



CAPRICORN
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Other resources in step 4a:

- Communication templates are contained within this document

Show and tell – good communication

In the latest Australian poll of the trustworthiness of professions, mechanics came in at 24 out of 40, just a few places above lawyers, bankers and journalists.

Perhaps it's time to start asking ourselves how come the humble mechanic, the person who gets your car going again when it breaks down, can be considered so untrustworthy.

It might pay to refer back to the training of auto mechanics and technicians to understand why this is so.

All of their training is underpinned by the requirement to fix other people's problems. They can become so fascinated and absorbed with the fixing job that they often forget about the customer.

You need to remind yourselves that most customers know nothing about cars. The less they know the more worried and concerned they become. This is what causes the mistrust. So to start winning back customer trust you need to put them at ease by talking them through the repair process so that they feel they have a level of control over the situation.

Winning back this trust is critical to the financial success of your business, because without it, customers are less likely to buy your recommendations. Even worse, they might never return.

You need to acknowledge that the way you communicate to your customer is equally as important as the actual repair work done on their car. You may well be able to fix a complicated issue on a vehicle but if you fail to keep the customer informed on the progress of the repair, it's very likely that they will drive away unhappy with their experience. Indeed, if they are not told of the effort you put into their car, their imagination can run riot, leading them to the conclusion that they may have just paid a lot of money for a part that was not necessary.

Conversely, workshops can perform a second rate repair job, but communicate so well with the customer that they can drive away more than happy with both the repair and the size of the bill. That, of course, is unprofessional and even dishonest.

You might salve your own conscience by giving a healthy discount on a large bill. Wrong again. There's not a discount big enough to win back a customer's trust or make up for poor communication.

Good communication is simple. It's about keeping your customers in the loop. Never assume that your customers know what you are doing or what is really wrong with their car.

Everything needs to be explained very clearly. As a general rule if the customer starts calling your workshop to find out what's going on with their car repair, it's a sign that they are getting frustrated. It might already be too late to save that customer.

The reason they call the workshop is that they are uncertain about something meaning and that means you have failed in your communication. Uncertainty or lack of understanding is a cause of mistrust.

These are the steps where communication is critical:

Customer greeting

This is your first chance to impress the customer and it's this first contact that sets the customer's expectation level about the service they will receive and the price they will pay. Every customer must be greeted with a smile and enthusiasm. If the workshop and the staff look unprofessional and seem disorganised the customer will start thinking 'cheap and nasty'.

Ideally, your service advisor should have pre-prepared every customer's job card with their name, car rego and job requirements the night before. This way you can anticipate who is booked in, and the customer feels that you were expecting them.

'Good morning Mrs Jones, are you dropping off the Commodore for its service?'

This small gesture projects a feeling of belonging to your workshop which helps to consolidate the customer's trust.

There will be peak times when the service advisor can't promptly attend to every customer. To cover this eventuality, all staff must be trained and confident in the 'meet and greet' policy.

No staffer should ever walk past a customer without acknowledging them. There is nothing worse than a customer being ignored. Customers don't know who is a technician and who is a service manager. They just see someone that works at the business and wonder why they are not being served.

Example greetings include:

‘Good morning, Bill the service manager is busy with another customer, he won’t be a minute, do you mind waiting?’

‘Good morning, how can I help you?’

‘Good morning, are you being looked after?’

During the greeting process the following subjects must be covered and correctly recorded on the job card:

1. **Confirm the correct customer details** – there’s nothing worse than not being able to get in contact with your customer. Always repeat their phone number back to them to confirm it’s correct.
2. **Confirm expected pick up time** – never assume you can keep the car all day. The customer might be expecting it back by lunch time. By clarifying this early it allows both parties to make alternative plans if necessary.
3. **Confirm the scope of repairs and ask if there are any specific areas of concern** – the more information you can get from the customer the better. Sometimes you will have to probe by asking questions. The technician who will work on the car needs this vital information to lead him in a repair direction. Gathering this information also shows the customer that you are interested and concerned about their car.
4. **Explain to the customer the repair/diagnosis process so they have a clear understanding of what is going to happen** – treat the customer as if this is the first time they have been to a mechanic. Take control and confidently explain to them what is going to happen and what the repair steps are likely to be. *‘Just leave it with us and we will get back to you’* is not good enough. This is not explaining what is going to happen and will most likely result in the customer making frustrating calls to the workshop to get updates on their vehicle.

Example service or repair:

‘Adam will start working on your vehicle this morning so I should have an update for you by 1pm. I’ll give you a call on your mobile then to discuss any service issues. The standard service cost is \$145 plus GST which includes all the basic parts and labour. We won’t undertake any further repairs until I have spoken with you first. Is all that OK with you?’

Example major diagnosis:

‘Adam will start working on your vehicle later this morning. We will spend up to one hour trying to diagnose the problem. We should have an update for you by 1pm. By then, if we have diagnosed what the problem is we will be able to give you a quote for the repair. If not, you can decide if you want us to commit more time diagnosing the problem. Your maximum commitment to that stage will be \$90 plus GST. We won’t undertake any repairs until I have spoken with you first. Is all that OK with you?’

