

RV Techs are more like Veterinarians than Doctors

By Chuck Marzahn

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When we talk with a customer and refer to our technical abilities, we often use medical lingo for our descriptions. For example, we “diagnose” a problem. Using the medical field for comparison has often caused me to stop and think. We call ours a “trade” while physicians have a “practice.” Does it mean we trade our skills while they “practice...?” If they practice a long time, do they finally get it right? Seriously, the correlation is interesting.

Much of the health of our business rests with the practitioners of healing its ills. On a recent trip to visit one of the Indiana plants, we commented as has been done many times on the thinking that the dealership is the last fifty feet of the assembly line. Nobody can shortcut that extra effort taken to ensure a quality delivery without paying a price later. So, in some sense, the tech would be the pediatrician giving birth to a new and positive ownership experience for some lucky RV owner.

Taking units on trade should involve a trip through the shop to ensure the condition of the unit as represented during the deal by the customer. Sometimes the sales manager must think techs are radiologists... complete with x-ray vision. The question comes back, “Why didn’t you see the problem when you had it in the shop for PDI?”

We demand that our techs are absolute experts at finding every potential problem. Often, they are the brunt of questioning the why’s and wherefores of a failure on a recently retailed unit. Maybe if they were to place the coach on the coach and asked about its relationship to its parents...

The ability to quickly and accurately assess the condition makes me think of the process called triage by the folks in medicine. In the sense of a battle “medic,” it would be a look at the extent of injuries to determine treatment priorities. There’s a saying that head wounds are among the easiest to assess. They are either minor or severe. In either case, they are lower on triage “rank” because there isn’t much which must be done in either case. We look to our techs often, particularly on used products, to set priorities for future repairs. Almost like they have a crystal ball, isn’t it?

Who could ignore the many, frequent and forever urgent requests of customers for “emergency” repairs while on or just before a trip? There you have it. Now we’re “emergency room” doctors, too.

When the press of business isn't so much, we fall into the role of internist when we prescribe preventive maintenance and do those seemingly endless tests and evaluations.

Could we also be thought of as Orthopedic Surgeons when we are called to set and mend broken body parts?

I'm sure by now you get the idea...

Let me get you to think of it in a different way. The techs in automotive would fit neatly into the above metaphors. Here is where we, in the RV industry, are different.

RV Techs are more like Veterinarians.

Vets have about the same levels of training with regards to the amount of time taken to become a "doctor." Stop and think about some of the differences with a fresh look.

A "vet" (or RV Tech) must know so much about so many systems. A doctor has to know how to "fix" people. A vet must know how to fix birds, reptiles, fish, large mammals and pets. It could be cold-blooded or warm-blooded. We have to know about chassis and houses, plumbing and electrical, body and trim, hydraulics and generators. We have to know not only about refrigerators but reefers running with three different systems.

Vets have small clinics to work in. Most clinics I've seen have tile floors because of frequent accidents. Vets have limited budgets. As I visit stores across the country, there has been some recent improvement to the working conditions for our RV techs. Much more is needed. It is, seemingly by nature, dictated that our RV techs work in hot, cluttered areas. Think about the "doctors" on the automotive side who enjoy great, gleaming facilities. Makes you wonder why someone might want to be a "vet?"

Vets most likely won't earn as much as the regular "MD." Think about the small clinics again. Think about the bills that your vet gives you and then think about the bills that your doctors give you. Who hasn't noticed the different prices for the same prescription drugs? The real point may be that we aren't giving proper respect or compensation to either our vets or our RV Techs.

Perhaps, the biggest difference is that vets are vets because they love animals. That small fact is what really gives us the dedicated core of people who keep the pets we love so dearly in such great shape. Same thing applies, once again to the RV Techs. They are largely in the business because they love the business and the product. What better reason could there be?

Have you said “thanks” lately to the folks in the shop who are putting heart and perspiration into our industry’s notable success?

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