

There is Power in Alliances



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If you want to successfully create a culture in the dealership that evolves around the customer experience, that culture cannot stop at the business office. It has to translate to all the departments and other aspects of the dealership that a customer may come in contact with. Every team must be an alliance for one another in order for the dealership to see true growth as a whole. A key element in creating a successful culture is ensuring

the customer receives a consistent message throughout their entire experience; from the dealership's website, to the lot, to the time of delivery. Setting the tone for what the customer can expect from the dealership's buying experience early in the process can lead to higher CSI and customer retention.

Some ideas on how to establish a culture will require change, and change is not always easy for everyone. The best way to cultivate change is to have a strong commitment and a clearly defined purpose. It has been said that there are seven words to describe something going wrong: "That's the way we've/I've always done it." Customers are concerned about the same things they have always been concerned with – drawn-out negotiations or feeling that they are being upsold unnecessary products. The fact is, customers choose to do business with a dealership that has a variety of vehicles in inventory and a convenient buying experience. With that, it is safe to assume they are not there for the F&I products. So, where and how can dealerships inform customers of the advantages they would receive with their products and services?

DEVELOP a presence for the business office and F&I products on the dealership's website. Highlight the experience of each business manager and what potential customers can expect from them when purchasing a vehicle. Briefly introduce the full suite of available products with a description of the features/benefits of each. Add an FAQ section to address the financing options offered. Make the team available to potential customers by encouraging them to contact a business manager with questions. Your next appointment might come from an internet lead, so ensure that the business office has a strong presence on the website that is consistent with the dealership's culture and message.

CREATE an action plan with the sales and management teams. Agree that every customer will be introduced to a business manager every time. If everyone agrees to this process, it will create more selling opportunities for the entire dealership. Another reason why an introduction can be advantageous is that it ensures the Red Flag rules are observed, as well as the state and federal paperwork are being completed correctly. A

business manager can also help explain a possible misunderstanding that a customer may have, such as the monthly payment amount or any financing options. Lastly, some business managers will ask for referrals from customers. These referrals are passed back to the sales team and create additional sales opportunities. There are many advantages to every customer being introduced to a business manager, both for the customer and the dealership.

BUILD a solid process with the sales desk to maximize every opportunity. Re-hash every deal; the good ones along with the difficult ones.

- Can you get a better deal with a different lender?
- Which lender can offer the best opportunity to place more loans?
- Which lenders are you building portfolios with and how can you maximize the relationship?
- Are there customer benefits that can be improved on?

Establishing a consistent way to submit offers to lenders and present these offers to customers will eliminate any confusion between the sales team, management, and the business office. Just staying on top of every opportunity is the equivalent of making game adjustments for what is and is not working. However, you must also continue to look for ways to improve the team in order to consistently hit top numbers each month.

IMPLEMENT technology into certain areas of the business office to create more efficiencies that help fight the clock. Any tool that can save time creates more opportunity for the business manager to interact with customers. For example, a great way to incorporate technology in the business office is to have the customer take a brief survey on a tablet. This is a quick and easy way to introduce various product benefits that match their results, allowing the business manager to then make a logical presentation of product offerings. Also, e-contracting certainly helps save time with remittance, funding, and immediately identifying customers in the vendor systems. Not every type of technology will benefit every dealership, so investigate all options to determine what would fit best in the dealership's culture and process.

A strong culture is key for a dealership to sustain success. Seeing the power in alliances will ensure every department maintains the level of service that is promised to customers; from the initial website visit, to the last handshake before handing over the keys. Establishing a culture and business goals may require change. However, change can be viewed as a positive thing when the dealership taps into these alliances and available assets to achieve the desired customer experience.

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