Progress call

After confirming the repair process, **always** follow it through. If you say you will ring by 1pm, make sure you do. The last thing you should do now is plant any seeds of mistrust in the customer's mind by not calling when you said you were going to call. Note on the job card the customer's expected pick up time as well as the time you promised a progress up-date.

Example progress call for service or repair:

'Hi Mrs Jones, it's John from TaT Service Centre. Have you got a minute to have a chat about your car? We have just completed the service and everything seems to be in pretty good order. However we have found a leak in the radiator. We have pressured tested it and it needs to be replaced. We have contacted the dealership and they have quoted us \$600 to replace it. We have rung around and located a good used part for \$350. We can get that in and install it today while we have the car. Would you like us to go ahead?'

Example progress call for a major diagnosis - *'Hi Mrs Jones, its John from TaT Service Centre. Have you got a minute to have a chat about your car? We have just diagnosed the problem to be xx. A replacement will cost you \$600 or we can repair the existing one for \$400. It will be like new and comes with our standard 12 month warranty. We should be able to repair it while we have the car today and have it ready for you by 5pm. Would you like us to go ahead?'*

There must always be a clear understanding between you and your customer about the next step. It might be that you are going ahead with certain service items such as brakes, coolant change or rotation and wheel alignment or you might be spending more time on the vehicle to sort out the problems. Always have a clear understanding between you and the customer about the time involved and the dollar commitment.

If all the vehicle issues have been diagnosed follow these guidelines:

- 1. The repairs to be performed** – ensure you have verbal agreement on all the repairs that are to be undertaken. As a rule of thumb try to avoid doing any repairs without prior customer approval. Repairs being done without approval are a great cause of mechanic mistrust.
- 2. The estimated costs** – once there is agreement on the repairs ensure the customer is clear on the price. They should never arrive to pick up their vehicle without having an understanding of the price. Giving an estimate is fine but if the actual is 10% higher you need to get on the phone and explain that to them ASAP. A repair bill coming in above what was quoted is also cause of mechanic mistrust.
- 3. Time of completion** – let your customer know what time the vehicle will be ready for pick up. If anything, give yourself some extra time because you must be ready when the customer arrives.

If the car is yet to be diagnosed you need to gain a further commitment and go through the above process again.

Overruns on a quote

Occasionally you will be completing a major job after providing a quote, and time and expenses will start to blow out. Nothing annoys a customer more than finding the bill larger than they were quoted. This is a sure way to lose a customer. If this occurs it is essential that you communicate this to the customer ASAP. It is much easier to justify why the job is blowing out when in progress than when the job is finished. If you can explain why the job is blowing out in most cases you will be able to salvage some of the lost time. This is why communication between the workshop technicians and the service manager is critical.

'Hi Mrs Jones, it's John from TaT Service Centre. Have you got a minute to have a chat about your car? We are about halfway through replacing your transmission and we have hit a stumbling block. We have found XXX which is causing some issues. The job is more than likely going to take an hour longer than we first expected. When we quoted you we assumed that this issue would not arise. This means the final cost will be around XX. Are you happy with us to proceed?'

Completion call (optional if already confirmed)

This phone call is not necessary if you have already confirmed the car pick-up time with the customer.

However, if the vehicle has been completed early, or the invoice has come in under the estimate you should try to let the customer know. For all you know, Mrs Jones may be sitting around in a coffee shop. It's a nice call that most customers rarely get. Most, if not all calls from repair shops contain bad news. This phone call will go a long way towards increasing your customer's satisfaction levels and build customer loyalty.

'Mrs Jones, I just wanted to let you know that we have finished your car a little earlier than expected and it's now ready for you to pick up. The total cost came in a little under the estimate that we discussed this morning. The total is \$???'

Vehicle pick up

If you have covered everything in the completion call, the pick-up should go without a problem. You need to ensure that you have the invoice prepared and ready for them. Customers hate waiting around at the end of a long day. Always offer to go through the invoice with them and show any replaced or damaged parts. This is a great way of demonstrating value for money. The invoice should always cover all the repairs undertaken as well as cover all the things discussed during the phone calls and any applicable warranty.

'Hi Mrs Jones. Your vehicle is ready for you. We have completed the service, stamped the service book and put it back in the glove box for you. The front brakes have been replaced and the wheel alignment done. The spare tyre is good and we made sure that it is fully pumped up. The total comes to XXX. How would you like to pay for that?'

When it comes to winning your customer's trust and loyalty, communication is the key. Most customers are totally unaware of the extent of work done during a service or more complex repair on late model cars. Customers must be informed as much as possible about the work undertaken. How can a customer ever understand and appreciate the value of your service and workmanship if they don't know about it?

So here's the challenge. In the next four weeks, start communicating with your customers and you are well on the way to winning back their trust and loyalty.

The place to start is www.tatbiz.net.au/capricorn.

Just go for it!