

# CAR SIDE MANNER

## REAL-LIFE LESSONS IN CUSTOMER RELATIONS



It's happened to all of us. The customer complains of a mysterious cough, grunt, groan, stumble, or sneeze. You listen to the customer as well as you can, with no interruptions other than the ringing

phone, the blast of an air chisel, a parts delivery, a question from one of your technicians about another car, and a visit from your ex-wife who wonders where the alimony payment ended up last month.

Later, you drive the car and attempt to reconstruct what the customer said during the chaos of early morning. You remember that the customer complained about this strange noise. Strange noise my foot. This thing has more noises than a bus load of baboons. Some sound serious. Others, annoying but not critical. Which one was he talking about?

You do the best you can, find and fix a legitimate problem, and hope you've corrected the complaint. Sometimes you hit the bull's-eye, sometimes you miss the broad side of the barn. Then it's back to stage one. Only this time you spend more time with the customer, and as a result, have a lot better chance of succeeding.

Tony Ritz at Sports Car Service Center in Tempe, Arizona, has a customer inquiry form he gives to his customers to help eliminate these problems. It reads as follows:

Dear Patron,

In order to better analyze, diagnose, and repair the problem with your vehicle, please take a few minutes and choose the answers which best describe your vehicle's malady. Please feel free to add any comments which you feel might prove helpful in our diagnosis.

1. Does the problem occur when the engine is HOT \_\_\_\_? or COLD \_\_\_\_?
2. Does the problem occur at LOW \_\_\_\_? AVERAGE \_\_\_\_? or HIGHWAY \_\_\_\_? speeds.
3. Is this problem intermittent? YES \_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_.
4. Will the problem surface on demand? If so, how can WE make it happen? (Please answer this question in detail on the back of this sheet.)
5. Does your vehicle emit SMOKE \_\_\_\_? AN UNUSUAL ODOR \_\_\_\_?
6. If you are experiencing a chassis vibration, can it be felt in the STEERING WHEEL \_\_\_\_? or is it a nondescript SEAT-OF-THE PANTS feeling \_\_\_\_?
7. Does this vibration occur during ACCELERATION \_\_\_\_? CRUISE \_\_\_\_? or DECELERATION \_\_\_\_?
8. If your vehicle drifts from center, does it go RIGHT \_\_\_\_? or LEFT \_\_\_\_?
9. Does this pull occur with your foot ON \_\_\_\_? or OFF \_\_\_\_? the brake pedal.

10. If you are experiencing a strange noise, does it occur with a change in VEHICLE SPEED \_\_\_\_? or a change in ENGINE SPEED \_\_\_\_?

11. Would you best describe the suspect noise to be a SQUEAL \_\_\_\_? SQUEAK \_\_\_\_? CHIRP \_\_\_\_? BUZZ \_\_\_\_? HOWL \_\_\_\_? or KNOCK \_\_\_\_?

12. Does this noise come from the FRONT \_\_\_\_? CENTER \_\_\_\_? or REAR \_\_\_\_? of your vehicle. From the DRIVER'S SIDE \_\_\_\_? or from the PASSENGER'S SIDE \_\_\_\_?

13. Does this above-mentioned noise occur during ACCELERATION \_\_\_\_? or DECELERATION \_\_\_\_?

Thanks for taking the time in helping us better serve your automotive needs. I'm sure this information can only assist in saving our time, and your money!

This form has a lot going for it. Consider the following:

- **It makes the customer think about his problem.** To fill out the form he has to think about the specifics of his problem, reconstruct the situations where the problem occurs, and then relay that information to you in some detail.

- **It urges the customer to ask questions** about any terms on the form he may not understand. Don't worry that he doesn't automatically understand the difference between a steering wheel, and a seat-of-the pants vibration. If the customer is smart enough to admit he doesn't know, you can at least help clarify the situation by explaining the difference.

- **It gives the customer a better appreciation** of how difficult the repair could be without the information.

Tony Ritz writes, "This form has proven itself very helpful in our everyday diagnosis by allowing our technicians to get a FEEL for the customer's problem by having the owners relate their problems in their own terms, eliminating third party interpretations."

Maybe all your customers won't appreciate the added work. But the smart ones sure will, especially when you don't spend their money fixing the buzz in the rear end when they wanted you eliminate the clunk in the steering.

—By Ralph Birnbaum

### Import Service may want you.

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- 2) The ability to write clearly on auto repair topics in a timely fashion.
- 3) The ability to produce clear, black and white photos on specific repair procedures.

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