



BY RICK MCCORMICK

Pruning Time!

Today's reality is presenting us with both challenging times as well as countless possibilities. Success is reserved for those that dare to prune their process to assure future growth in skills and profits.

Every dealership is striving to maintain two business models, the current one and the one they aspire to create. We shouldn't focus too heavily on maximizing profits from a single business model because it can lead to a lack of applicability during major shifts in customer expectations. We can all agree that we currently find ourselves in one of those times of major shifting. We can't afford to continue the norm and refuse to adapt or determine how we must change.

That leads us to a challenging and somewhat painful practice often experienced in gardening, which is the value of pruning for further growth. The same artistry, skill, and patience required to grow a vibrant garden is also necessary to develop a vibrant F&I process. We must prune back activities that affect the customer experience. Our success, and the ownership-experience of our customers, depends on our efforts. Let's look at some pruning opportunities that add value to the F&I process and allow for growth in the future.

These are three branches of the customer-experience tree that must be pruned to provide more growth.

1 TIME

Customers have often told us they hate the time it takes to buy a vehicle and, more so, the time it takes to finalize the paperwork. Now ask this question: What is making your customers wait to get into the F&I office? There needs to be a game plan on how deals transition from sales to F&I. Sales and F&I

must stop acting like they are on different teams. Cooperation requires the F&I manager to have early involvement with the customer and be an integral part of the deal process.

Trim away any limitations. For example, if sales doesn't want the early involvement of F&I, or the F&I manager prefers to wait until deal completion, you must snip these limitations. The process may be awkward or painful at first, but the long-term results will be more growth and higher levels of success.

2 TRAINING

Well-trained F&I professionals build more value in the process, as well as the products, in less time while utilizing a no-pressure effort. They overcome objections in a customer-focused, interactive way that persuades a positive response from customers. If you are not consistently examining your F&I process, then it is time to inspect where you are spending time between customers and reduce where necessary.

Between customers, cut back distractions to make room for more productive activities. Working one-on-one with a coach, role-playing your process, and researching your craft should be regular activities. Occasional visits to a workshop or seminar are not enough. Shear off idleness to make room for more effective training.

3 TECHNOLOGY

Effective technology is readily available, helping to save time and make for a more customer-friendly process. Now more than ever, customers are starting the process online to save time and become educated about F&I products before coming to the dealership. After such a massive change in their lives, customers will be looking for quicker, easier ways to do business. Success requires acceptance of these new technologies.

This is the difference between finding the competitive advantage to succeed or to continue suffering under the weight of our current struggle. So, if you find any resistance to technology, prune it.

Today is a challenging time that is also filled with countless possibilities. Success is reserved for those that dare to prune their process to assure future growth in skills and profits. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rick McCormick is the national account development manager for Reahard & Associates Inc., an F&I training company providing classes, workshops, in-dealership and online training. Email him at rick.mccormick@bobit.com.