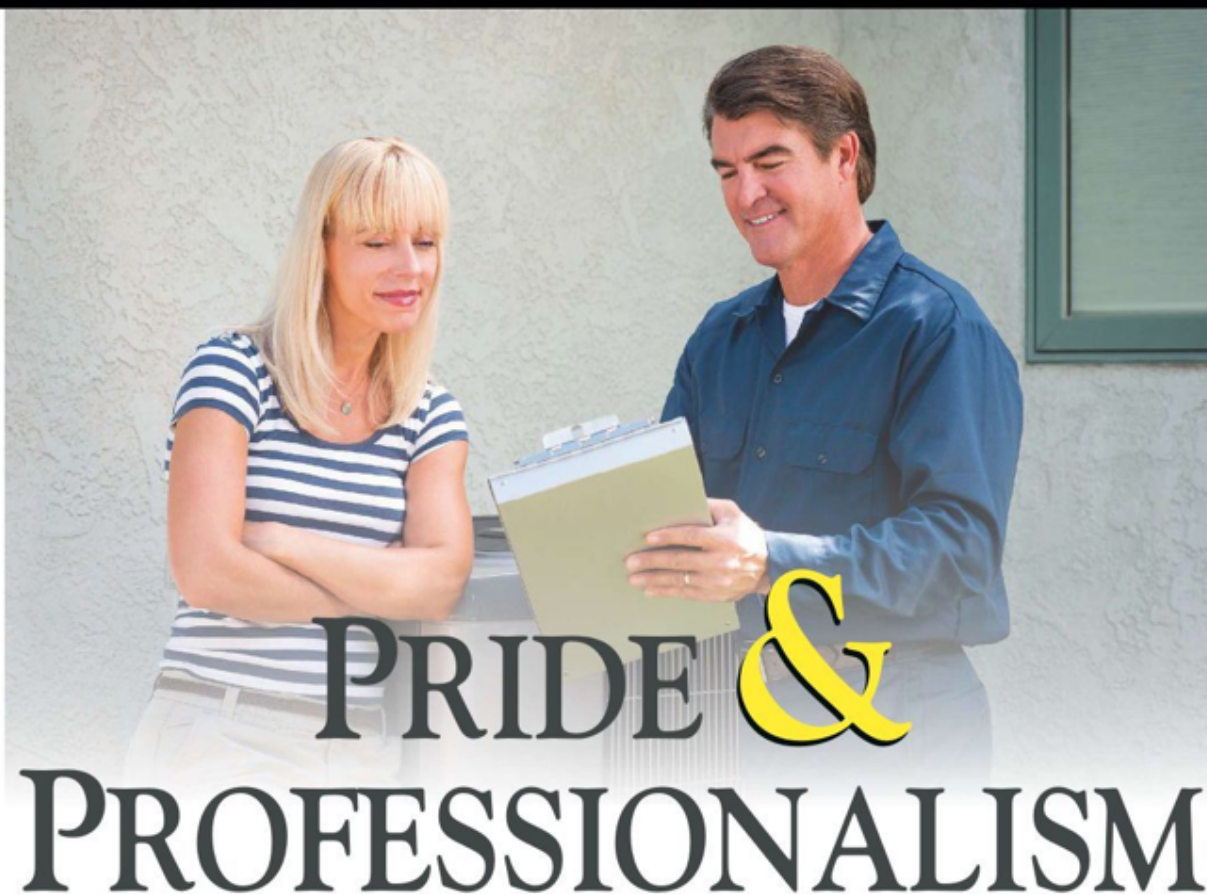


By Dan Apple, President, The Apple Group LLC

SALES & MARKETING



PRIDE & PROFESSIONALISM

As a 16 year old I worked at Fass Brothers Fish House, a local family style seafood restaurant. I was assigned duties ranging from busboy to dishwasher. After a few months I was assigned kitchen prep duty. This created some jealousy with some of my coworkers since this shift worked only in the afternoons, leaving nights free which is extremely important to any teenager...

