

The Business We Have Chosen

As we reflect on the results of last year and look forward to the new one, it's a good time to reflect on the direction of your business. What best describes the business you are in? Do you consider your company a garage door dealer that also offers service? Or are you in the customer service business that also offers garage door products? Take a minute and honestly ask yourself these two questions. What's your answer? Obviously, as a door dealer you must provide both

new products supported by service. But which is your first priority in the day-to-day operation as you field requests from customers? What I have observed after 36 years in the garage door industry is that dealers that make providing world-class customer service their first priority are the most profitable and also sell the most doors in their markets. It's the best of both worlds. Customers may not remember your company for the garage door you installed five years ago but will never forget when they called you frantic with their car was stuck inside the garage and you came running to the rescue. At that point they take on the role of being a fan of your business rather than just being a customer. Guess who they will think of first when replacement time rolls around? Providing superlative service is the best marketing you can do.

There's so much pressure to generate new door and operator sales volume. Pressure from the manufacturer, pressure from your installers and sales people but most of the pressure we put on ourselves as the owner. Big volume is king, right? Or so we might think. Yes, it often allows you to purchase product at a lower price and perhaps get better freight cost considerations but a lot of why we put so much emphasis on volume stems from our own business ego. In our zest to pump up the volume and become the largest door dealer in the area, we often forget that service is the primary reason the phone rings. They can buy a garage door at the big box store but can they get the same level of service and expertise you offer as an industry professional? No way. Now don't get me wrong, we all need to sell new doors, generate sales volume and aspire to grow our businesses. Selling tons of garage doors and openers is great just as long as service is your first priority in my view.

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Positively Outrageous Service

Years ago T. Scott Gross was a keynote speaker at an IDAExpo™ that I attended. Scott was in the chicken business. Specifically, he was in the Church's Chicken business in a very small Texas town. His powerful message was filled with entertaining stories and jokes and held everyone's attention for the hour or so that he spoke. In a nutshell he said that anyone can sell fast food, but not everyone can do it while providing what he called "Positively Outrageous Service" (P.O.S.). Scott told stories of ways that he trained his staff to not just serve the food but serve the customer. They specialized in going above and beyond what was expected when they "screwed up" a customer's order. One example was when a mistake was made with a take out order. The chicken was cold and one of the sides ordered was left out. The manager came over personally, apologized profusely and not only remade the order himself but provided more food than was ordered, threw in dessert and also gave the customer a coupon for a free meal the next time they visited Church's. The purpose was twofold, first to take care of the customer and second to get them talking about their experience. Scott defines it this way, "Positively Outrageous Service is random and unexpected, out of proportion to the circumstances and when it is done well creates compelling word of mouth advertising." Scott understood that selling chicken was his goal but selling service was how he would get there.

People want to buy from businesses that make them feel good. It's more than selling garage doors and service. Your job is to make the buying experience enjoyable. As Scott would put it, your goal is to make your customers say "Wow" after they have used your service. It takes a lot of work but the rewards are too great to ignore.

Creating the Culture

How do you move from offering good service to great service? It takes a lot. However the first thing required is *your commitment*. You have to make it the central goal of your organization and demand that every employee put serving customers first. From the moment the phone rings to the time the invoice is sent, all of your team needs to be on board. The commitment by you and all of your staff easily boils down to this, treat your customers as you would want to be treated. I know the Golden Rule is probably an overused parallel but I cannot find any easily remembered phrase or cliché that offers a more succinct and accurate description of what it takes to thrive at the customer service game. Beyond achieving this mindset, there are other logistical things you will need to put in place in order to ratchet up your customer service efforts.



Be Prepared

Any good coach will tell you that it is better to be prepared and not have an opportunity to perform than to have an opportunity and not be prepared. This is especially true with customer service.

Staffing – When the phone rings and a customer needing garage door service is on the line, how does your organization handle it? Are they treated like they are special or do they get the "hot-potato" treatment? Can everyone that answers your phone provide on the spot customer service and handle the call professionally or does the customer get bounced around? Having people in your office that have the right attitude and proper training makes all of the difference. Many door dealers consider these positions as strictly overhead expense and try to keep their expenses for their wages as low as possible. When that is the case, what kind of customer service will they give? Moreover, what message does that send to the staff? All employees but especially the receptionist, inside sales / customer service reps, dispatcher and any other front line personnel that interact with customers, should be considered as part of your sales and marketing efforts and compensated accordingly. They should be well trained and reflect the company's mission of providing top-drawer service. To see how your organization measures up, hire a few secret shoppers and have them call in and request service. Their experience should let you know how customers are really being served by your staff. Hopefully it is how you would want to be served.

