or loaner/rental cars. By asking if this service is needed with each appointment you make, you can eliminate overloading the system and creating a crisis.

You should also track available hours to sell when taking appointments. This tracking should provide allowances for the amount of work you generally upsell in an average day. By starting with the number of hours you have to sell and then subtracting the hours you sell when you book each appointment, you can help avoid scheduling more work than you can do in a day. Listing the hours to sell is

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also helpful on those days when you have a technician off and you can't complete as much work as on a normal day. All too often the realization that you're a person short comes too late in the appointment taking process.

Sample Appointment Sheet Showing Hours Left to Sell

Time in	Ride ?	Name	Yr/ Model	Work	Hours	Hours left 20
7:00	yes	Joe Perfect +	94 Accord	Oil change, 60k	3.4	16.6
7:15	no	Everett Sinchoo	90 Civic	Oil leak since radiator fixed	1.5	15.1
7:30	loan er	Sam Ting	92 Prelude	Hesitates off idle, pings "Car do sam ting". (comeback)	2.0	13.1
8:00	yes	Willie Makit	96 CRV	Window doesn't roll Brakes noisy	3.1	10.0
8:15	no	Betty Wont	89 Civic	Oil in coolant— headgasket	7.0	3.0

Controlling the Transaction, the Initial Reception

The number one thing that goes wrong in the morning is the customer who just didn't allow enough time to drop off their car. They want to stick their head in the door, toss you the keys and split. Often this is accompanied by the "See you at 5!" statement from the customer. You don't know who they are or what they want and it's a sure bet you won't have the car done the way they want, within the estimate!!

There are two ways to best deal with this situation. The first is to document everything in detail, complete with estimates, when the appointment is first made. Some shop management software is perfect for this, others are sadly lacking. If yours is sadly lacking, then you can hand write it or set it up in MS Word and print it out. Put the papers in an accordion file with 30 divisions in it, one for each day of the month. On the appropriate day, you just pull out the papers for that day and you have it. If you write it up in Word, you can copy and paste it onto the repair order. All you need to do on arrival is conduct a quick review, print it and get a signature. They're happy, you're happy.

The second way to deal with this situation is to make a quick initial appointment. Let the customer know at that time that the rest of the transaction will be completed when they arrive. Then, upon arrival, have the customer come in, sit down and just take the time you need to complete the transaction. This might require some assertiveness on your part. You can be nice and still be assertive. This is an element of controlling the transaction. If they just don't have time for that, calmly take the keys and tell them you'll park their car and wait for them to

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call you when they have time to discuss the needed repairs. Be sure they understand you won't touch their car until you've talked to them. Many times they'll throw up their hands, sit down and handle it right then. Problem solved.

The next situation you face is the customer who just insists that you promise something you simply can't deliver. Violations of arithmetic are the best examples. They drop the car off at 8am for 8 hours worth of work and insist they need the car back at noon. The best thing you can do is stand your ground right up front. Many times they are so insistent that we tend to give up and say yes. This sets us up for the inevitable bad conversation/confrontation later in the day. Stand your ground and don't make promises you can't keep. Don't tell them what they want to hear, tell them the truth. They may not be able to handle the truth but tell it to them anyway. In many of the arithmetic cases, I've simply explained the math to them and they understand a lot easier. Arguments at the front counter are most easily settled before you've worked on the car.

Writing a Proper Repair Order

Communication Skills

How many times have you clearly communicated something to someone and they did something different? They just didn't receive the signals you sent. You each thought it was clear, you each thought it was something different. Complete agreement on nothing.

Experts in communication will tell you that effective communication starts with telling someone what you want them to know then having them repeat it back to you. You'll find they've gotten most of it. You then repeat the parts they've missed and have them repeat *that* back to you. Again, they've still missed a little. And so it goes, until you've been back and forth quite a few times. In the end, you've had effective communication. Time consuming, but effective. Writing a repair order is no different.

Your objective is to gather enough information from the customer so you can explain it on the repair order. "What does it do and when does it do it?". The result is that anyone can pick up that repair order, read it, and then be able to duplicate the symptom(s).

Let's take an example:

Customer: "My car is making a noise."

You: "When does it make this noise?"

Customer: "All the time."

You: "Does it make the noise when the car is sitting still or moving?"

Customer: "It doesn't do it if the car is stopped."

You: "Can you describe the noise?"

Customer: "It's a constant noise." (They're a lot of help!!)

You: "Is it a deep growl, a rubbing noise or a high pitched noise?"

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Customer: "It's a high pitched noise."

You: "Is it a constant noise like a tone or does it repeat?"

Customer: "It repeats, eeep eeep eeep." (Now we're getting somewhere.)

You: "Does the noise get faster as the car goes faster?"

Customer: "Why, yes, it does."

You: "Is there anything you can do to change the noise?"

Customer: "No, it's always there."

You: "Does applying the brakes change the noise?"

Customer: "Putting the brakes on makes it stop."

You: "OK, you say the car makes a regular, rhythmic, high pitched noise as the car is rolling. The noise gets faster as the car goes faster and if you step on the brakes, the noise stops. Is that right?"

Customer: "The noise only stops when I'm applying the brakes. As soon as I let up on the brake the noise comes back."

You: "Very good. So I should write that the car makes a regular, rhythmic, high pitched noise as the car is rolling. The noise gets faster as the car goes faster and if you step on the brakes, the noise stops. The noise will only stop as long as your foot is applying the brake pedal and then it returns when you release the brakes. Does that sound right?"

Customer: "Yes, that's it."

This procedure should be repeated with each symptom the customer wants fixed. It may seem time consuming, but it saves more technician time than you can imagine. Clear, concise descriptions of the exact symptoms the customer is concerned with are the key to fixing it right the first time quickly and efficiently.

The questions below were developed on the i-ATN Shop Management Forum by the group, assembled by Tom Ham with input from Brad Peterson and are reprinted with permission:

Key questions are:

Symptom to be corrected?

First happened when?

How often?

Will it do it sitting still or does the car have to be moving?

If the car has to be moving, how fast does it have to go to do it?

Does accelerating, coasting or braking affect the noise?

Does it matter if the car is cold (cold start) or warmed up?

Is it affected by the weather?

Any warning lights on or gauges reading different than normal?

Has this happened before or been repaired (attempted) before?

Any other ways it doesn't drive, run or work correctly?

Make it a habit to go through these questions on every symptom that requires you to make a repair recommendation.

Better yet, make a menu of the different symptoms a car can have and a list of questions that should be asked for each set of symptoms. Then make up a canned job for each symptom with the questions right in the job. That way the questions are printed right on the repair order along with the customer's answers to those questions. In the event the customer gives you wrong or incomplete information, it's in print.

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➡ Sample labor operations and questions are in the back of the book.

Take a Test Drive

Any car with a noise or running concern should be road tested with the customer in the car. NEVER let the customer drive unless you're really desperate. When I was working at a dealership I once had a woman drive me through every parking garage in the city during prime write-up time. I was gone 45 minutes and the Service Manager was livid!! I was literally a prisoner in her car, helpless to do anything to get back to the shop.

What sounds like a simple noise to your customer may be one of many noises. The customer only hears the NEW noise. We can't tell the new ones from the old ones. We want to fix the one the customer wants to have fixed.

Either you or a tech needs to drive the car with the customer to hear the noise or experience the concern. This is the biggest time saver in the world!!

Avoid "Driveway Diagnostics"

Don't ever tell the customer that you "know" what it is. It might *not* be that and it undermines the idea of selling time to test and inspect the car and verify the problem. It's fine to tell them you have some good ideas what it *might be.* Even if you can clearly see the coolant gushing from the water pump, even if you can clearly hear it screaming, even if you can see the pulley wobbling, please sell testing time. It may have other problems.

Never write a repair order that starts out with the phrase, "Replace . . ." or give specific instructions to replace a part, no matter what, even if it's been special ordered for that car. Always write the symptoms to be repaired. This is the only way you can be certain the car will be fixed. If the technician doesn't have any idea what the replacement part is supposed to fix, they have no way to verify the repair.

Always seek to give the technician enough information to duplicate the complaint. "What does it do and when does it do it". This should always be your goal.

Intermittent Symptoms

Murphy's Law states that "The malfunctioning appliance will always work perfectly in the presence of a repairman". This was never so true as in the automotive business. The intermittent symptom will never show itself in the shop. This is another reason for a road test with the customer.

In the back of this book is a sample questionnaire you can fax to the customer. This gives them a chance to help you identify the problem. If the problem is *really* intermittent, it's perfectly appropriate to suggest to the customer that they may wish to save their money until it gets a little more consistent.

Some of these things may be "pattern failures" in certain years or

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models of cars, things that always happen to that particular car. There's nothing wrong with an educated guess if it's a serious problem and you've discussed this with the customer in advance. A dying or stalling problem could kill you on a left turn in heavy traffic. If the igniter, as an example, commonly fails on this year and model at about this age and mileage, and it seems their complaint might be resolved by replacing the igniter, there's no harm in suggesting that it might be a good idea to replace it now. This should only be done after testing has been performed. It should also be clearly explained on the repair order that you were unable to confirm any part failure and that the part was replaced as a precaution. An educated guess, as it were. This can get you off the hook if it doesn't fix the problem. Remember, your repair order is a legal document, enforceable in court. You want it to be your friend if that becomes necessary.

Always Give an Estimate "Line by Line"

As you record each item the customer wants addressed, be sure to give them an estimate on each line of the repair order. If you charge $10 to replace a tail light bulb, let them know ahead of time. Customers rarely argue at the time of write-up. The car isn't fixed yet. If they don't want it done for the price you ask, you simply don't do the repair. That's easy. If you don't give them a price for the tail light, they'll almost always argue *after the car is fixed.* Remember, YOU are in a position of strength *before* the car is fixed, the customer is in a position of strength *after* the car is fixed.

If there are common problems that may be encountered with a repair, now is the time to let the customer know what you may find as you perform this repair. If you're replacing an exhaust manifold or manifold gasket, we all know the possibility of broken bolts. The customer should be made aware of this. It sets the stage for them to pay to extract the bolts and reduces the odds that they will say, "you broke 'em, you fix 'em"—for free, of course. Timing belt tensioner bearings are a natural add-on sale when replacing a timing belt. You should presell this item at time of write-up. There are many other examples. Cover this ahead of time with the customer. It enhances your professionalism and makes the subsequent sale easier.

If you don't already have one, your shop should establish a "minimum shop charge". Many shops post a sign stating a "minimum shop charge $60". That's ridiculous. No one (who wants a return customer) will charge $60 to replace a tail light bulb if that's all the car needs. For this reason, the sign and the minimum charge are bogus. Our shop has posted six-inch-square signs in our write-up area stating our minimum shop charge is $8. That's a pretty low amount, but it lets us get at least $8 for each and every line on the repair order. That's $8 labor for every light bulb we replace. This alone adds about $400 to our labor sales every month. That's almost *five grand* at the end of the year. We still replace air filters for no labor charge since we have to remove them anyway to inspect them. But we do charge labor to replace wiper blades and any light bulbs. We rarely lose sales when we

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quote this in advance. We've had some customers tell us they or someone else would do the job. But on the next service visit the item still wasn't fixed. We're frequently able to get the money on the next visit. Eventually, we wear them down.

