

Shift Your Focus



You love it when it is working in your favor; you hate it when it is holding you back. It is a number that is either making you money or keeping you up at night. I will spare you another dramatic statement because I am sure you have already guessed what I am talking about—Customer Satisfaction Index, better known to most as CSI. The easiest way to define CSI is also strikingly meaningful. Simply put, it is the numerical representation

of the overall impression you make on your customers; this includes your attitude, your company, your selection of product or services, the transaction that took place, and everything in between. CSI has quickly taken hold of the automotive industry and arguably dictates how dealers make decisions more than ever before. Everyone has heard the old adage “knowledge is power.” So, if customers have more knowledge than ever before, do they have all the power? Naturally they would like to assume so, but what is “power” anyways? Is it being armed with inside information like buy rates and trade values? Is it the ability to tarnish a business’s reputation based on a short paragraph posted in the form of a 1-star review? Or is the automotive business just one big poker game and everyone wants to keep their cards close to their chest? The fact of the matter is that we are in a time where endless amounts of information is available within a split-second and this has shifted things for dealerships and customers. For example, type the name of a nearby nature reserve into an online search engine and you will find that even parks have an online rating. Are we just doomed to begin operating and managing out of a place of fear every time we present numbers or when it comes time to tell the customer about their oil leak? I challenge you to think about CSI, and how it pertains to your day-to-day operations, in some different ways.

Forget the numbers... for just a bit

Take your eyes off the scoreboard for a moment and focus on the play in front of you. We pull reports, look at data, and analyze survey return scores to the utmost degree. True to most manufacturers, there are abundant amounts of data to sift through and that can create a feeling of uneasiness. The primary issue with overanalyzing this information is that we are looking at just results. The interactions and communication exchanges are now history. If we constantly manage our team by just results, it is unlikely we will see quick improvements. It would be like driving down the road looking only in the rearview mirror. Everyone will give you a reason of why “they are where they are/were” instead of focusing on what is going on in real time, in the moment. Now, it is still vital to assess past results in order to make a plan for the future, pending that we are spending an equal or greater amount of time looking forward as we are looking back. Ask yourself “Are we giving our customers an

experience they would pay for again?” Observe your processes, the team, the facility, the surroundings, and put yourself in the customer’s shoes. Focus on leading the team and coach in the moment as needed. Know your players and position them according to their strengths.

Focus on the people... yours first

Encourage and empower your team to create a personalized experience for the customer in the dealership. You likely agree the process, whether in sales or service, should include a brief consultation in which the customer’s needs are assessed and expectations are set. It is easy to talk about setting and meeting, even exceeding, expectations because the bottom line is this: we can all agree it is the right way to do business. But how do we transition from meeting expectations to exceeding them? How do we make the shift from merely doing what we know we should do, to doing something that makes a difference, and an impact, for the customer? This starts with testing processes to see if they are customer focused. Ask yourself at each step, “Are we doing it this way because it is easier for us or our customers?” Work hard to create open lines of communication between team members and the different departments. This will help build an environment where we serve “our” customer instead of “my,” “your,” or “his/her” customer. When everyone on your team is running the same play and has the same goal, the team develops confidence in one another. Confidence leads to trust and trustworthiness cultivates reliability. When team members rely on one another, commitments to customers are made clearly. Unfortunately, when the opposite is true, you end up with the salesperson that says the detailer will be done “soon” and the service advisor that says the technician will have an update “a little later this afternoon.” Remember, if you do not set expectations for your customers, they will set expectations for you, and then measure you against those.

In purchasing decisions, buyers assign a value of what is presented to them and compare it against the money he or she will agree to pay. Some will make a game-time decision, others will break out the calculator and graph paper and tell you to sit tight. In either case, their decision will be directly based on how they felt about the results, however in depth they may have gone, and their experience up to that point. You can help make the decision a no-brainer by having a customer focused team that is committed to a customer focused process. The key to customer loyalty is to deliver an experience that makes the customer feel genuinely valued and appreciated. So why not make that the focus every day instead of that number?

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