Kitchen prep included getting the food ready to be cooked for the evening shift. One task was breading flounder that would be deep fried later that evening. It consisted of thawing the frozen fish, dipping it in a milky liquid and then breading it in a flour mix, one piece of fish at a time. Pretty boring considering we had to bread hundreds of pounds per week since this was Fass Bros' loss leader on their "all you can eat" menu. So as I am breading away, my mind totally elsewhere, suddenly the kitchen manager grabbed my hand and told me to stop. Startled, I asked what the matter was. Barbara, a woman in her 40's with lots of restaurant (and life) experiences, simply glared at me then pointed to my pan of breaded fish with an attitude of disapproval. All she said was "take a little pride." She then showed me a pan she had done,

each fish perfectly breaded and placed neatly on wax paper layers. Mine looked like I had thrown it in the pan, after a quick dip and toss in the breading mix. Of course as a know-it-all teen I said, "what's the problem, it's just breaded fish?" Barbara said, "yes, but they're my fish and since I'm in charge here you are making me look bad. You have to take a little pride in everything you do if you want to work here." After the short but powerful lesson, she promptly ordered me to re-do the half dozen 20 pound pans I had completed. Worst of all, I had to do it on my time! How could she do this to me on a Friday, knowing this would cause me to stay late and work on into the night shift? Looking back now, this was one of the most important things I could have learned for a successful business life. Being professional means "taking a little pride" in everything you do. How you look and dress, being punctual, how you communicate and the quality you put into your work is all a part of being a professional.

Perceptions and Expectations

What is your expectation when receiving professional services? How do you perceive professional providers and how they should look and act? When you go to the doctor seated in the exam room with the door shut, anxiously awaiting the doctor to pop in, what image comes to mind?

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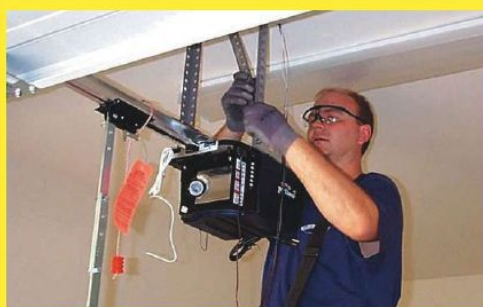
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Probably a person in a white coat, looking over your chart and asking you what seems to be the problem. Right? How about if a guy wearing shorts and a Hawaiian shirt shows up, in need of hygiene attention, what's your reaction? Yes, that may be fun to see on a TV show like Mash but not when you have a serious medical problem. If you need legal counsel, do you expect a well dressed lawyer in an upscale office or someone behind a kiosk at the mall or via a faceless website? Which would you want to represent you if you head to court? This same assumption can made for all services from restaurant servers to car wash attendants and even cashiers at the local grocery store. I'm sure you get my point. In all of these examples the common thread is your perception of the the service provider and the experience you received. Image, communication and execution is all part of the mix. As consumers we all have a perceived image of professionalism looks like. What's yours?

The garage door industry has a wide diversity of professional dealers. From owner/operator "Chuck and a truck" to mom and pop shops to large dealers with multiple locations, all facing the same challenge....how to make their company stand out and be perceived as the best place for customers to call to repair or replace their garage door. What's the secret? While it takes a lot to make a business successful including sales smarts, marketing ability, a talented staff , good equipment, an adequate facility and financial expertise just to name a few. But the overarching ingredient in the secret sauce is professionalism. Let's look at each area of the business and see how this works.

Techs

Size doesn't matter. Whether it is a one man show or a large fleet of techs, each dealer has to present a public image to the customer that is polished and professional. Why? For starters, it's a reflection of you. If you consider yourself a professional, and by definition if you are receiving payment for your services you are, you owe it to your customer to give them the highest degree of service. They expect it. From how your trucks look, to the technician at their front door to the quality of service provided on site, the customer sees the whole package. They have an image of Mr Goodwrench and it applies to any technician they interact with, not just the guy working on your car. Field techs are your company's most visible ambassadors and therefore a reflection of the owner. What kind of garage door tech would you expect to see at your house? Recently I had our air conditioning system serviced at our home in Southwest Florida by two different contractors. Company



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A was larger and advertised reasonable prices and fast service. Company B employed only word of mouth advertising and had been recommended by a neighbor. I called the first one since I figured they could get to us faster and the temperature was rising quickly inside my house. Right out of the box their tech was late for the appointment, was wearing a company tee shirt long past its expiration date, cut off shorts and a Nascar ball cap. You know where this story is going. Needless to say he blew through the problem, mis-diagnosed it and said a second tech would have to come out, perhaps even a total system replacement was needed, to which I said no thanks and called the second contractor. Company B's tech was on time, wore a nicely identified uniform, dawned booties before coming

into the house and determined the problem in a very short order. Within 30 minutes my starting capacitor was replaced and the unit was cooling our house again. The tech explained what went wrong, how he fixed it and went over the other maintenance he had performed. A professional looking bill was presented on his iPad, I signed acceptance with my finger, he swiped my credit card, emailed me the receipt and was on his way. While contractor #2 wasn't the cheapest, he created a memorable experience and made me a customer for life. Now what's the worth? Guess who I will call first the next time I need HVAC service or replacement. So what should "Mr. Doorwrench" look like?