Remember, there are many things that we ourselves could do but they're just an inconvenience to actually do. We're frequently happy to pay someone to do them for us just to get out of the job. Don't be bashful about charging a minimum charge, especially if it's only eight bucks. As long as you've told the customer ahead of time, there are no surprises. It's so easy to get when you mention it in advance.

Giving an estimate on each labor line is the way you can get the few tenths of an hour charges here and there. It all adds up at the end of the day, week and month. When the repair order is done, you simply add up the estimates for each line and you have your total repair order estimate, all neat and tidy.

The estimates you quote for each line should include *all the charges* for that line, including hazardous fees, tire disposal, shop supplies, donuts, telephone, trash and so on. It's very important that if you tell a customer it's going to be $20, it had better be $20.

Sell lists

Your shop should have a number of canned diagnostic tests made up in advance. There should be a series of tests for an overheating engine, for example. (There is a sample of this in the back of the book). You should also have a test for a coolant leak, including the time it takes to pressure test the system and inspect for leaks. It's very important that you sell these tests at the time of write-up. It gives your technicians the proper time and procedures to accurately determine the cause of the customer's concerns. In this way, you're not only increasing the size of your average repair order, you're also insuring the car will get fixed right the first time. Keep in mind that as the tech conducts the tests, there may be more than one cause for any given concern and communicate this to the customer.

Your electronic information system can be your best friend if the customer balks at the price you're quoting "just to look at it". Print out the testing procedures right from your electronic information system and let the customer see all the test sequences involved in determining the faulty part(s). Once they see all the tests and all the things involved, they begin to realize the complexity of the modern automobile. The prices you're quoting are quite reasonable all of a sudden.

Avoid the "D" word. That's right—the dreaded "diagnostic" word. To charge the customer a "diagnostic" charge implies that the one operation you've just sold them will accurately *diagnose* whatever is wrong with the car. What we want to sell are "tests." The results of the tests are data that must be analyzed. It's quite *likely* that the analysis of that data will determine what needs to be fixed, but there are also occasions when more test time must be sold. By

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selling test time, you've left the door open to sell *more* test time when it's appropriate.

I've provided an overheating checklist in the back of the book. The tests should be performed in the exact order they appear. If you find a thermostat stuck shut, for example, it has to be replaced and the *testing continued* until you're done with the testing. You can't tell if the radiator is properly exchanging heat if the thermostat is stuck shut. You can't tell if the cooling fan sensor is working if that part of the radiator is plugged and so on. You may have to call the customer and make a number of sales just to complete the tests. You can be fairly certain that once the entire test sheet has been completed accurately, the overheating concern will be fixed and fixed right the first time.

Most importantly, we get paid for the testing. Even if the customer doesn't authorize all the repairs, they still pay for the testing. "Why should I pay you, you didn't fix the car?" is a phrase we hear all too often. They aren't paying for a fixed car, they're paying for *information.* The information on the test sheet is valuable. They should pay for it. Very few customers will balk at paying for information when they can clearly see it with their own eyes. A copy of the test sheet should always be given to the customer and a copy should be kept for your own records. This protects you both.

Talk Maintenance to Every Customer

Every single car on the road requires periodic maintenance in order to prevent costly repairs. You need to discuss the maintenance needs with every customer. Ideally, your shop has some way to track the maintenance history on every vehicle.

At our shop, we've broken down maintenance to its component parts and currently have 13 different operations that we track separately, from tire rotation and brake inspection every 7500 miles to wiper blade replacement every 12 months. (Sample in the back of the book). The idea is to *prevent* problems by addressing them *before* they occur. We don't believe our customers need to be blinded in poor visibility conditions to prove they need to replace the wiper blades. This is dangerous and completely preventable. It's much more desirable to perform these operations on a regular schedule.

Scheduled maintenance does several things. First and foremost, it takes care of the needs of your customers. Your better customers *want* to take care of their automotive investment and seek out shops that help them do that easily and conveniently. If your shop doesn't do that, they're more likely to switch to a shop that makes maintenance easy. *You stand to lose your best customers.*

Second, maintenance work provides your shop with a large amount of highly profitable work that's also easy to perform. It's the easiest money we can make.

Third, maintenance work evens out the flow of traffic and helps to reduce the "peaks" and raise up the "valleys" of the business cycle. Some months are high demand, like in the summer, and some months are traditionally slow in some markets. Selling scheduled maintenance

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makes it much more likely the customer will return when the odometer hits a certain point, regardless of the business cycle. This establishes a regular, systematic flow of business into your shop.

Ideally, you're going to sell maintenance for future visits. The easiest sale to make is the one coming up, especially if it's a large sale, such as a major maintenance or timing belt replacement. Your customers will allocate the money ahead of time for future service needs.

You should spend some time on every service transaction to cover maintenance with every customer. If you address it every time, your customers will realize its importance. Customers who've never done maintenance can be converted over time. Maintenance just makes good sense. You can make this easy by simply printing out the maintenance schedule from your electronic information system and handing it to each customer. Seeing it in print is very persuasive. Seeing is believing. And paper sells when recommendations won't.

In the back of this book is a chart that shows how much money can be saved by keeping an older car and continuing to maintain and repair it instead of trading it in or leasing. The figures are real numbers for a Honda licensed and insured in Lincoln, Nebraska. You can easily do the research for your own town. Use a Ford Taurus or a Chevy Lumina in your chart, since the depreciation is much higher. The numbers will be an even more striking contrast and reassure the customer that performing regular scheduled maintenance is a good investment that makes economic sense.

Address ONLY the Customer's Concerns

Even though you've discussed maintenance with the customer, don't add anything to the repair order until you've addressed their *original* concerns. The repairs necessary to fix what the customer came in for may blow their entire budget. It's not right to put the customer over their budget on any visit before their initial concerns are addressed. The last thing we want is to present them with a large bill for fixing everything *except what they wanted fixed.*

You can literally sell more by **refusing the sale.** What?!!? That's right, when you discuss the maintenance required, if the customer tells you to do it, refuse the sale. (No, I'm not nuts, keep reading). Tell them you first want to address the reason they brought the car in. You don't want to put them over budget. This builds trust and lets them know you are clearly on their side. The number one thing that customers want is a shop they can trust. This will help prove your trustworthiness.

Naturally, once you've determined what their car needs, call them, sell the needed repairs and the kitchen sink, including that maintenance you refused in the beginning. In this way, the customer controls the entire transaction, as they should. We must always remember it's the customer's car and the customer's money. We have no right to make decisions for them.

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The Red Flag

The biggest red flag in the world is the customer who insists they don't need an estimate, "Just do what it needs". The rough translation of this is, "Money is no object, I've got 20 bucks". When the customer refuses an estimate, always pull a number out of the air, preferably a very high one. You might say, "OK, so if it's 600 bucks, that's OK?" Naturally, if they say yes, make that your estimate. In most cases, the customer will have a stroke when you say that. Always agree on some dollar figure, no matter what they may say. The customer who never wants an estimate is the one who'll scream the loudest at the 50 cents you charged for brake fluid (because they were out!!). Remember, when the car isn't fixed yet, YOU are dealing from a position of strength. Don't give up that position.

Now, you've discussed everything with the customer, you've agreed in advance what exactly is going to be done to the car and how much it will cost. Print the repair order and have the customer sign it. This is the final step in creating a legal document that binds you both to its terms. It states what you're going to do and what the customer will pay to have it done. You should set a goal to have every customer sign every repair order. This will be the single most important thing that you'll do. Get the customer's agreement and signature.

Dealing with Everett Sinchou

He's been to all our shops. He's the guy who comes in and says, "Everett Sinchou fix my radiator, I've got an oil leak. Now you fix, I no pay!". The very best way to handle this situation is to agree to carefully re-check the work you did do. Don't go beyond this unless you feel there may be something to his claims. It's entirely possible the transmission cooler lines weren't properly connected to the radiator and that's the cause of the oil leak. So, re-check the radiator installation carefully. Once you've determined your previous job was properly done, you may now call Everett and explain how much it will cost to perform an oil leak inspection. If it becomes necessary, get the car on the hoist, then take Everett to the car and show him where you worked and what you did. Show Everett the oil drips off the timing cover and explain that this is not related to a radiator repair.

By keeping an open mind yourself in the very beginning, you help insure your success in convincing Everett that the two symptoms aren't related. He's really got a second concern that will cost him more to evaluate.

Setting Up the Authorizing Phone Call

Be sure to set up a way to communicate with the customer later in the day. The best way is to ask them for their phone number. Don't give them the number you have on file. In many cases, they'll absent-mindedly tell you it's right when it isn't. If you have them quote you

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the number themselves, it increases your odds of reaching them. It's also beneficial to let them know at about what time you'll be wanting to contact them. We have a couple of cell phones to loan out to customers who "won't be near a phone all day". They're programmed to dial only two numbers—our shop and 911. If you do loan cell phones, be sure to go through the drill with the customer before they leave. Call the phone while the customer is holding it and have them answer to be sure they're familiar with it. We've had many customers *turn them off by mistake.* This just shows that when technology advances, God simply invents a better idiot.

If phone communication seems to be an obstacle, ask about e-mail. Many people have to constantly check their e-mail at work and that can be a great way to contact them effortlessly.

Be sure to let the customer know that if you can't reach them, their car may not be fixed. Remember, you both have to agree on things ahead of time, before the repairs are done. If you can't reach the customer *don't fix the car!!!.* Many "scam artist" customers know how the game is played. They'll intentionally be out of touch all day so they can argue about the bill that was incurred without their permission. Better to argue about a car sitting in the back lot, unfixed, than to be at their mercy when the car's done.

If all else fails, instruct the customer to call you at some point during the day. If there's no communication, there's no ride home.

Internal Shop Activities

Time Management

In the back of the book is a sheet you can use for daily tracking of the cars you've written up. This is a very important time management tool. There's a place for the repair order number, the customer's name and phone number and the all important *time in and time out* columns. The "time out" is obviously the time the finished car is due out the door. The "time in" is the time the car needs to be in to a technician in order to make the promised "time out". We tend to look too much at promised times and not enough at *the time it will take the technician to properly do the job.* Some jobs take one hour, some take 5 hours. The five-hour job needs attention long before the promised time. We'd better be thinking about that 5-hour job before we go to lunch, not at three o'clock.

This tracking form requires a yellow and a blue hi-lighter. Bright yellow attracts the eye. Every hour, review the form and decide which things require action in the next hour. The cars that need to be completed in the next hour (time out) should have the completion time hi-lighted in yellow. The cars that need to have work started on them (time in) in order to make the promised time should also be hi-lighted in yellow. When the task has been done, use the blue hi-lighter to show it no longer needs your attention.

Please don't mix up these colors. I've seen people use yellow to show a completed task and blue to indicate a task to be done. That's

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backwards!! Remember, *yellow attracts the eye* and blue is soothing, meaning it's done and you no longer have to worry about it. You don't need your eye attracted to things that are completed.