Communication – The cornerstone of superlative customer service is being good at communicating. In the garage door business, especially when it comes to fielding repair and service requests, it is critical. Here are a few examples.

- **Answer the phone with a smile.** Your front line personnel are the face of your business. This initial contact is

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often the first big step in forging a lasting relationship with your customer. First impressions are lasting ones, so make them count.

- **Ask, don't tell.** When booking a service (or installation) appointment, make sure to ask the customer their preference rather than just assuming your first available will do. Once a date is agreed upon, be careful to explain the window of time your tech will arrive, being careful to respect the customer's time.
- **Call to confirm.** In our busy lives it's easy to let things on our calendar slip by and a friendly reminder is always appreciated. An essential operating procedure is calling to confirm the next day's service appointment. Your customer will appreciate the effort and it may save a wasted trip. If for some reason your tech will be late getting there, it is imperative that you contact your customer with as much notice as possible. Another good practice is to have your techs phone the customer when they are in route.
- **Follow up on service.** Routinely your staff (or you) should follow up with a phone call or email to your customer and just ask how everything went with the service request. It takes hardly any time to do this but the good will and customer service capital created is invaluable.
- **Handling problems.** The mechanical and labor intensive nature of what we do for a living almost guarantees that there will be problems and set backs in the process of filling the customer's order. When these situations arise, and they often do, the customer is more concerned about how you handle the problem than the problem itself. Jump all over it. Take an offensive position when tackling the problem and keep your customer informed throughout the process. Even when the news you deliver is not what the customers want to hear, do not delay in calling them. You would rather have a well-informed customer that is disappointed than one that is in the dark. When circumstances call for it, make concessions. Do everything reasonable to restore your customer's faith in your service. Often a small discount or free goods will go a long way. The bottom line is to act quickly, decisively and never let problems fester. Remember, people pay more attention to what you do than what you say.
- **Build a history.** Great customer service organizations take ownership of their customers' problems. In the garage door business it is your job to know what equipment a customer has and keep track of the service performed. So when they call you can tell them what has been done to their door rather than them telling you. This will instill confidence and streamline the process of responding to their service requests. Most of the business application software used today has the ability to add an equipment list



- inside the customer's file, which can be readily accessed. If you are not currently gathering this information you are not tapping a valuable resource. Your techs should be trained to document garage door systems brands, serial numbers and descriptions so that this data can be input for future use. A service history is a valuable thing, especially when there's a question about what repairs have been done and when. It's also a great tool for your sales people when the time comes to consider replacement and is essential if you offer a planned maintenance program. More about that later.
- **Debrief techs.** Make it a daily practice to talk to your techs about each service ticket and what work was performed. This will help with documenting the work done, knowing how to charge for it and reduce the possibility of additional work needed being overlooked. It also allows your tech to vent or brag, which is good either way.
 - **Know the Playbook** – Giving great service requires knowing your company's capabilities. Everyone that helps a customer over the phone should be able to quote basic prices for repair work, maintenance and even standard garage doors and openers. When requesting service the customer has two basic questions. "When can you do it and how much will it cost?" Anyone answering your company's phone should be able to answer those questions rather than passing the customer around, making them spend more than a minute on hold. Of course this will require ongoing training and interoffice communication. While you may have one main scheduler or dispatcher, the rest of the staff needs to know what the service schedule is every day and have the freedom to schedule accordingly.
 - **Same day service.** This is easy to say but tough to pull off sometimes. But it starts with you making this a central strategy of your service program. Of course it is not always possible to provide service the same day, however you

