

A DAY TO REMEMBER

Shift your focus away from sales and toward customer service to make buying a car at your dealership a memorable experience.

I love cars. I love buying cars. I love selling cars. I love driving cars, especially ones with gobs of horsepower itching to be unleashed. You can take the bus, a train or Google's self-driving box to work if you want to, but you'll get my car keys when you pry 'em from my cold, dead hand.

Several years ago, as a birthday gift, my wife sent me to the Richard Petty Driving Experience. It was exceptionally well-run and a truly memorable experience. I still have the plaque they gave me hanging in my office. It includes my elapsed time and speed for each lap and a photo of me in the car. I'm wearing a racing suit and helmet, and there's an enormous smile on my face. As far as I'm concerned, that's about the most fun you can have with your clothes on. On that day, for a few brief moments, they made me feel like I was a NASCAR driver. I'd do it again in a heartbeat.

I have been in the car business since 1975, and some of the finest, hardest-working, most

honest and generous people I know are automobile dealers. Yet we have all heard someone we know, possibly even a friend or family member, say, "I hate buying a car!" It still feels like a punch in the gut every time I hear it.

Why? Because it means the last time they bought a car, it was an unpleasant ordeal they would just as soon forget, and want to put off doing again as long as possible.

That's just sad.

If a customer ever has an unpleasant purchase experience at your dealership, it should keep you up at night, and you should wake up determined to create and deliver an enjoyable and memorable experience for your next customer. They should leave your dealership with an enormous smile on their face and maybe even a framed picture they can display in their home to commemorate their purchase.

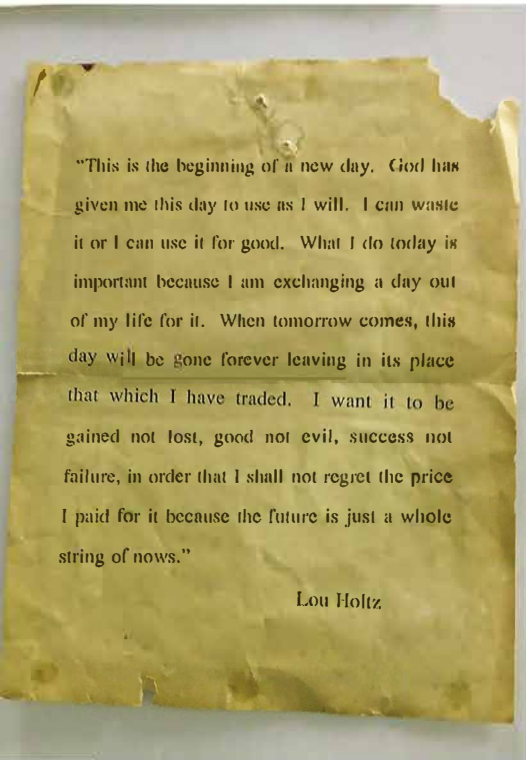
FOLLOW-UP CALLS

I call every attendee of every F&I class I teach.

I call to ask how the training has paid off and give them their certification test results. It's something I've done it since I taught my first F&I class back in 1985. I learn firsthand the challenges they face upon their return — including what's working and what's not working — so I can provide some additional input they may find helpful. I also get to hear their excited success stories.

I made one such call yesterday, and the student and his sales manager (who had been promoted to that position after completing our F&I class last year) could hardly wait to tell me about his improved performance. They kept me on the phone for close to 30 minutes, regaling me with tales of dramatically higher product penetrations and income per retail unit. They each wanted me to know how our training had changed their lives. In the two weeks following the class, the F&I manager had sold more service contracts and GAP policies than he had in the previous month. His





excitement and enthusiasm was palpable. His concept of selling, his belief in his products, and his understanding of the purpose of an F&I department had been radically changed.

Since he completed the class, he has been helping the people on the other side of the desk make the right decisions for their families. By changing his focus from helping himself to helping customers, he was selling more products, making more money and having more fun than he had had in many years. Even his wife had noticed the change in his attitude, his enthusiasm and, of course, his paycheck.

Whether you're teaching a class or selling a car, those are wonderful phone calls. When someone has a memorable experience that they want others to have as well, that's the best testimonial you can get. It's also tangible evidence that your process is on the right track.

A SHIFT IN FOCUS

So how do you ensure every customer has a memorable experience at your dealership?

First, change the focus from selling cars or selling F&I products to helping customers. Give them all the information they need to make smart decisions. That requires a shared understanding of who your customers are and thoroughly learning their wants and needs.

Sometimes, I think we all tend to forget about that living, breathing human being on the other end of the phone or the other side of the desk. Selling is not about talking people into something. Selling is merely the process through which we help other human beings get what they want, so we get what we want. Your sales process should involve creating a memorable experience and a long-term relationship with customers. This can only be accomplished by identifying their wants, needs and concerns, and then providing possible solutions.

Businesses make a profit by delivering products and services that help consumers. And yes, you need to offer them at a price that generates a profitable return for your business.



But ultimately, if you're not making enough money, you're not helping enough customers.

Next, you must dramatically change the purchase experience. We have to "Wow" the customer in every dealership interaction. Their purchase experience begins with their initial dealership contact, whether that contact is by phone, over the Internet or in person. They should have no trouble finding your number or navigating your website. They should enjoy meeting your F&I professionals, taking delivery and receiving a follow-up call. Create an atmosphere of trust that ensures every customer has a truly enjoyable and stress-free experience.

We have to be easy to do business with. Make buying a car at your dealership fun, not an ordeal. Help customers based on their agenda, and enable them to buy their vehicle the way they want to buy. Then have F&I people who are trained how to, and capable of, creating customer interest in the F&I products and services they may also need.

Third, separate yourself from the herd.

A memorable experience requires that you make your dealership stand out. Every dealer must find the "hook" that sets them apart from their competitors. It's not enough to say, "Our people make us different." Be specific! For example, you should be able to say your salespeople have all completed specialized product training, your F&I managers are AFIP-certified and your technicians are all ASE-certified.

Finally, live your core values. People don't buy what you do; they buy why you do it. That's true whether you're the dealer principal, a football coach, a trainer or an F&I manager. Great dealers lead by example. They believe in what they say, they live what they believe, and they become successful because their actions clearly demonstrate their core values.

LASTING IMPRESSIONS

Lou Holtz, a memorable college football coach and, more recently, an ESPN analyst, used to have his team recite a prayer before each game. Twenty-eight years ago, I shared that

prayer with the young people in our church's youth group. Recently, one of them sent me this email, along with the photo on this page:

"Hi, Ron! I just wanted you to know — I still have this! You gave it to us at MYF a million years ago. I keep it in my classroom; it helps me to remember to do the best I can for that day. I don't always live up to it, but it helps me to think 'Well, maybe I didn't help 30 kids today, but maybe I helped one.' Just wanted to say thanks for taking time out of your busy life all those years ago to be our MYF counselor with Dad. I have very fond memories of those years."

Want to make sure buying a car at your dealership is a memorable experience? You could start by reciting this simple prayer at your next team meeting. **ADM**



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