I developed this form when I was working at a new car dealership and writing 25 tickets a day. Properly used, this form can save your life and your sanity (if that's possible).

The "$$" column means the repair order is all figured, the "called" column means you've called the customer and explained the bill to them. If the car is done, but you haven't figured the bill, use the yellow hi-lighter to remind you to complete that task, likewise with the "called" column. Once the customer has picked up the car, color the entire line blue. The car's gone, your job is done.

Putting Together the Actual Estimate

The technician's job is to give you a sales presentation, including specifications. The tech should always tell you what the car needs in the way of repairs and should always prioritize them. Establish three repair priorities. "A" items are a safety hazard if not repaired. Loose ball joints and tie rod ends, leaking wheel cylinders and brake linings that are worn to the metal are examples of these. The car isn't safe to drive until these are repaired.

"B" items are those that should be repaired to avoid causing additional damage later on. Deeply cracked CV boots or oil seals leaking oil onto the timing belt are good examples of these. It's going to be a lot less money to fix these now, rather than wait until the damage is done later.

"C" items are things that are discretionary repairs. A leaking oil pan gasket or a small hole in the muffler really aren't a big deal. It doesn't matter whether these things are fixed now, later, or never. The cost is the same.

The technician should always give you factory specs to work from. Using factory specs gets you out of arguments. If you say the brakes are thin, the customer can always say they aren't. It's you versus them. Not good. If you say the brake pads are 2mm, that's the factory recommended wear limit, it's hard to argue with that. You can show the customer the factory manual or print it out from your electronic information system. Now that's really hard to argue with. Any argument will have to be with the factory engineers, not with you. This is a very important thing to note.

Another important part of the estimating process is for the technicians to fill out Parts Requisition forms, listing the parts they'll need to complete the repairs. Sample forms are in the back of this booklet. This avoids incomplete estimates and repeated trips to visit with the technicians. If you have a separate Parts Department, they can get the parts prices while you are looking up labor prices. Ideally, the two will come together at the same time, making more efficient use of your time. If you have to do both, the Parts Requisition form makes the call for parts prices and availability easier.

If any repair is of a "non-routine" nature for your shop, always be

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sure to show the technician how much time the book allows for the operation and get their approval. Labor guides are just that, a guide. You shouldn't hesitate to add extra time for older cars or rusty cars or anything else that will make the job take longer than the book allows. This is only reasonable, as time is all you have to sell.

Prior approval from the technicians gets you out of arguing with the them after the work is done. After all, they had a chance for input before the job was bid.

Finally, review your estimate for parts and labor to be sure that the shop's gross profit objectives are being met. Ideally, every shop has a target of how much total gross profit per hour of technician time it needs. Be sure your estimate is harmonious with these goals.

Pad the estimate a little to allow for small unknowns. The objective is that you can OK a small unexpected part replacement without calling the customer a second time and still come in just under your estimate.

Now, list out your estimate on the back of the repair order. List the operation, the flat rate hours and the total parts and labor price for each item. Ideally, you should list the customer's concerns first. Next, list the safety items (the "A" list), followed by the "B" and "C" lists. Some electronic information systems have great provisions for estimating, you may be able to take advantage of those features. List the total for all the work. If the list is extensive, you may wish to have subtotals for the different types of work to be done.

Making the Actual Sale

Before you call the customer, remember you won't have to pay the bill yourself. Many Service Advisors get so involved with wanting to please the customer, they have trouble being the "bearer of bad news". They actually have difficulty asking for money. Consider the following important facts:

- You weren't the engineer who designed it
- You didn't build it
- You didn't buy it
- You didn't wear it out
- You didn't break it
- You don't have to pay for it!!

You should always inspect the car yourself before calling the customer so you can intelligently answer any questions the customer may have. It always amazed me when I called a customer to inform them there was a hole in the muffler. Invariably, it seemed very important to the customer to know *where the hole was located.* Like it mattered—a hole is a hole. Had I not inspected the car myself, I wouldn't have been able to properly answer the question. Other questions, like how thin, how soft, how hard and how loose can only be answered by the one who was at the scene. So, check it out before you call.

O.K., we've prioritized the repairs, inspected the car and we're ready to make the call. Whatever you do, don't tell the customer to sit down before you give them a large estimate. The last thing you

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want to do is relay this as bad news. It's simply a report on the condition of the car and its needed repairs and maintenance. All too many times the Service Advisor gets too emotionally involved in this process. You're not informing the customer they have a terminal disease, for Heaven's sake. It's just a car and it needs some repairs and maintenance. It's no big deal. You don't have to write the check. Car repairs always seem like they cost too much anyway, so get emotionally detached.

Simply call the customer and tell them what's on the list. Start with the things the customer wanted fixed. As you go along, the customer may want to start giving you the OK for the first items. Ask them to hold up on making decisions until you've finished; you want them to have a clear idea of the whole picture before they decide on anything at all. Once again, you're infusing the concept of honesty by refusing their money. **Don't give a line by line price**, just tell them what the car needs. After you've covered the things the customer wanted fixed, you then move on to any items on the "A" list and its safety considerations, then the "B" and "C" lists and, finally, needed maintenance. Then you should say, "And if you do it all, it will be $XXX.xx.

Then you simply wait for a response. You've made your presentation and asked for the money. At this point, you don't say anything until the customer does. There's an old saying in the sales business that once you've asked the customer to buy, you remain silent. The first one to speak loses. If the salesman keeps talking, he's just lost the sale.

It may surprise you to find how many customers will buy the whole package. By not giving line by line prices, you've helped clarify the needs of the car and avoided confusion on the part of the customer. They'll get bogged down in the dollar details every time. If they want to know the prices by line, it's now appropriate to answer any questions the customer may have.

You may have to do some new addition to total up part of the work, that's fine. Not every customer will buy the whole list, so you'll have to subtotal parts of it. As the customer buys each item, get out the famous yellow hi-lighter to mark the sold items on the estimate. This way there's no confusion with your parts people or the technician. This is non-verbal communication at its finest.

Some customers will ask for a discount on some of the work if they buy other work. Don't give discounts. You're not Monte Hall and this is not "Let's Make a Deal". You have a list of items they may choose to buy from and each item stands on its own.

Simple Explanations

Keep your explanations of the technical repairs as simple as you possibly can. We keep a drive shaft with a split CV boot in the office . It's been all cleaned up, of course, but it's a great visual aid for selling CV boots and CV joints. In general, the shorter and simpler the explanation is, the better it will work. A distributor vacuum advance unit is a device that helps improve mileage. Everybody wants better mileage.

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A CV boot is a rubber thing that keeps the grease in the CV joint. If they replace a cracked CV boot now, they can avoid a much more expensive repair when the boot splits open in the near future. A cylinder head gasket is something they should replace now to avoid ruining the whole engine if they don't. These examples should give you the basic idea of the simple explanation.

We use a digital camera in our shop to take photographs of all kinds of things on cars. It's a great tool when we give the customer a large color photo of some of the things we found on their car. You should even offer to show them things on their own car when they return later in the day. You should always keep the old parts that came off of their car and then ask them if they'd like to see those parts when they arrive to pick up the car.

We use a white plastic block from the BG Products people to show the color differences between the fluids in their car and new fluid. This really reinforces the need for fluid maintenance. We take a photo of the white plastic block with the old and new fluids side by side. It can be a very convincing sales presentation. Remember the saying, "Seeing is believing". When you can show people, it again demonstrates your honesty.

Selling Skills

Understand the difference between **empathy** and **sympathy.** Sympathy means, "I understand how you feel and I feel the same way". Empathy means, "I understand how you feel, but I *don't* feel the same way". Too much sympathy on our part makes it very difficult to call customers with "bad news". Again, it's not bad news. It's just a report on the condition of the car. When someone occasionally tells you how this will be an economic hardship on them, it's OK to show empathy, just don't be sympathetic. You don't want to feel bad yourself. If their life is tough, that's their battle, not yours. We need to make sales to make profit so we can be here next year. This is survival on our part. This is why we don't offer discounts on repairs. No matter how bad it seems for the customer, it will be worse for us if we offer that discount. In some cases, the customers with the real tales of woe live in half-million dollar houses. It's of no real concern to you whether they buy the repairs or not. It's not your car, it's not your money and it's not your life.

Always look for buying signals from a customer. A buying signal is an indication they want the work done. A buying signal might be, "Can you get this done today?" or "How soon can this be done?". Once you hear a buying signal, you should assume the sale. Always assume the customer is buying the repairs. It's the only logical course of action. If something is broken or worn, it only makes sense to repair it or maintain it. This is, after all, the second biggest investment in a person's life, after their house.

Once you've gotten a "buying signal", assume they've given you the OK. Answer a buying signal with an assumptive statement and then listen. For example, the buying signal, "Can you get this done today?" should be answered with "Yes, we can complete that repair

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today, now what about .....(the brakes, the muffler or other repair or maintenance items on the car)?". Many people have a great deal of trouble actually committing to a decision. This makes it easy for them to say yes and they like it.

Learn When To Shut Up

There's another old saying in the sales business— "Many a sale has been lost by the same weapon that Samson used to defeat the Philistines—the jawbone of an ass". What that means is the salesperson has continued to talk (and sell) *after the customer has already said YES!* Once the customer has said YES, stop talking about that item. Drop it in the middle of a sentence if you have to. Continued talking only increases the odds they'll change their mind. You give them a forum to say no. God gave us all 2 ears and 1 mouth because we should listen twice a much as we talk. Good sales people are the best listeners. They listen carefully for a buying signal and pick up on it immediately.

What Would You Do If It Was Yours?

Sometimes we're tempted to make a sale by telling people what we'd do if it was our car. This is considered very poor salesmanship. In the first place, it's not yours and most customers could care less about what you'd do, anyway. Occasionally, customers will ask me, "What would you do if it was yours?". My response is, "It's not mine and it doesn't make any difference what I'd do. The issue is, it's YOURS and you'll have to decide what's best for you".

Our job is to give our customers enough information so they can make the decisions that are appropriate for them at the time. That's all we can do. We can't possibly expect their decisions to agree with ours, since we're all different. This phrase is one I use frequently when discussing needed repairs with customers.

The Subordinate Question

The subordinate question in the sales business is a question that, when answered "yes", means the customer has bought, but if the answer is "no", it doesn't mean *they haven't bought.* Completion time is a good example of a subordinate question. This is frequently used with the assumptive sale. Assuming the sale (that we haven't really made yet), we might say, "Would you like this done today or would tomorrow be more convenient for you?". The issue is no longer a decision to do the work or not, but rather a discussion of completion time. Assuming the sale, we're now discussing the terms of the sale, rather than whether or not they want to make the purchase. We're giving the customer a choice between something and something, as opposed to a choice between something and nothing. Again, some customers have a terrible time arriving at a decision, this makes it easy. By agreeing to a completion time, they're saying yes without really having to announce their buying decision. If they say no to the completion time, that does-

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n't mean no to the sale, only to the completion time. They may offer another time as being better, so they've still bought without having to say they are doing so.