- Clean, good personal hygiene (hair trimmed, teeth brushed, beard trimmed or clean shaven etc).
- Polite, good manners.
- Clean uniform that is in good condition. Keep extra set in truck.
- If certified, proudly display official IDEA patch on uniform.
- Company and tech's identification on uniform (or badge with photo ID).
- Wears booties to cover work shoes if entering home.
- Communicates effectively and efficiently with customer. This includes introducing himself, confirming the problem with the customer, explaining how problem will be solved and then discussing the repair / installation with the customer upon completion. Makes a point to discuss safety features.
- Cleans door and work area to leave better than when he arrived.

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- Provides invoice or work ticket that is properly and neatly documented of work performed, date and time expended and his name. Any parts used also listed with a breakdown of cost.
- Perhaps attaches his company's service decal on the door should the homeowner need further assistance.

Trucks

Ever had a work truck park in your driveway with an oil leak? No fun cleaning it up. How about when you are driving and see a work vehicle tailgating or darting from one lane to the next at a high rate of speed as if they own the road and certainly must be on their way to a fire someplace? How about a vehicle that only a faded view of the company's name or logo is visible due to the dirt caked all over it, only being able to read "wash me" scrawled on it. When you see these examples, what's your opinion of the company from which it was dispatched? A company vehicle, especially a service van or pick up truck, is a billboard on wheels. It can be a giant flag, proudly waving your brand and services in front of your customers or it can be a detriment to your business. What does a professional door truck look like?

- Good, conservative paint job, no dents or big scratches.
- Good mechanical condition (no smoking exhausts or squeezing brakes).
- Clean inside and out, including the windows.
- Company logo or signage that is professionally installed.
- A simple slogan or tag line that says what you do (i.e. Garage door sales & service). If full or partial body wrap is desired, only one that is professionally designed that reflects a simple message about your company.
- Equipment, tools and material stored neatly properly secured during transport.
- If hauling longer material, make sure safety flags are installed. When using a trailer, make sure break lights and all safety features are in good working order.

- Less is more. Avoid displaying lots of manufacturer's logos as it looks like "hanging out the wash" and does not offer a clean, professional image.
- If you are nationally accredited, display the official IDEA logo proudly but neatly.
- Most importantly, the driver must operate the vehicle with care and obey all traffic laws.

Sales People

I believe there are two basic types of people in the world. Extroverts who think everyone is interested in everything that comes out of their mouths and introverts who think nobody cares about anything they say. Both can be good sales people. But great sales people know how to be personable while practicing active listening. Customers are endeared to sales professionals that listen much and talk little. Mostly they are drawn to sales people that seem genuinely interested in solving their problem. A "door consultant" if you will. Just the same as techs and trucks, sales people are being held to the same high standards of professionalism by discerning customers willing to spend big bucks. Here's what customers expect.

- Smartly dressed, preferably with company branding (logo) on shirt or outerwear.
- Nice looking vehicle, clean inside and out and well marked. If your sales person's car looks like he or she lives in it and would get killed not by the car crash but rather from the impact of all of the flying trash and debris inside, it's time to set some new rules about vehicle cleanliness!
- Good hygiene (same as techs).
- Be honest. Don't know the answer to a customer's question? Say so, and offer to find out. Anyone can respect that. Grandma used to tell me "the truth will never hurt you". This trait is paramount in successful sale people.
- Speak professionally but on their level of understanding of the product or service needed. Do NOT use technical jargon. They sense you are talking down to them which is often a trust killer. Use terms like "track that fits to your



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“Be on time...

Not just with sales appointments but every step through the transaction, lead time, delivery “ and installation, call backs etc.

ceiling height” rather than low headroom double track - rear mounted torsion. Harry Homeowner just wants to know what time it is, not be told how to build a watch!

- To be listed to and understand their problem.
- Be on time. Not just with sales appointments but every step through the transaction, lead time, delivery and installation, call backs etc.
- Be their advocate when there is a problem (and there’s often a problem).
- Communicate timely. Keep them informed before during and after the sale.
- Follow up. When the dust settles, show up and check out the installation or service performed. Ask them what they think. If sincere, this often cements your relationship.

Office People

The perception of your company’s professionalism starts when the phone is answered. It begins with a greeting. Perhaps something like “Good morning, thanks for calling XYZ Door, how may I help you?” Or does it sound more like an abrupt “XYZ Door”? The person answering the phone is the face of the company and begins the customer experience with your company and brand. What do you want the customer’s first impression to be like? Someone who greets them with a friendly voice and interested in why they called? Or someone that seems to be in a hurry to get them off of the phone, often treating them like an interruption. While the latter is extreme I’ve seen it all too often over the years, both as a consumer and a business owner.

