

# The 5 Words That Can Hurt Your Bottom Line

“Is my vehicle ready, yet?” may seem like pretty innocuous words. However, these are the five little words that could hurt your dealership’s bottom-line. Anytime your customer initiates a call AFTER the promised delivery time, you have damaged your image in your customer’s heart and mind. Granted, if our answer is “Yes, Mr. Jones, I was just about to give you a call. We have completed all the work on your vehicle. You can come and pick it up at your convenience,” it may stem the bleeding. But if we say, “Oh, let me check. No, we haven’t gotten to your car. Boy, have we been swamped today,” you are adding insult to injury.

Think about it from your customers’ perspective. They are busy people who are already inconvenienced by the loss of their vehicle. If they call you, you have compounded that inconvenience. They are worried about when they can get their vehicle back, AND they had to take time from their day to find out whether you have completed the work. One of the reasons customers take their vehicles to an independent service center, instead of a dealership service department, is that they can be in control of when their vehicle will be ready. For example driving up to a quick lube center (“in and out in 10 minutes”), the customer feels in control. If there are too many cars in line, they can choose to drive away. But if the place is empty, they know that they can drive in and out in a few minutes. Time is an important factor for most clients. Remember, in most of our customers’ minds...time IS money. So, you are COSTING your customers. Your lack of consideration has just added more cost to the bill. You probably know that for customers to continue doing business with you, value has to exceed price. By respecting your customers’ expectations regarding time, you are taking a step toward building value for them in doing business with your dealership.

Examine how much consideration you demonstrate for your customers’ time and convenience. Scheduling and communication are two factors that can display your respect in your efforts to keep customers coming back time and again.

**Step one:** Make sure that you spend enough time with customers when they drop off their vehicle. This added time will enable you to not only correctly identify the vehicle problems, but with the use of a few probing questions, you may be able to up-sell other needed services. When you spend more time with customers, you will also be better able to write a more complete and accurate RO. More complete and accurate ROs often mean that your technicians can simply repair the problems instead of spending their time determining where the problems are. This in turn will allow for a more accurate completion time estimate.

**Step two:** Call the customer BEFORE they call you. Your promise time is just that...a PROMISE. In your customers’ minds, you have broken that promise when you haven’t called them. If you can’t meet your promise time make the call first. Give the customer an honest reason for the delay and make sure that you give him/her a more accurate completion time. Remember the phrase

“Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me.” Do NOT make the customer feel foolish for choosing you to do their repair work.

**Step three:** If you have to break your promise time because, “Boy, are we swamped today”, you imply that your problem is more important than the customer’s. Does the customer really care about your problems? In a word—NO! So, make sure you are empowered to offer something in the way of service recovery.

1. Apologize with empathy.

It isn’t enough to say, “Gosh, sorry that your vehicle isn’t ready.” You need to add empathy in order to start to win your customer back. “I am so sorry, Mr. Jones. Your vehicle isn’t going to be ready when we promised. I realize that this is an inconvenience for you.”

2. Immediately correct the problem.

“But, be assured that we are doing everything we can so that we can to finish it by \_\_\_\_\_.”

If you haven’t completed the repair because of poor scheduling, or any other dealership problem, two additional steps may be necessary.

3. Offer symbolic atonement.

Make sure that you are empowered to offer the customer something to compensate them for their time and trouble. This can often go a long way in starting to repair the damage. Something as simple as a “perk”, a discount coupon for an oil change or free drop-in car wash will ensure that there is a next time. It will help your customer believe that you are truly sorry. This shows your customer that you are willing to “walk the walk”, not just “talk the talk!”

4. Follow up.

Call the customer within 48 hours to make sure that everything is fine with the repair. This added step reinforces in your customers mind, that you are genuinely concerned about their needs. On the other hand, if the customer says that there is a problem, take responsibility for the issue yourself. Have the customer bring in their vehicle at their earliest convenience so that YOU can resolve the issue.

You, the service consultant, are the face of the dealership. After the sale it’s with you with whom customers will primarily interact. Let your customers see that they are not just \$ signs or numbers. They are real people with whom you want and need to have strong positive relationships. Simply by communicating and keeping your promises, you will boost your dealership’s odds of keeping them coming back time and again. Loyal customers make your business.

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