The assumptive sale approach coupled with the subordinate question is the most powerful method you can employ to close sales.

Body Language

When dealing directly with customers, it's important to understand a little of the basics of body language. Body language is a form of communication that's totally non-verbal, yet very strong. Not only do we need to understand what people are communicating to us with their body language, but we need to be careful what messages we're sending them.

A few basic positions are:

- Arms folded across the chest—a defensive posture indicating a person isn't receptive.
- Hands in pockets or concealed—when the palms of the hands aren't visible, it can be a sign of concealment. It may indicate selfish motives, concern for their own money or lack of fair play.
- Hand behind the back of the neck—a defensive position. This is where the term "hot under the collar" came from. The person with their hand in this position feels they're under attack.
- Hands on hips—a sign of readiness or agreement. This person is ready to go. When you see a customer in this position, they're buying.
- Hands outstretched with open palms—a sign of honesty and openness. "I've got nothing to hide" is what this says.

One thing we need to understand about body language is called "mirroring". Two people talking will frequently mirror each other's body language. If you have your arms folded across your chest in a defensive position, expect the person you're talking with to mirror the signals your body language is sending. If you're sending a defensive signal, they will, too. Practice using the hands on hips and the open palms language when talking to customers and you'll find them much more receptive to what you're saying.

One thing that's very important to remember when considering body language is that it's not always fool proof. Sometimes people use certain positions for different reasons. The hand on the neck may be there because their neck is sore, not because they're defensive. Sometimes we itch and we need to scratch. Don't get too carried away with reading body language, it's not always a sure thing. However, we should always be aware of its existence.

The Sale is Made

Recite back to the customer exactly what operations you're going to perform and the total price. Get the customer's agreement. Again, don't announce the price of each item as you do this, just list the labor items and, when you're finished, the total price for all the work,

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including what they authorized at the time of initial write-up. Too many times confusion and disagreement happens when we only tell them how much *additional* repairs we're selling them. Always give them the total amount of money it will take to get their car back. Once you've made the sale, hi-light the items sold in bright yellow, both on the repair order and on the Parts Requisition form. This is effective and easy non-verbal communication for the technician, the parts people and you. This leaves no doubt what the customer bought and declined. You should also total up the final sales total and list that amount as well. We've had to refer to these later when the customer's memory became foggy.

Making the Big Sale

On some occasions you may have a car that needs some expensive repairs. The customer may willingly indicate a readiness to buy those repairs. Sometimes it's best for us to initially turn down the sale. *Turn down the sale? Am I nuts?!* (He's doing it again, he's doing it again!!!)

Let's say we have an 8-year old Accord that comes in with a cam seal leaking, a brake pedal that goes to the floor and front pads worn to the metal. The cam seal has soaked the timing belt, the pads have damaged the brake rotors (which must be pressed off, damaging the wheel bearings) and the brake master cylinder needs to be replaced. These repairs might approach a total of $1500. If you make that sale, what happens if something else goes wrong the next week? We all know we'll be the bad guys then.

Even if the customer is willing to buy those repairs, wouldn't it make more sense to decline the sale and suggest that the customer might be wise to have you perform a comprehensive vehicle inspection to determine the overall condition of the car? In this way, all the mechanical needs of the car can be considered in the purchase decision. Remember, **our job is to provide the customer with all the necessary information so they can make the decisions that are appropriate for them.** If we don't sell them a comprehensive vehicle inspection, how can we provide them with all that necessary information?

This approach in our shop has consistently produced some very large sales and some very happy customers. After all, whatever's wrong with the car is beyond our control, but finding it is within our means. If the customer declines the inspection, you're off the hook if something else breaks later. If not, you have the income from selling the comprehensive vehicle inspection. This approach can only enhance your professional image and perhaps clinch that big sale.

Is It Worth Fixing?

This is a common question that we're all tempted to answer on the spot. The plain truth is that it's not an easy question to answer. We can't possibly answer this question unless we've done the vehicle inspection.

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I'd recommend that you answer this question with another question: "What would you do if I told you it wasn't worth fixing?". Many of us in the industry have had the common perception that when the repair cost exceeds the book value of the car, it isn't worth fixing. After all, why would anyone put $3,500 into a $3,000 car?

Let's examine this more closely. If the customer didn't fix the $3,000 car what would they do? If the answer is they'd go buy another car and they have a $4,000 budget, then they're still in the same boat. They've spent 4 grand and are no better off than before. Why? From the experience I've gained doing thousands of vehicle inspections, I can tell you that the average car in this price range, sitting on a car lot looking good, usually needs $1,500 to $2,000 in repairs and maintenance. So, the average buyer of one of these beauties inherits a bill of that size when they take delivery. Now they've spent 4 grand and still need to spend another 2 grand, which makes a total of 6 grand. If their $3,000 car is structurally sound and can be all fixed up for $3,500, isn't $3,500 a lot less than 6 grand?

It's now a lot easier to see how the answer to the question, "Is it worth fixing?" is a variable depending on the financial goals of the customer. This should be explained to every customer asking this question. It makes it a lot more logical to spend the $3,500—*at your shop!!!* See the "cost of a car" in the back of the book.

Finishing the Repair Order

After the work is finished, you must now itemize on the repair order everything that was done to the car. At the time of initial write-up, you clearly wrote out what the car was doing and when it was doing it—the *condition.* Now, you need to list the *cause* of that condition, then the *correction.* Every single repair made to the car should be listed on the repair order in this fashion. Condition, Cause, Correction. This doesn't always have to be terribly long and difficult. If the customer's initial concern was the smell of raw gas, you simply list that you "replaced leaking fuel pump". This clearly shows the *reason* you replaced the pump. When Everett Sinchoo returns a month later and announces, "My car still runs bad, you sold me a fuel pump and it still isn't fixed. Now you fix, I no pay!!", you can show Everett that the pump was leaking fuel. The pump replacement had nothing to do with a drivability complaint. This is clearly listed on the legal document you gave him a month ago. If you didn't show this on the repair order, Everett has the means to make your life miserable.

The more you write, the better value you can show the customer. Most shop management software has the means to store "canned" labor operations. Write up detailed explanations of the common labor operations you use and "can" them to be used later. No shop ever simply replaces front brake pads. Most shops will *inspect the brake calipers for binding or sticking, apply noise reduction shims or lubricants or compounds, lubricate the contact points of the brake pads, reseat the caliper pistons, torque the wheels then road*

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test the car to seat the brake pads to the rotor and insure proper braking operation. This clearly is worth more to the customer than simply listing, "R & R front pads". R & R? What is that—Rest and Recuperation? Always avoid initials and abbreviations. Clearly write out words and include all the extra quality steps your shop takes to insure a job done right the first time. It's worth more than the shop that "slaps on a set of pads".

Always cite factory specs whenever you can. Never use the word "defective" or "shot" (unless it has a bullet hole in it). A wheel sensor for the anti-lock brake system might have test specifications that state "the resistance should be 700 to 1100 ohms". If your test showed the sensor had 15,000 ohms, list the specs and the test results. This clearly states the precise reason the part was replaced. We all know there are times when multiple part failures can cause a single symptom. If this car later comes back to your shop with the "ALB" light on, you're covered because you clearly listed the reason you replaced that particular part. If additional repairs need to be performed, you're not obligated to do them free because "You didn't fix it last time. The part you replaced wasn't the problem". You replaced a part and carefully documented the reason the part was replaced.

Everything that *can* be measured *should* be measured. Every measurement should be carefully documented on the repair order.

Every recommendation for additional repairs should be accompanied by the *reason* for the recommendation. If you're recommending a transmission service, it's important to list whether it's because of a concern with the transmission operation, the smell or appearance of the fluid or whether it's simply based on time or mileage. After all, the customer may have just had the transmission serviced recently and you don't want to give them any reason to suspect your integrity.

Additional Repair Order Writing Tips

Stating the precise *reason* a part was replaced isn't always as easy as it sounds. In the above case of the wheel sensor, you should write, "The right rear wheel sensor failed testing. It tested to have 15,000 ohms resistance, the specification is 700 to 1100 ohms".

Electrical repairs can also be difficult to describe. There are only 4 known electrical failures: high resistance, open circuit, grounded circuit and a short circuit. An "open" circuit means current can't flow through the circuit. A "grounded" circuit is when a power wire sends power directly to ground (those are the ones that blow a fuse the minute you install the fuse). A "short" circuit is when one power circuit transfers electricity to another circuit—like when you step on the brake pedal and the dash lights light up. A blower motor that won't come on at all and doesn't blow the fuse usually has an "open circuit". Replacing a blown fuse could be written up as, "Locate and repair open circuit". Due to the complexity of finding the exact source of an electrical malfunction, it's best to use these 4 terms in describing the repair.

There are no "bad" parts on a car. "Bad" things use foul language or stay out too late. "Shot" parts have bullet holes in them. "Defective"

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parts should be replaced at no charge under warranty—either the car manufacturer's or your shop's (Yoww!!). Rubber parts can be soft, split, cracked, hardened or oil soaked. Suspension parts can be loose, worn or noisy. Coolant or fuel parts can be leaking. Bearings are usually noisy, binding or loose. Be very descriptive when explaining the repairs on paper and avoid using the B-S-D words—bad, shot or defective.

Delivering the Car

When the car is finished and you've completed the explanation on the repair order, it's time to deliver the car. This is most easily done on the phone prior to the customer's arrival at the shop. Most customers tend to pick up their car at the end of the day and you need plenty of time to deal with any misunderstandings. That time is not when customers are lined up to get their cars and pay their bills. Calling the customer ahead of time is the best way to deliver a car. Explain what you did and how much it is. In some cases you might even ask the customer if they're going to write a check for the repairs. If they are, you can ask them to make out the check now for the proper amount. This will make the cashiering process much easier and faster when the time comes.

The whole idea is that when the time comes to collect the money, it's a simple, quick, painless process. Customers are frequently pressed for time at the end of the day. Their recollection of your service should be that you are fast and convenient. Get them in, get them out. This insures that their last impression of you is as favorable as possible.

To finish this off, always try to have their car parked right in front when they arrive. Back the cars into place so all they have to do is throw it in gear and go. This also helps prevent a customer from backing into someone else's car and causing damage (the ultimate nightmare!).

Are Your Labor Charges Fair?

One thing the Service Advisor constantly wrestles with is the fairness of labor charges. The typical customer wants to pay .2 of an hour and the technicians want 8.0 hours for the same operation. So, who's right? How do you know at the end of the day if your labor charges and shop procedures are fair to the shop, the customer and the technician? The customers will slowly disappear if you charge too much, the shop will slowly disappear if you don't charge enough. This is clearly a balancing act. Where's the final scorecard?

Industry standards have been formulated for technician time and labor charges. We need to understand a few basic terms to understand the scorecard.

