



PROFIT MATTERS

HOW DO YOUR NUMBERS LINE UP? | BY CHRIS "CHUBBY" FREDERICK

The Banana Theory: How Customers Spoil

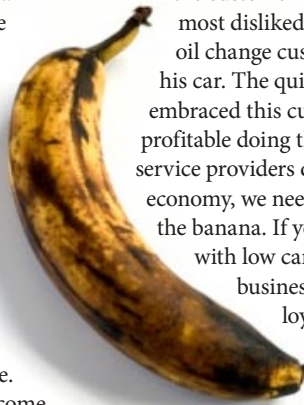
Many fishing professionals feel bananas bring bad luck or a chemical imbalance to the fun times. I overheard one of our senior coaches, George Zeeks, relate The Banana Theory to spoiling our customers.

How many times have you purchased a bunch of bananas at the store? I'm talking that perfect, firm one, just the right shade of yellow and smelling exactly like a banana should smell. You bring the bunch home and maybe even snack on one or two right away. Then, like a lot of other things, we forget about them.

The next time we look for that perfect banana, we find instead a soft, mushy thing that looks like a leprous banana with big black spots. In every business, there is a time when the customer is in a perfect position to make a purchase. There are also circumstances that come up to "spoil" that opportunity and leave us in a far from perfect situation.

The Banana Theory differs in all its various forms, but always deals with the same problem. How do businesses sabotage their own ability to sell their product by not paying attention to the customer?

I have trained and coached managers and owners in the automotive industry for many years, and very few of them like the customer who waits. One of the most disliked consumers is the lowly oil change customer who waits for his car. The quick lube industry has embraced this customer and has been profitable doing the very thing many service providers dislike the most. In our economy, we need to wake up and smell the banana. If you are having problems with low car count, low repeat business and low customer loyalty, read on.



The Banana Softens

Fulfilling the customer's expectation is the key to success in every industry. In automotive, we have some control in setting that expectation, but we cannot forget what the customer wants. Many shops not only forget what the customer is expecting, but

purposely set up situations that cause the opportunity to turn into a rotten banana.

From the time that the customer is greeted and the work order written, the clock is ticking. A meaningful, accurate expectation of when the car may come in for service needs to be established. If we quote when the car will be finished, then we have already shot ourselves in the foot.

Most advisors, when they quote a finish time on a service, do not allow any additional time to perform any services that the car might need and the customer may want to have done. The customer is now thinking of the things they need to do when they leave your shop and they are making their plans based on that "finished" time that we quoted them. Always quote the expected time that we will start on the car, not finish.

Once the car is in the bay, we have 15 minutes to bring the customer out to the car and present any additional services that they might need. This means we have to do a courtesy check of the car, find any issues and have that courtesy check back to the advisor within approximately six minutes. I know there are people out there reading this and saying it can't be done that fast and still do a good job. Keep an open mind. The quick lube industry has been doing this very thing, correctly,

QUESTION OF THE MONTH

QUESTION:

Chubby, what is the biggest mistake being made when you can't get a customer to schedule an appointment for their next visit?

The answer usually is you ask for permission when you should just be giving them their next appointment date. When is the last time a dental secretary asked you for permission to set up a follow-up appointment? They just assume it, and so should you!

Do you have a question for Chubby? E-mail him at cfriderick@autotraining.net.

profitably and with very good customer response for many years.

The Banana Turns Brown

For the naysayers, let's break down what we need to do to get the estimate back up to the advisor in six minutes. As soon as the car enters the bay, we should be working as a team to do a quick check on the lights and turn signals to make sure they work. Approximate time: one minute.

Before we even set the lift, we need to check under the hood for fluids, filters, belts, hoses, etc. Approximate time: two to three minutes. After setting the lift and taking the car in the air, we can do a visual check under the car for CV boots, muffler problems. Approximate time: two to three minutes.

At this point, we need to turn the ticket in to the advisor so they can disengage with what they are doing and build the estimate on the waiting car. Most of the items found will be routine and probably



already packaged, so building the estimate should not take that long.

The final step is to make sure we get the customer out to the car within 15 minutes to make the presentation. As we get further from the 15-minute window, the banana is starting to get rotten. I cannot tell you how many shops do not turn the ticket in to the advisor until after the oil change is done. Thirty minutes have passed, and now the chances of making a successful presentation are just about shot.

The customer wants to leave, rightfully so, and we have neglected our duty to provide service to the best of our ability. If your shop does a brake inspection during the courtesy check, then do it after you have turned in the ticket. You have time to remove the wheels and perform a basic brake check before the advisor returns with the customer. The ability to prac-

tice "show and tell" with the customer is essential in building a better relationship with the customer, the need of the service, the value of the service and the urgency to do it now. Presenting at the counter in the office just does not cut it.

If we are rotating the tires, why not do it after we have turned the estimate in? And while we're at it, let's check the balance on the worst tire to its status. It will be easy enough for the technician to add on to the estimate while we are presenting.

Many times people have forgotten to have their tires balanced, and it is our job to let them know if it is needed. It not only helps to save the customer money, but we might actually make a couple of dollars while we are doing our job. ■

Chris "Chubby" Frederick is CEO and president of the Automotive Training Institute. He is thankful for assistance from George Zeeks and Brian Canning in preparing this monthly column. Contact Chubby at cfrick@autotraining.net.