All of your office staff, even if it’s just you and your spouse, are in the customer service business. As a customer service representative (CSR) your first priority is to be helpful. Each

customer should feel like they are the only customer being served today and deserve your best. As another ambassador for the company, your reputation and brand depends on this moment of truth. When I was in the business of hiring for these positions, I would look for past experiences or life skills that led me to believe the applicant was a helpful and kind person by nature. Whether it was past positions, community related volunteer work or their involvement in their church, I was looking for people with “the right stuff” to help our customers when they called or showed up at facility. What do top notch CSR’s look like?

- Neatly dressed and well groomed.
- Smile when they answer the phone or greet a customer at the door.
- Get the customer’s name (and spelling) right without asking for it numerous times.
- They take really good notes.
- Assures the customer that they’ve called the right place and their problem will be solved.
- Don’t pass the buck. Rather they take ownership of the customer and their problem and follow it through to a successful resolution. From a simple spring replacement to a full door replacement, the best CSR’s makes it their business to advocate for the customer, even when collaborating with other members of their staff.
- Like sales people, really good CSR’s communicate timely. If they say they’ll call you back in two hours to update your repair request’s status, they make sure they stick to their commitment.
- They love victories. CSR’s consider a victory is when they help a customer out of a jamb or when turning an angry, dissatisfied client into a raving fan.
- They have the same traits as good hospital nurses. The best ones show you that they care and make it their job to get you well and back home. While the scope of services are vastly different from a CSR’s, the attitude is the same.

Your Place

For 28 years our dealership was in a really bad part of town. Located in a run down business district but on a main thoroughfare in Richmond, VA, and was a direct reflection of what we could afford at the time. No, Jefferson Davis Highway wasn’t exactly class A retail space but it had to work for us since it is all we had. Over the years we slowly but consistently expanded and improved our facility. We had a saying that helped justify our actions....“just because we’re on Jeff Davis Highway doesn’t mean we have to act like it”. Truly our door business, which took up the better part of a city block, was a diamond in the rough, and I mean a very rough section of town. We even remodeled part of the old building into a showroom and conventional wisdom said that affluent people would not venture to our area to look at garage doors. Turns out that wisdom meant very little. As in the film Field of Dreams, we did build it and they did come!

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So many times our customers were pleasantly surprised at the appearance of our facility and our personnel while on our campus feeling safe and well taken care of. The buildings were all the same color scheme, professionally designed and easy to read lighted signage proudly displaying our logo and the entrance clearly marked. All in a fenced, paved compound so that the customer did not feel exposed to the neighborhood and its reputation. Even special parking spaces marked "customer parking only". Did we spend a lot on the facility's image? You bet. Did it pay off? In spades! As customers, what should we see in a professional's facility, large or small?

- Clean and neat, inside and out. No exceptions.
- Sharp looking signage. It can be the latest expensive digital billboard type or a simple painted wooden sign. Either will have the same attributes, easy to read, easy to see from the road and well maintained. If lighted, make sure bulbs are constantly working. Otherwise it looks like the sign is missing teeth! Your sign is a giant business card identifying your business and its brand.
- Adequate parking.
- Clearly marked entrance with store hours posted on or near the door.
- If you are fortunate enough to have yard storage, find a way to shield it from the customer entrance.
- Once inside, air is freshened and office is well lit.
- A receptionist strategically positioned to greet customers when they enter. If staffing will not allow for that, at least a bell to ring for assistance supported by an audio or video notification to the office or warehouse staff.
- If you have a showroom, the latest styles of garage doors and openers on display with literature near each product.
- Restrooms ready to receive guests, impeccably clean and supplied.
- Some place for guests to sit if they have to wait.

**Marketing**

Marketing is how you present your brand to showcase your expert staff, great products and superior service. What should your message look like? It needs to have a consistent look with a personal appeal. Let's consider one successful marketer's approach. Delivering packaging is not glamorous. In one of the latest UPS television commercials, the entire spot is dedicated to a teenage girl anxiously waiting for her prom dress. The first, second and third dresses just do not work and have to be returned but finally just the right dress arrives in the nick of time, delivered by a smiling UPS driver. The company's name was never spoken in the spot, only a brief image of the truck and driver with the company's logo being displayed at the end. The tag line reads "returns made easy...happy prom" and the closing billboard reads United Problem Solvers instead of UPS. This is a company that understands their niche and how to invite their customers to choose them when the need arises. In the TV spot, first and foremost they're in the problem solving business, it just happens their role is one of package delivery. The garage door business is exactly the same model. We're in the access, problem solving business first, it just happens to be through marketing garage door sales and service. Does your marketing inspire and educate customers?