Productivity is the ratio of the amount of time the technicians

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spend *actively working on cars* compared to the amount of time they are *available for work.* As an example, if the technician has a 10-hour available workday and is clocked in and working on cars for 8 hours, they are considered to be 80% productive (8 hours wrenching divided by 10 hours at work). This is a measurement that determines how well the front office does at keeping the techs busy. The goal of the industry is to achieve 90% productivity, or having the techs fixing cars 90% of the time they are available for work. To achieve this goal requires tremendous organization. If your shop operates at 80 to 85%, you're doing well. The average independent shop across the country is at about only 50%. This means the poor technicians are standing around idle for half the time they're at work.

Efficiency is the ratio of how long it takes the technician to complete the job compared to the actual time billed. For example, if the job pays 1.2 hours and the technician completes the job in 1.0, the tech was 120% *efficient.* This is also a measurement of management, since they determine how much time should be charged for the job. The industry standard here is to try to achieve 120 to 125% efficiency on jobs.

If your technicians are available for work 8 hours a day and you're able to keep them busy working on cars for 80% of that time, they'll spend 6.4 hours in an average day fixing cars (8 hours times .8 equals 6.4 hours). Out of that 6.4 hours, if they achieve the industry standard of 125% efficiency, they'll produce 8 hours of billable labor (6.4 times 1.25 equals 8.0).

This whole concept is the topic of classes lasting for days. We can only spend a few minutes on it. The basic lesson here is that at the end of each day, you should have billed an hour for each hour you have a technician available for work. At the end of the day, you should always review how many hours the shop produced then compare it to the technician time available. If you're not making that standard, something is wrong. Don't always seek to blame the technicians, they're rarely at fault when the numbers don't add up. There are clearly management issues here. The basic scorecard should always be monitored. If the scorecard shows your shop is billing an hour for every hour of technician time available, your operation is working well. If not, you need to take some action. Always watch the scorecard. It's your key to staying in business and having repeat customers.

Wrapping It All Up

So, that's it. A pretty simple job. Write them up in the morning, call and sell additional needed work, finish up the repair order and collect the money. It's all so easy—NOT!!

Covering the basic mechanics of the job and making it sound simple is the easy part of being a Service Advisor, but anyone who's ever done this job knows there are some very difficult situations to handle. In this next section, we'll get to the good stuff and show you how to make difficult tasks seem easier.

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Solutions to Common Problems

The Attitude

We've all gone to a store in a good mood and had some grouchy clerk irritate us. I once told a manager that I didn't realize what a pain in the butt I was until his clerk enlightened me. The transaction I'd requested was apparently difficult for her to perform and she told me so. In my mind, that was her problem, not mine, and I let her know it. I needed done what had to be done and couldn't have cared less what was required of her to perform the task. As a customer, I didn't care about her. Her problems were hers, not mine. She decided they should be mine as well. Wrong approach. I left the store mad when I'd come in happy. Not a good reason to return to the store.

On the other hand, we've all gone to a store and been uplifted by someone in a good mood. Moods rub off. It's extremely important that we uplift everyone we come in contact with. We must always present the positive side of ourselves. Everyone can be fun at times. We have to be sure we're fun people when we're at work, too. We have to make getting a car serviced fun. People like to do fun things. We want them to have that fun *at our shop,* not someone else's.

When a customer asks you to do something, don't reply that you <u>can</u> do that. Say you'll *be happy* to do it. Say you'd *be delighted* to do it. *I've been waiting for you to ask* me to do that.

I remember hearing a speaker when I was a youth. He had a story about dippers and buckets. He said we all carry with us an emotional bucket and a dipper. When we have a positive encounter with someone, we dip out of our bucket and put it into the other person's bucket. We make their bucket a little fuller. This is good. When we have a negative encounter with someone, they get <u>their</u> dipper into <u>our</u> bucket and take a little out. Our bucket becomes less full. This is bad.

Now, the magical thing about our buckets is that when *we* dip a little out of *our* bucket and give it to others, we also end up with our own buckets a little more full, as well. You see, we can't dip our own bucket empty. The more we dip out, the more we have left.

As a Service Advisor, your objective is to dip as much out of your buckets into your customer's buckets as you possibly can. A prompt, friendly greeting as soon as a customer enters your shop is the best way to start this. Tell them how glad you are to see them. If they're well dressed, don't ever hesitate to tell them how nice they look. Offer them a free soft drink, some fresh coffee or try to do something else to make them feel pampered.

Initiating a business transaction properly sets the tone for the rest of the work and makes your job much easier. Focus on this and discover the secret to having fun at work while being highly successful

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financially.

Last, try your best to ignore those people who come in with a hole in their bucket.

Yes You Did—No I Didn't!

There are times when a customer wants an explanation for "why did the part fail?" and the answer relates to the manner in which the car was operated.

The customer with the large bulge in the sidewall of the tire, the bent wheel and the damaged wheel cover will always deny hitting anything, ever. They'll try to get you to cover for them. "How could this have happened?", they'll ask you. "Well, you hit something", you reply. "No, I didn't", they insist.

At this point, you might just as well change the subject to politics or religion. You're about as likely to have a rational conversation on those topics as you will on the bent wheel blame.

The customer may be telling the truth, it could have been the teenage driver who did it, and they ain't talkin'.

Here's your power phrase for this situation: **"The damage I see is consistent with (an impact).**

The best way to avoid arguments is to make statements that are difficult or impossible to argue with. Rather than assign blame for what you see, simply report what you see. You can easily report what you see. You can also truthfully state how the condition you see could have a known cause. That's as far as you can go. You can't possibly have a clue who was behind the wheel, the speed of the vehicle or its location at the time of the event. So get those variables out of the conversation. That effectively eliminates the argument.

"What I see is consistent with....."

Another situation arises with prematurely worn parts. Spinning the wheels at a high rate of speed for an extended period (such as when stuck in the snow) will overheat the spider gears in the differential of a Honda car and, ultimately, blow them out the cover, leaving a large hole. When the car is moving forward in a straight line, the spider gears don't even move, much less wear.

So, when a car comes in with this condition, there's only one possible explanation. Now, we've got some clear guilt to deal with. This condition couldn't possibly happen just driving innocently down the road. Here's where your job gets tougher. When you tell them what this condition is consistent with, you may get a real argument.

The follow-up phrase is: **"As an automotive expert, if you handed me the keys to your car and ASKED me to produce this condition, there's only one way I'd know to do it. What I'd have to do is.....yadda, yadda, yadda. I'm not aware of any other way I could produce those results".**

Once again, you're not involved in detective work to determine who did what when. You're only involved in the condition of the car at this time and what the best course of repair is, as well as offering future prevention precautions.

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These two power phrases have been very effective in getting me out of some potentially difficult situations. After all, what I'm after is the customer's money and a fixed car. I'm not concerned about winning any arguments.

Can I Bring in My Own Parts?

A seemingly innocent question for some customers, especially if they frequent parts stores. Some seem to think we should sell our parts for less than we pay for them. They just don't understand what all's involved.

The answer is simple—let them know how what *looks* like the same part just isn't. Even though the boxes may appear identical, the part number may be the same and the contents of the box may withstand critical examination and be pronounced the same, it *still* isn't quite the same.

You see, the part *you* furnish comes with a lot of additional benefits. Your warranty, for example, comes with your part, but not with the part they furnish.

In the back of the book is a form entitled "Customer-Furnished Parts Form". This is a legal contract that's guaranteed to effectively communicate to the customer the precise difference in parts.

Read it through to them and ask them to sign it. Once they're part-way through it, I believe they'll give up the idea completely.

Never Say "I Told You So"

You can hum it later. We're bound to give advice to customers that they don't take. Many times it turns out the way we told them it would and the customer will comment that they should have listened to us.

That old battery that you suggested they replace finally croaked and the customer was inconvenienced. "I should have listened to you", they'll say. This is not the time to be superior, it's a time to demonstrate some humility and class.

"Don't worry about it, nobody else around here ever listens to me, I'm used to it", you might comically reply. Play it down with a little humor. It will ultimately elevate your status and enhance your friendship with your customer.

Having customers NOT follow your recommendations can sometimes be your best sales pitch. It's almost like you're "Carnac the Magnificent", making predictions for the future. Ultimately, if they can see it's less costly to give you the money up front than it is to withhold it and suffer the consequences, you can convert a "C" customer into a "B" or the "B" customer into an "A".

Always remember, it's not your money, it's not your car and it's certainly not your inconvenience. Be gracious and humble, people don't give their money to people they don't like.

The Skeptic

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Some people, especially the new customer to your shop, may have had some previous bad experiences with auto repair that causes them to be skeptical of what you tell them. Either they just don't believe you or perhaps they don't really understand your explanation.

The very best way to overcome this is to *show them their car.* Once again, "seeing is believing". Cracked CV boots can be difficult to explain on the phone. They are the easiest sale to make if you can just show them to the customer.

We must also remember that, as automotive professionals, we know what a good part looks like. Some customers may need a little help with this. I once showed a customer her worn tires and she said they looked fine to her. When I put a brand new tire next to hers, she said she could easily see how worn hers were. We may occasionally have to put the new part next to the old in order to convince the customer. Swollen or soft radiator hoses can easily be sold if the customer can *feel* the soft spot in their hose that isn't present in the new hose.

If they still offer some sales resistance, remind them **"It's my job to give you enough information so you can make the decisions that are appropriate for your own situation".** This removes the pressure for them to buy immediately. It takes you out of the "salesman" role and puts you into the "automotive professional giving out information" role. It's of no real concern to you whether they buy the repairs or not (you won't be the one walking).

Your primary concern here is that the customer fully understands the gravity of what you're telling them. If the unfixed item is a safety related concern, be sure you say to the customer, "You do understand that this is a safety concern? This condition could result in accident or injury if it's not fixed. You do understand that?".

As long as they fully understand that the items left unfixed could either be a safety concern or could cause additional repairs, your job is done. It's always advisable to clearly state on the repair order the car isn't safe to drive. I always tell the customer in advance that I'll have to list that on the repair order if they don't fix it. This isn't a threat, it's just doing your job of clearly communicating to the customer the condition of the car. You're just **giving the customer enough information so they can make the decisions that are appropriate for them.** What they decide is not your concern. Avoid cheap high-pressure sales tactics at all costs.

They'll usually come up with the money soon.

The Objection

Objections really have two forms—the actual objection and the stall. It's very important that we learn to understand and recognize these distinctly different responses. They can appear to be the same, but must be treated differently.

An actual objection means they don't accept what you tell them. The proper way to handle an objection is *to give them more information.* When a customer says "no", it doesn't really mean NO. It means

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based on the information I have available to me at this time, I choose not to respond favorably to your offer. The answer is simple, you need to give them more information.

Just like the customer who didn't believe me when I said her tires were thin. I had to give her additional information by putting a new tire right next to hers. Now, had she refused to buy at that point, I might have explained how thin tires can't dissipate water in the rain at highway speeds. More additional information.

You might set a limit of three attempts at additional information before you give it up. More than that is badgering a customer, but less than that might be construed as not doing your job.

The stall is the other "objection". The staller accepts your explanation, they just can't quite commit to writing out the check. A stall needs *reassurance.* They need to understand that buying is the right thing to do and now is the time to do it. The last thing you want to do with someone who stalls is to give them more information. They've already accepted the need.

