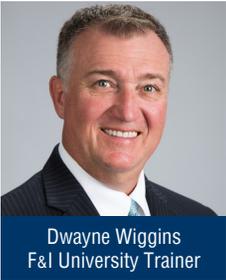


To Interview, or Not to Interview: That is the Question



To borrow a line from Shakespeare, “To interview, or not to interview: that is the question.” Lately, in the race to reduce transaction time, there has been much debate regarding “the interview.” Some say, “It is a waste of time!” While others say, “You have to do an interview!” Either way, both will defend their positions with vigor, especially on social media websites.

So, for those of you that are on the “waste of time” team... **AGREED**, but only if it is a bad interview. **Bad interviews (aka interrogations) should be stopped immediately.** All they do is cause the customer to become defensive, take up valuable time, and diminish opportunity.

On the other hand, a good interview makes all the difference. A good interview provides critical information which allows for a personalized approach when consulting the customer on protective products. After all, that is what customers want! They want to consult with a professional to make the right purchasing decisions for their needs and lifestyle. Also, the customer should never know the interview is happening. When done right, it will simply seem like a casual conversation. The customer may even find out that they have a few things in common with you!

Think about it through this scenario. Most automotive professionals started on the sales floor and, due to success, worked their way into the business office and other management positions. However, while still on the sales floor working hard to move up, what if the sales manager walked up and said, “We would like to save time during the sales process, so going forward, we want you to stop having a conversation with the customer before you select, present, and negotiate the purchase of their new vehicle.” Sounds crazy, right? Would you have done it? If so, how do you think it would have impacted your production? Up, down, or not at all?

I believe we would all agree that taking a shortcut like that would cause production to decrease significantly. As top sales professionals, I think we can equally agree that we probably would not have followed those instructions. Instead, we would have come up with another solution to build rapport and gather the information needed to be maximize our opportunity, but in the new allotted time implemented by management. A conversation to build rapport and gather needed information is too critical in the process to shortcut, and also directly contributes to your success by maximizing each opportunity.

So, how is it different in the business office? It's not! In fact, a good interview may be even more critical to business managers since they are presenting intangible products. Customers cannot simply test drive or smell that new car smell with F&I products. It is up to the business manager to illustrate the value of the products and how they meet their true needs.

With that, to answer the initial question...interview! However, successfully executing the interview may not be so simple.

Time is the biggest reason why the interview is skipped. Everyone is in a hurry, no one has an extra second, and everyone is concerned with how their time is spent. No one wants to spend their time being “interrogated” about products that they “don't really need.” So, maybe the better question is how do we keep the interview in the process and still meet the demands of the “I'm in a hurry” generation?

Here are a few ideas:

Identify where the “in a hurry” comes from. Too often, the business manager is told by the salesperson, “The customer is in a hurry, so can you just get them in and out?” This leads to the business manager feeling pressure to accommodate this request, so they sacrifice conducting a proper interview for the sake of keeping the customer happy and high CSI scores. Then, the business manager discovers afterwards that it was really the salesperson in a hurry, and not the customer.

One suggestion to combat this is to reset the clock. For example, after you introduce yourself and review your responsibilities, give the customer an accurate expectation for completing the transaction from this time forward.” This will take us between 20–30 minutes to finish things up so let get started.”

Have a conversation while signing paperwork. There is required paperwork that the customer has to sign in every transaction, which is often coupled with awkward silence in the business office. Instead, take advantage of this time to have an effective conversation facilitated by the easy forms. For example, when the customer is signing the Odometer Disclosure Statement, ask, “What made you decide on this one?” This simple question can provide valuable information and will not add any time to your process. You are accomplishing two important things here, forward progress in the deal and information gathering.

Streamline the sales process. In 2017, J.D. Power and Associates stated that the time spent in a dealership was up to an average of

187 minutes (more than three hours). The biggest offender of wasted time for the customer is the time spent waiting to transition to the business office. On average, a customer will wait up to 32 minutes to see a business manager after negotiating the vehicle price with the salesperson. Help the team find a more efficient way to get the customer from saying, "Yes, I'll take it," to getting them into the business office. Freeing up some of those 32 minutes to conduct a good interview can help the dealership, as a whole, see a positive difference – increased sales, more customer retention, and higher CSI.

One idea: **keep the customer engaged by starting the delivery process while waiting to get into finance.** Time is a perception thing. People do not mind investing time in something if they perceive that their time is not being wasted. Consider the saying, "Time flies when you are having fun." It is very true because you do not watch the clock or focus on it when you are engaged. Keep customers engaged by starting the delivery process while they wait to get into the business office. As a side note, doing this will also ensure that the customer has a good understanding of all the technology on the vehicle before discussing protective products.

Keep it brief and do not forget to share. When did the interview become anything more than showing genuine interest in the customer and having a brief conversation with purpose? Remember that conversations are short and two-sided in today's world, thanks to technology. Interrogations are not received well in any situation. If the

customer finds you going too deep into the weeds on a subject or just firing off question after question, they will move to the "I'm ready to get out of here" mindset.

Recognize the customer's signs. You will see clear signs from the customer that you have reached interrogation status. If this happens, change directions immediately and move forward in having a casual and two-sided conversation. Some signals that the interview has morphed in to an interrogation are:

- A change in the customer's body language, such as moving to the crossed-arm position
- The tone of their voice becomes more defensive
- Their responses become very short and direct
- It begins to feel like the entire conversation is rushed

Following these ideas will help meet the time demands of today's industry, while still conducting a proper interview. After all, it comes down to choice; to interview or not to interview. As with a lot of things in the automotive industry, it is choice and not chance that makes the difference, so be sure to choose wisely!

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