- Should be a reflection of the brand you are trying to build. If your brand is focused on service, reinforce it with how yours is unique. An example would be "same day service". If it's upscale products maybe the message would be "garage doors that enhance your home".
- Must always have a consistent look and feel.
- Preferably professionally produced.
- Err on the side of quality, well placed ads rather than blasting fragmented ads all over the place.
- Explain exactly how you can solve the customer's problem.
- Be personal. Give a face to the brand name. If you are willing, put the owner right out in front. Consumers like knowing who's behind the logo.
- Be upscale. Fancy discounts and cliched call to actions look cheap. Focus your message on quality and reliability.
- When there are seasonal or other advertised specials, list them on all marketing venues including online, mass and social media and printed ads. Wherever you advertise the specials should be the same and have a definite beginning and expiration date.
- Don't brag. No gimmicks or try to be cute. Just state how you can help them.

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Walk the Walk

The thread that ties all of this together is you. You are the captain of the ship. The crew follows your lead. If you want a professional organization you must set the tone. How you act, dress, communicate and behave reflects the level of professionalism you should expect. It all starts with your values and ethical standards. Not what you write down as company policy. The old parental saying of "do what I say, not as I do" does not apply here. Here's some questions in this regard to consider.

- Do your verbal and written communications with your staff, customers and vendors sound and read like what you would expect from a professional?
- Do you set the same dress code for yourself that you impose on your staff? Too relaxed may seem like you are not interested, too formal may signal aloof and detached. A good policy is to reflect what you expect.
- When counseling, supervising or interacting with your staff, how do you sound to them? Are you always laid back and informal? Do you lose your temper often in front of staff? When coaching a staff member, do you make it personal or about the problem at hand? Is it perceived as a listening and learning experience for the employee or a trip to the woodshed? Getting some honest feedback about your managerial style from a staff member may be an eye opener.
- Are you polite to everyone?
- How well do you listen? Active and engaged listening sends the message that you care about the other person.
- Are you the consummate authority on any subject (whether you need to be or not)? If you catch yourself being a bit of a know it all, stop it! Often admitting you don't know is more effective and solicits valuable input from your staff or support team.
- As the head cheerleader and ambassador for your company, what is your public image? If you are in a restaurant or going through the checkout line at the grocery store, how do you treat the folks serving you? Remember, you may be wearing logo apparel and they'll identify your company by your behavior.

Credentials

Earlier in this article I mentioned Mr. Goodwrench. It's been a great marketing campaign used by General Motors and their authorized service centers over the years. Why did it work? It's because consumers identify with credentials. An A.S.E. certified auto mechanic resonates with consumers in that industry and applies to many others. Accountants, engineers, architects, doctors, lawyers and Indian chiefs all have a common label, credentials. They had to earn this designation. The garage door industry has such a

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designation. Your business can receive a nationally accreditation from the Institute of Door Dealer Education and Accreditation. Your techs can receive professional certification status for residential, commercial or master designations. Is your dealership accredited? Are your techs certified? If not, what are you waiting for? You can find what you need in the I.D.E.A. section of this magazine or visit www.dooreducation.com. Adding credentials can only enhance your company's professionalism.

The Pay Off

Building a professional company isn't easy. It's an investment of both time, talent and money. But the payoff is huge. Proposition: in my earlier example if the guy in the shorts and Hawaiian shirt pops through the exam room door wielding a stethoscope, what you would expect to pay for his services versus the professional in the white coat? Don't get me wrong, both may give you excellent or crappy treatment, but it's your expectation that sets the bar for what you would expect to pay. When getting your car serviced do you expect to pay a higher rate at the dealership or at Bubba's Garage that looks like an old, bombed out service station? While both may fix your car, your expectations of receiving professional service reflects what you expect to pay....and that is almost always a higher rate. So why wouldn't this "pay for professionalism" concept apply to a garage door dealership? There is no reason in my estimation why it shouldn't. Business is business whether its giant UPS or even tiny Bubba's Garage, both meet the definition of professionals. It's just a matter of what they do with it. In our case, we stepped on the professionalism accelerator and never let up. The pay off was a company that started with \$400, working out of a mobile home and old bread truck, and blossomed into an eight store operation across the state of Virginia. Sure it took more than just professionalism. However it was professionalism that guided our talented staff, marketing efforts and work quality leading us to be the guy to call when garage doors or service was needed. One of my wife's favorite movies is "Pride and Prejudice". When it comes to the garage door business I would advocate pride and professionalism.



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