They now need to feel that it's OK to buy today. Statements like, "You'll feel safer with the new tires on the car" or, "The car is worth putting new tires on" or, "I can have this done for you today" are all good replies to a stall. I've even had very good success with, "It's the right thing to do and now is the right time to do it". Reassure the person stalling that it's OK to give you the money.

One of the easiest forms of reassurance is to make the customer aware that the things their car needs are just normal wear-out items. There are many things on a car that they must *expect* to replace eventually. We all know they'll need tires, batteries, mufflers and brake linings. It shouldn't be any great surprise when they finally do. It isn't like they're having to buy their third automatic transmission in five years. Statements like this give the customer a fresh perspective on the needed repairs. If *you* don't consider it any big deal, they shouldn't either.

The "Protector"

This is one of the most difficult situations to deal with. You give a customer an estimate to do the work and they sign the repair order and authorize the work to be done. You've agreed in advance what will be done and how much it will cost.

Now, when it comes time to pick up the car, you have some Knight in Shining Armor ride into camp to do battle and "protect" your customer (from you—the evil liar and thief).

Statements like, "That's too much money" or, "You're too expensive" or, "The car didn't need all that work" are commonly heard.

I'll work with any customer on any issue. But if the argument is made *after the work is done,* I get real tough. There's a time to negotiate and it's clearly before the papers are signed. Once the agreement is made (and the car is fixed) I want my money. On the other hand, if the deal is made, but the car isn't fixed yet, I'll allow anyone to back out.

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My response is simple. Step one: "Sir (it's almost always a guy) You're concerned that I'm not being fair with her. Is that correct? (seek and get his agreement before proceeding) What you're now doing isn't fair to me. I was very careful to explain exactly what the car needed and why we were recommending the repairs. I never at any time pressured her to make a decision. If you wanted to be involved in the decision, that was the time you should have entered into the transaction. That time is past. We made an agreement on what was to be done to the car and how much it would cost. I've done what she asked me to do and the price is within the estimate given. There are no further negotiations on the matter. If you have any questions on the work that was done, I'll be happy to address them now, but the work is done and the bill stands. A deal is a deal. I'm always fair to my customers and I insist they be fair with me. If that doesn't work, we go to step 2—"Sir (it's almost always a guy), I don't see your name on here anywhere. You have no legal standing in this matter. You'll have to wait outside". If he persists, I may tell him, "This reminds me of the old 'badger game' and smells like fraud to me. There was a time when we made this agreement and if you wanted input, you should have been involved then. I have a legally enforceable contract that you're not a party to". At this point, I'll no longer accept a check or a credit card. I expect to be paid in cash before I'll release the car. Cash means U.S. currency, not a money order, not a cashier's check—dead Presidents are the only means of payment that are impossible to take back. That's the only payment I'll accept. Some of these people never give up.

If he doesn't leave, simply pick up the phone and call 911 to report a disturbance.

Unfortunately, there are some people who get out of bed in the morning with the clear intent to defraud you. When a huge fuss is made after the fact, I have no other choice but to suspect that this is one of those people.

A deal is a deal. Signed and legal.

This is the number one reason to *always get a customer's signature on the repair order.* If the car was left in the night drop or towed in, note it on the repair order. If you have a signature and the "papers are in order", you win. If not, you may lose.

We must also be on the lookout for potential fraud. An old car with a pattern of neglect can be a sure tip-off if the customer authorizes expensive repairs that may not make good economic sense. I'd never remove a cylinder head on one of these cars without some money up front. This separates the fraud candidates and usually allows a tow truck to get rid of this problem for you.

The Mad Customer

Despite our best efforts, we're all going to have jobs leave our shops that we might be less than proud of. We all make mistakes. Some of these could result in mad customers.

People get mad because they're frustrated. They may think you're going to "blow them off" or they may recall past experiences that

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you're not a part of.

Step one in dealing with a mad customer is to allow them to vent. Don't interrupt them, listen to them patiently. If it's appropriate, you might even agree with them as they talk. Let them have the floor, the worst thing you can do is prevent them from talking. At some point, they'll finish and the internal pressure from the anger will subside.

It's appropriate at this point to take their side. "Wow, that's terrible, that would make me mad, too. I can certainly understand your feelings and I don't blame you a bit. I'd feel the same way".

Remember the two magic words— "I'm sorry". Don't hesitate to apologize for poor performance. On the other hand, don't apologize too much. That can make you appear less than sincere.

I once heard a person say, "A man says he's sorry once. If he says it too many times, I don't believe him".

At this point, clarify the customer's concerns. It is very simple, effective and disarming to ask the customer, "What would you like for me to do?" (Remember, you sure don't want to ask them what *their problem is!!)* Identify the key issues and address them. Many times the customer will ask for substantially less than you're prepared to do. Whatever they ask you, do a little more.

The sooner a decision is made, the easier it is to resolve the issue. Be certain management empowers you to make simple decisions to satisfy a customer. Having to delay a decision because you can't reach someone only causes the problem to get worse.

Offer to re-check the work you did at no charge to them. Offer a rental car or transportation if it will take some time or get the car in the bay right away and do it while they wait.

Make darn sure the work is properly rechecked. Test drive it yourself. The last thing you want to do is mess up the job twice.

"You're Too Expensive"

This is a phrase that we're going to hear even if we drop our labor rate down to 2 bucks an hour. This complaint is likely to take two forms, one is generic and the other a comparison to other shops.

For the generic complaint, "You're too expensive" , I usually agree with them. "Yes, car repair costs too much these days. But the cars are very complex and the equipment and training it takes to do the job right costs a lot of money. The overhead is very high. However, when you call the guys in to repair the office copier, do you blink at the $100 an hour that they charge? No. When you call the computer guys out and know they are going to charge $150 an hour, does that stop you? Of course not. Those people bring in less than $1,000 worth of their own equipment to do the job. A good auto shop needs about $300,000 in equipment to operate, yet our hourly charges are a fraction of the cost of the office repair and computer people. Car repair is actually a pretty good value when all things are considered".

Comparing auto repair with other industries is the best way to answer the concerns about cost.

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When your prices are compared to another shop, you need to convert the comparison to apples and oranges. Comparable shops have to charge comparable money over the long run. So now it's a question of getting what you pay for. The lowball shop without much equipment or training won't deliver the same results as the well run and well equipped shop with trained professional technicians.

The lowball shop can barely afford to stay open, much less correct a job that wasn't done right the first time.

In order to deliver a low price, part of the equation frequently involves cheap parts. Cheap parts are rarely a good value.

The lowball shop doesn't generate enough income to pay their mechanics a decent wage, so they don't usually have good technicians.

Basically, the customer is going to get what they pay for. If they want a cheap job, it can be had for a cheap price. If they want it done right the first time, it's going to cost more. The difference is that the premium job will generally be less money over the long term because the repairs are likely to be more permanent *and* involve fewer parts being replaced in the process.

The Price Shopper Phone Call

We need to remember the one and only reason for answering the phone is *to get a car in the door.* Price shopper phone calls can take a lot of your time and render few rewards.

Many customers call and ask for prices because they don't know what else to ask. The best way to answer a price call is to ask the caller, **"What is it that causes you to believe it needs _____?".** This can highlight your concern for customers and convert the call into a meaningful conversation. This strategy will frequently get you a **car in the door.** We all know we can't always give an accurate estimate on the phone. This is where those "Test" and "Inspection" sheets you've created come into play. Now you **can** give them an estimate to "examine" the car (and help you sell "test time").

Your job is to convince the caller that: 1) You're the shop for them, 2) You care about them, 3) You want to fix their car right the first time, 4) You want to fix the car right *for the least possible money* (no, don't send out the men in the white coats to get me, keep reading). That's right, why replace the whole engine if it only needs a water pump? Why replace a water pump if it only needs a hose? Why replace a hose if it's only got a loose hose clamp? Because you're honest, caring professionals, you don't want to replace parts that aren't needed to do the job properly. Until you do the proper testing, you can't possibly know what the car really needs. This is also a good time to inform the caller that you have an **electronic information system** with over a million articles and six million graphics to insure that you **can** fix it right the first time. Guesswork costs money. It's less expensive to have a professional determine *exactly* what's wrong than it is to just start replacing a bunch of parts until it's fixed (maybe).

Always smile ☺ when you answer the phone. Always try to appear to be as helpful and concerned as you can, **always ask for an appoint-**

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ment time and always remember the only reason you're on the phone is to get a **car into your shop and money in the register.**

The 10 Stupid Things Service Advisors Do to Mess Up Their Day....

10. When a customer asks how much a certain operation costs, they give an answer in hours and tenths.

Hours and tenths are *internal shop language* and should never be discussed with a customer. They have no idea what a half hour means in dollars. It also gives no indication of how much the parts are. Any hourly rate that's above minimum wage will start an argument with many consumers. This is a sure path to discomfort.

9. When a customer asks how long an operation takes, they tell them how much time it will take the technician to complete the work.

What the customer wants to know is how long their car will be in the shop. Allowances need to be made for write-up and reception, time to properly complete the paperwork and move the car in and out. A half hour job by a technician usually means the car will be at the shop maybe 45 minutes to an hour. Always respond to that question by giving a time that will account for all the activities needed to get the car in the front door and out the back door.

8. They don't list everything on the final repair order that the technician wrote on the shop copy.

There is no reason for a Service Advisor to do much "editing" regarding technician observations. The technician may have found something else that the car owner should know about while performing the job. Pretty much everything the technician writes on the shop copy should be transferred to the final repair order. If the technician is to be held accountable for the job, the least you can do is accurately record what they've written.

7. They diagnose the car on the driveway and write a repair order that directs the technician to "replace the _____".

This is the number one way to not fix a car right. There's no way to check the quality of the work, since no condition is accurately recorded. Even if the diagnosis was done on a previous visit and the special order parts are in, the original condition should still be written on the repair order so the proper quality control steps can be taken.

Even if it's obvious what's wrong, even if the Service Advisor knows exactly what it will take to fix the car, this should never be revealed to the customer. Why not, you ask? Well, first, that may not be what's wrong this time. Even though all those 1992 green cars do that, maybe this one has something else wrong that causes the exact same symptoms. By naming the exact part, you've now indicated there's no need for any testing. So how are you going to

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justify charges for testing? Most parts that fail on a car need *some* time and money allowance to verify the repairs.

Take the example of a coolant leak. When the hood is raised, it's easily seen that there's a large crack in the radiator. No need to test for a coolant leak here, you might say. Au contraire—is that crack in the radiator the **cause** of the overheating, or is it the **result** of overheating? There could be a small leak (or several small leaks) elsewhere that let the coolant out, causing the engine to overheat and crack the radiator. One thing is certain—the car needs a radiator. But it also needs a follow-up leak test or an overheating check (list) performed to see if the car's really fixed after the radiator is replaced.

The best strategy is to sell analytical testing time and it's even OK to quote the total price for what you *think* it is (parts and labor, of course). But never let them know that you may have a real good idea what it is until a technician has inspected the car.

6. They don't give good details to the technician.

After the customer goes into great detail about the noise they hear when the brakes are applied, the Service Advisor writes "check brakes" on the repair order. Might as well go bowling blindfolded. Always write on the repair order what the customer's concerns are. Seek to give the technician enough information so the complaint can be duplicated. If a technician can duplicate a complaint, the car can be easily fixed. That's the reason it's at your shop to begin with.

5. They don't really listen to what the customer wants to have done to the car.

Men are geared for action, women make better listeners. It's sometimes difficult for men to *listen* to the customer's concerns. It does no good to have a complete plan of action before you know what the action needs to accomplish. You need to please the customer—they're the ones with the money. You just can't possibly please someone unless you first listen to what they want.

Without starting a gender war, it's also important for men to understand women's thought patterns. Men are very good at getting straight to the point. Women frequently need to talk just to get their own thoughts straight. As the woman talks, she organizes things in her mind. The talk isn't necessarily an explicit conveyance of information.

When asked what her car does, a woman will frequently verbally recreate the situation in order to bring out all the important details. They'll need to tell you what day it was and where they were going, why they were going there and what they were going to do once they got there. Naturally, a man will recognize that these details aren't necessarily important to what the car did. Men will sometimes get impatient and interrupt with questions. Shut up and listen. As the story unfolds, the important details will come out. This is just a way for her to recall all the important information that will ultimately be needed to fix the car.

It's important to understand that the different genders communicate in different ways. Neither way is right or wrong, they're just different

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and Service Advisors need to be aware of this.

4. They attempt to please a customer who has unreasonable completion time or price requests.

It costs what it costs and it takes as long as it takes. No matter how much we want to please a customer, we have to understand these two fundamental principles. It's better to get this out in the open right off the bat than to give in and agree to perform the impossible. The impossible can't be done and when the customer comes to get their car, you now have to live with the "promise" you made when the car arrived. If the customer's expectations aren't reasonable, you have to fix the customer before you can fix the car.

3. After the customer has spent a large sum of money on car repairs, they reassure the customer, "You won't have any more car trouble now".

That's about the dumbest thing you can tell anybody. No one can predict the future and no one knows what that car will do next. You've just painted a large target on your body. Be more realistic. Don't make promises you can't keep.

2. When making a sale, they tell the customer the price of the parts and then the price of the labor.

This should *never* be done because the customer will only hear one of the numbers, and it will always be the lower of the two. When quoting prices, always give only the total price of the repair. If the customer wants a breakdown, they'll ask. Otherwise, they don't really care. All they really want to know is "how much and how long?". If your shop charges for shop supplies, hazardous waste fees, parking, telephone, donuts or any other miscellaneous charges, they need to be included in the total price you quote. What you tell them had better be accurate.

1. The Number One Stupidist Thing a Service Advisor Does to Mess Up Their Day——They make decisions the customer should really make for themselves.

This involves several areas. The first is performing additional repairs without getting authorization from the customer first. If additional needed repairs are discovered in the process of doing other work, it's the customer's decision to make—not yours. It's not your car and it's not your money. If you can't reach the customer, push the car outside and wait until you do contact the customer.

The second area involves judgment calls. Brakes that aren't quite worn to the limit, air filters that might last until next time and timing belt tensioner bearings that are slightly noisy are all examples of decisions that customers should make. You don't know if that car's headed for the mountains on a 5,000 mile trip or going away to college for 9 months. The customer knows their own situation and should always make their own decisions. What's OK for you may not be OK for them. Your standards may not be their standards.

The third involves "doing the customer a favor". Your shop may

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clean the windows and vacuum the car for all customers. If a customer is waiting for their car to be completed, you should always ask them if they have time for these to be done. Sometimes, they're running late already and the "favor" you do for them may make them late for a very important meeting. Washing the car should never be done without asking the customer first. They may not want it done. Some people are very particular about their paint finish. Personally, I intensely dislike the finish left on the glass by Rain-X and I've heard some shop owners brag about "every car gets the windows treated with Rain-X" As a customer, it would make me mad if someone "surprised me with a treat" like that. The simple point is, it's their car and their time, let them make the decision.

Always, always allow the customer to make their own decisions. **It's your job to give the customer enough information so they can make the decisions that are appropriate for their own situation.**

Conclusion

90% of a shop's problems can be solved at the front counter. It all boils down to effective communication—with the customer, the technician, the parts department, the store manager and the clean-up guy.

Seek to avoid doing the 10 things that mess up your day—your job will be much easier and work will be a lot more fun.

Resolve to have fun at work—fun with all the staff and fun with the customers. If going to work isn't fun, then seek to make it that way, or find a means of earning a living that is.

The job of Service Advisor can enjoy a lot of respect, but you have to earn it.

Notes

Survival Skills for the Service Advisor

By

George Witt, AAM

THE BACK OF THE BOOK

— Approved for Credit —

About These Forms

These forms are provided to give you some guidelines on forms you can use in your own shop. Each was developed by George Witt with the assistance of his crew at the shop, with the exception of the Intermittent Problem form, which was developed by Brad Peterson. Brad has given me his permission to use it for this book.

It's very important that you involve all your technicians and staff and develop your own forms. If your techs don't like the form or want other information, these forms won't be as useful to you as they could be. Copy these and give them to your techs. Ask them for changes or editing. Keep doing this until you finally have a form that's really yours. You will then have a very useful tool.

This is one of the few signs
that should be in your office.

Minimum
Shop Charge

$8.00

Drivability Concerns

Job Code **Description**

DPI **Drivability** concern—**poor idle.**

Auto transmission or manual shift?
If auto, does it idle OK in park or neutral?
Does it ever die? Does it idle poorly when first started cold?
Does it idle poorly after it's warmed up?
How far do you have to drive the car to get it to idle poorly?
Does it accelerate OK?
Has the customer taken the time to go on a road test with a member of our staff to show us the symptoms?

DH **Drivability** concern—**hesitates** on acceleration.

Will it hesitate when it's first started cold?
Will it hesitate after it's warmed up?
Does it hesitate every single time?
Is there anything you can do to make it NOT hesitate?
Does anything you do cause it to hesitate more often?
Does anything you do cause it to hesitate worse?
Does cold or warm weather affect the hesitation?
Does wet weather affect the hesitation?
How far do you have to drive the car before it starts hesitating?
Does it seem to run rough or shake when it hesitates?
Has the customer taken the time to go on a road test with a member of our staff to show us the symptoms?

DS **Drivability** concern—**stalls.**

Will it stall when it's first started cold?
Will it stall after it's warmed up?
Does it stall every single time?
Is there anything you can do to make it NOT stall?
Does anything you do cause it to stall more often?
Does anything you do cause it to stall worse?
Does cold or warm weather affect the stalling?
Does wet weather affect the stalling?
How far do you have to drive the car before it starts stalling?
Does it seem to run rough or shake before it stalls?
Has the customer taken the time to go on a road test with a member of our staff to show us the symptoms?

DLP **Drivability** concern—**low power**

DRPC **Drivability** concern—**Runs poor cold**, runs fine after warmed up

DRPW **Drivability** concern—**Runs poor** after **warmed up**, runs fine cold.

DRR **Drivability** concern—Engine **runs rough**.

How far does the car have to be driven in order to begin running rough?
Does the outside air temperature (cold/hot) affect this?
Is this affected by wet or damp weather?
Is there anything at all you can do to make it run smooth? (continued on next page)

(continued from previous page)
Is there anything you can do to make it run rough?
How long has it been doing this?
When did it start? Has the customer taken the time to go on a road test with a member of our staff to show us the symptoms?

Won't Start

Job code	Description
CWF	Engine **cranks**, but **won't fire**.

Describe the starting procedure the customer is using to start the car.
Does it seem to crank at the normal speed?
Does it crank faster than normal?
Slower than normal?
How long has it sat since the last time it was driven?
Did it run OK the last time it was driven?
Did the car quit running the last time it was driven?
Has it been starting OK up until now?
Will it start fine on a cool morning?
Does sitting in the hot sun affect it?
Will the "check engine light" go out after the key is on for 2 seconds?

WC .5 Engine **won't crank**.
Does it make any sound at all?
If auto transmission, can the customer tell if the red light on the dash indicating the car is in "Park" is on?
Will it start if they put it in neutral?
Does cold or warm weather affect this?
Does the car make a single "click" noise from under the hood when they try to start it?
If the customer opens the door to make the dome light come on, will the dome light get real dim when they try to crank it?
Has the red "battery" light been coming on?

WSR Engine cranks and fires, but **won't stay running**.
After the engine dies, do the lights on the dash come on?
Is there anything they can do to try to keep the engine running longer?

Noises

Job code **Description**

NB **Noise** on **bumps**.

Describe the noise.
Will it make the noise going through a dip in the road?
Does cold or warm weather affect the noise?
If only one wheel hits a bump, will it still make the noise?
What kind of bump will produce the noise? (Slight or severe)
Can you tell what general area of the car the noise is coming from?
Has the customer taken the time to go on a road test with a member of our staff to show us the symptoms?

NR **Noise** while **rolling**.

Describe the noise.
Does applying the brakes change the noise?
Does turning a corner change the noise?
Does the noise get faster as the car gets faster?
Anything else affect the noise?
Has the customer taken the time to go on a road test with a member of our staff to show us the symptoms?

NSS **Noise** while **sitting still**.

Describe the noise.
Does engine speed change the noise?
Is it more likely to occur when the engine is warm or cold?
Can you tell where the noise is coming from?
Is there a certain engine speed that makes the noise louder?
Is there a certain engine speed that's more likely to produce the noise?
Has the customer taken the time go on a road test to show a member of our staff the symptoms?

NC **Noise** while turning **corners**.

Describe the noise.
Does it matter if you're pressing on the accelerator or not?
How fast do you have to go to get the noise to happen?
Does coasting through the corners change the noise?
Does applying the brakes change the noise?
Has the customer taken the time to go on a road test with a member of our staff to show us the symptoms?

George Witt Service, Inc.
434-6961

Intermittent problems can be a very frustrating experience for both the customer and the technician. In order to serve you better, please fill out the information below and check the appropriate boxes. If necessary, keep this form with you for a few days so the information we need will be fresh in your mind the next time the problem occurs. The more accurate information we can get from you, the faster we can get your car back on the road. Helping us helps you save time and money.

1. Customer name_____ Make_____Model_____Year___

2. Vehicle symptom/description_____

_____

_____

3. When did the problem first start happening?_____

_____

4. Has this vehicle been worked on for this problem before? □Yes □No If the answer is yes, what work was done? Did it make any difference?_____

5. Does the car have the problem when the engine is: cold only? warm only? warm or cold?

□other?—please describe_____

6. Does the car have the problem when the weather conditions are: (check all that apply)

□cold only? □hot only? □dry only? !wet only? □hot or cold? □no difference?

7. Have you noticed any unusual: □sounds? □odors? □drips? □leaks? □smoke? □warning lights?

□gauge readings? Explain_____

8. Any changes in: □acceleration? engine performance? □gas mileage? □fluid levels?

Explain_____

9. Any problems in: □handling? braking? □steering? □vibrations?

Explain_____

10. How often does this problem occur? □every time the car is driven !once a day □once a week

□randomly other. Explain_____

11. What is the longest period of time, in normal use, during which you did **not** notice the problem?

□1 hour □1 day !3 days □1 week □other—Explain_____

_____

12. Usually occurs: □morning □afternoon □evening □anytime

13. Vehicle speed during occurrence: □low !cruising □high □anytime

14. Driving conditions during occurrence: (check all that apply)

□short—less than 2 miles	□2-10 miles	□long—more than 10 miles
□with AC operating	□while turning	□while braking
!gear engagement	□stop and go	□with headlights on
□during acceleration	!during deceleration	!mostly downhill
□mostly uphill	□mostly level	□ mostly curvy
□rough roads		

15. Driving habits:

□drive hard before engine is warm	□mostly city driving	!park vehicle inside
□allow engine to warm up first	□mostly highway driving	□park vehicle outside
□daily mileage less than 10 miles	□10-50 miles	!over 50 miles

16. Anything you can do to PREVENT this from happening?_____

_____

17. Anything you can do to CAUSE this to happen?_____

_____

18. Other helpful information: (please check ALL that are appropriate)
    - □ has vehicle been sitting for a long time? (if so, how long?)_____
    - □ is vehicle normally garaged?
    - □ is vehicle only driven short trips?
    - □ has vehicle ever been in an accident? What parts were damaged?_____

_____

    - □ has vehicle been stolen/recovered recently?
    - □ has vehicle just been washed?
    - □ have you ever noticed wet carpeting?
    - □ has vehicle ever been in a flood?
    - □ does vehicle have a salvage title?
    - ! has the vehicle just had body work or other repairs?
    - ! does the vehicle's radio have static?
    - □ are there any electrical accessories that don't work? Please list_____

_____

☐ have you noticed any electrical abnormalities? Explain_____

_____

☐ did the problem happen shortly after gas purchase?
☐ any recent changing of gasoline brand?
☐ any unusual raw gas smells?
☐ problem occur right after loaning the car to someone else?
☐ has anyone else experienced the problem in your vehicle?
does altitude seem to have any effect?
does the temperature gauge ever show overheat?
does the temperature gauge show very low temperature, even after driving for 20-30 minutes?
does the heater take a long time to put out hot air?
is the vehicle equipped with any anti-theft device/alarm? Does it work? ☐yes ☐no
does the vehicle have a hidden "kill" switch?

Any other information that you might feel would be useful to us?_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Customer signature_____ Date___/___/___

Overheating Checklist

Check	Description	Yes	No	Results/comments
Coolant level inspection	Radiator full? Overflow tank full?			Added?
If low—Cold pressure test	Evidence of leaks?			
If low—headgasket test	Chemical or mechanical			
Radiator cap pressure test	Does it hold pressure?			
Cold thermostat test	Does radiator get warm immediately?			
Coolant condition	Color or clarity Proper mixture—Good to_____°F			
Complaint verified?				
Hose inspection				
Radiator/Condensor inspect.	Free of obstructions/good condition			
Belt inspection	Condition/tightness			
Fan operation	On at _____°F / Off at _____°F			
Fan airflow—front & back	volume/correct direction			
Water pump	Leaks/noise			
Heater operation	Output temp_____°F at idle Output temp _____°F at 2500 rpm.			
Coolant flow check				
Radiator heat exchange temp	_____°F behind radiator			
Progressive radiator temp	_____°F at top— _____°F at bottom			
Thermostat housing temp	_____°F			

Technician_____

Repair Order Number_____

Date____/____/_____

Additional comments_____

_____

_____

_

Sample Repair Order

Showing maintenance history
and
Complete labor descriptions

goes here.

Sample Repair Order

This is an actual repair order from my shop on my own car. It's the technician copy and shows the time for each labor operation.

It also shows examples of complete descriptions of the job.

The bottom of the last page shows the maintenance history of the car. Each maintenance item shows the date and miles when the item was last performed and the date and miles it's due again.

Some maintenance items are not time sensitive, such as tire rotation, where miles are the only determining factor. Other items are only time sensitive, such as battery replacement, where miles don't matter. Most items consider both time and mileage.

This software is the "YES" system by Pace Computer of Florida.

www.pacecomputer.com

NOTE: I do not recommend or endorse any one shop management system for all shops, as each shop has different needs. However, this software meets our shop needs very nicely and I'd be toast without it.

RO	Name	S A	Phone	IN	OUT	Called $	Date_____ Descr. of Work		Car			Notes:
1												
2												
3												
4												
5												
6												
7												
8												
9												
10												
11												
12												
13												
14												
15												
16												
17												
18												
19												
20												
21												
22												
23												

☐ Price and Availability	Parts Requisition	Need the Parts ☐

R.O. #	Tech	Serv. Adv.	Date / /
Year	Make	Model	
Engine	Fuel system	Trans.	

Qty	Part Description	Source	Cost	Sale

Keep It or Trade It?

The August 2000 issue of Consumer Reports magazine ran an article on making a good decision when it comes to keeping your car or trading it in. In case you missed it, the Feb. 2001 issue of Reader's Digest has reprinted it.

If our chart below looks similar to the chart in the article, it's because both are from one of our past Newsletters. Consumer Reports interviewed yours truly who gave them permission to "borrow" it for their article.

This chart clearly shows how it's much less expensive to keep the car you have. The article also mentions the Car Care Council's *Certified Inspection* program as a good way to assess the current condition of a car. Hmm, that sounds familiar.

One thing is perfectly clear. Regular, scheduled maintenance is money well spent. It's not unusual for a Honda car to last 300,000 miles or more when properly maintained.

The above chart uses the prevailing interest rates and average lease terms we've seen over the last few years. Actual results may vary (don'tcha just love this phrase?).

3 years total expenses	**Keep 1994 Accord**	**Buy 2002 Accord**	**Lease 2002 Accord**	**Buy 2002 Taurus**
Down paymt	$0	$1,000	$1,000	$1,000
Sales Tax	$0	$1,333	$720	$1,365
License	$476	$773	$773	$1,013
Insurance	$1,926	$2,616	$2,616	$2,422
Maintenance and repairs	$4,000	$1,000	$1,000	$1,000
Interest	$0	$3,314	$0	$3,399
Lease payments	$0	$0	$11,124	$0
Depreciation	$1,205	$7,180	$0	$14,250
Total cash outlay	$7,607	$17,215	$17,233	$24,449
Less equity	$2,800	$5,990	$0	-$768
Net 3 year expense	**$4,807**	**$11,225**	**$17,233**	**$25,217**

Customer-Furnished Parts Agreement

We are a premium automotive service provider. We always strive to provide the best possible automotive service and parts to our customers. One of the reasons we can perform outstanding service and repairs is our experience with different vendors of auto parts. Our finished product is no better than our parts. A poor experience with a brand of parts means we quite likely won't use that part again.

Please don't think that we are being vindictive or negative with this agreement. We just want you to know that parts vary widely in quality and fitness of purpose. We furnish quality parts and have to assume all these risks ourselves with every job we do. There's a lot more to this line of work than the average person might realize. We've spent a tremendous amount of time and money to get this knowledge and we'd prefer that you take advantage of that.

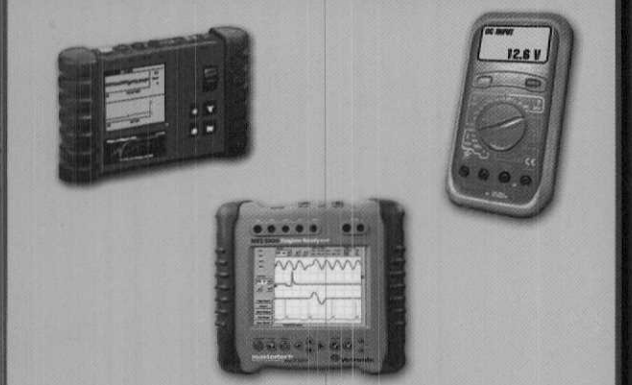
You have asked us if you can furnish your own parts and we will be happy to accomodate your request, providing you agree to the following terms:

1. You agree to pay an additional 20% labor charge on the job to make up for the lost profit we won't have on the parts you furnish. This only covers our labor overhead.
2. You agree to pay the labor to remove and re-install any part you furnished that doesn't work after we put it on. This labor will also be billed at the 20% higher rate. This includes partial installations. In some cases it's not possible to tell the part won't work just by examining it when it comes out of the box.
3. You agree to have the replacement part back to us within an hour after it fails. You will assume all responsibility for transporting the part from our shop to the source and back again. We will not go anywhere to get any part you furnish. This is your responsibility. It costs a tremendous amount to reassemble a car in order for it to be moved out of a stall and then put back in a stall for the subsequent work. In the event no replacement part is available the same day, the "one hour requirement" can be waived.
4. You agree to assume all liability for the future failure of the part you furnished. We cannot guarantee any part we did not sell you. If the part fails at any time, you agree to hold us blameless and assume all costs on your own. You fully understand that the car may not even make it out of the technician's work area.
5. You also understand the full risk of furnishing your own part financially. You understand that the final cost may far exceed the original cost we quoted you to perform the repairs using our parts. You have elected to pay the price of not utilizing our expertise in the area of selecting premium quality parts. You also realize that the repair may turn out to be totally unsatisfactory if the part you furnished does not perform up to expectations. You assume this risk willingly.
6. You agree to pay for diagnosis in the event the part you furnished fails and the car comes back in "doing the same thing". Even though the symptoms may be the same, the cause could well be different. A proper repair can only be done after a proper diagnosis has been made. This simply costs money, which you agree to pay. Diagnosis will be charged at the normal rate, it will not be raised by the 20% figure.
7. As always, we will stand behind our quality labor. We will still guarantee that we will perform all labor operations according to acceptable industry standards. In the event that we do not properly do our job, we will guarantee our work, but not the part.
8. Regardless of the outcome, you agree to pay labor according to the above agreement, even if you decide after the work has commenced that you no longer wish to have the vehicle repaired at all. In the event work is stopped, you will only pay for the labor that has been done up to that point. At no time will we waive any labor charges on work that has been authorized and performed.

I have read and agree to the above terms.

_____ Date____/____/____ Repair order number_____

TEAM AVI offers a complete line of diagnostic training, from beginning to advanced.



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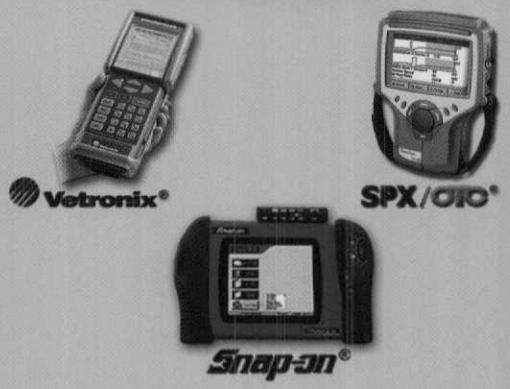

Scan Tool Diagnostics

System Specific

4 & 5 Gas Analysis

Air Conditioning

Transmission

Fuel Injection

Hard-To-Find Info

Hybrid Diagnostics

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