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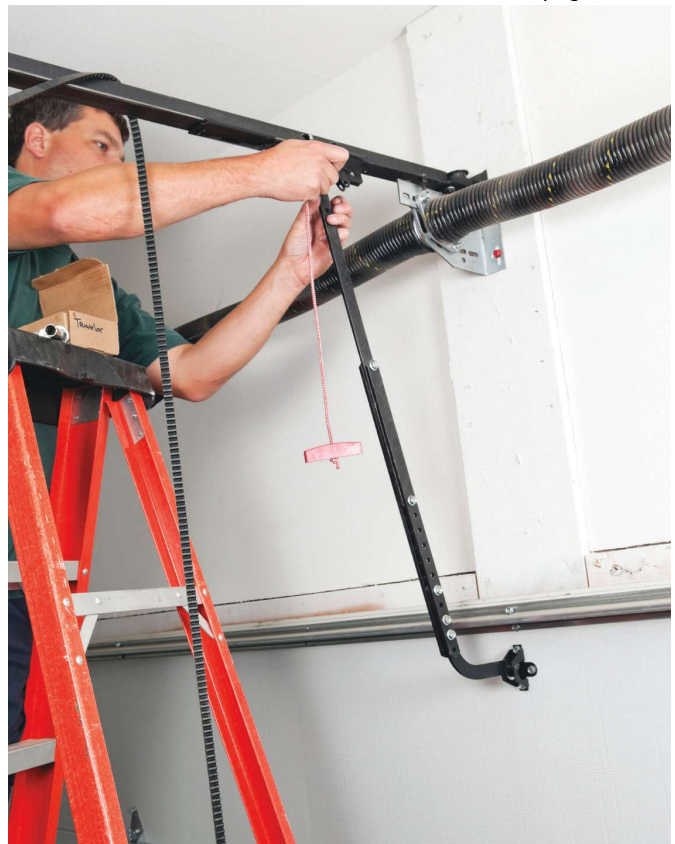
will be amazed what can be accomplished if you make it a priority. Think of your service department as a triage unit. As requests are taken they are prioritized so that the most urgent problems move to the top of the order while less pressing repair requests are scheduled within normal lead times. Requests such as broken springs, cars trapped, security issues would all be given same day treatment. This will require flexibility in your schedule and a dispatcher that is on the ball.

- **All hands on deck.** When it comes to providing service at this level, all of your field techs need to be ready to serve. Door dealers typically have designated service techs that only do repair work. But what happens when their schedule is full and you get a call saying that the garage door just fell to the floor? Being good at service requires covering more territory with the resources you have. To do this, your designated installers must understand that they too are in the service business first and may be called upon at anytime to rush to the rescue. Yes, I know that after doing a full day of installation work the last thing your techs want to hear is that they are being dispatched to a repair call. However, in almost all of these instances the tech will be the first one to admit that it felt good getting the customer out of a jam. Look at it this way, if you have 6 installers and each one took one service call a day you would be able to respond to 30 more service requests each week. Consequently, if an average service call yields \$100, you would add \$3,000 a week or \$156,000 a year to your sales with very high profit margins. Those same techs that grumble about doing service work will thank you when it comes to bonus time. So have your installers ready their truck with parts needed to respond to a repair request the next time they are called upon.
- **Flat rate repairs.** Most service in the garage door business is performed and charged on a time and material basis. But when it comes to residential garage door service, there are many basic repairs that are common. Spring replacements, circuit boards, gear assemblies, etc. Quoting a customer a fixed price for the repair is easier to accept and understand than the unknown of T & M. I am an advocate of offering flat rate repairs, which incidentally, are often more profitable than the T & M method.
- **After hours service.** This is another challenge that is necessary for having a world-class service program. Most door dealers advertise 24/7 emergency service, but many do only a mediocre job of following through. It's hard to be a little bit pregnant...either you offer and perform the service or you don't. Top-drawer service companies answer the bell every time. When a customer calls with an urgent request after hours, they get a live person that can understand their problem and send someone to help. The logistics required to support after hours service are considerable. At a minimum you need an on call dispatcher and at least one service tech. A good third party answering service is okay but someone from your organization would be much better. Never hide behind voicemail when it comes to service. After hours calls, during business hours or whenever, customers want to talk to real people and most are willing to pay a premium for it when it is truly an emergency situation. As for the tech, I would suggest having a primary and back up on

call every day. I would discourage having your tech act as the dispatcher also. Asking your staff to perform this service is significant. Being on call cuts into their personal time off and therefore these folks should be compensated accordingly. Perhaps a flat fee per week just for being "on call". If techs are dispatched to perform repair work they should be compensated for it at premium rates such as double time or time and a half. Doing all of this is expensive so do not be bashful about charging your customer accordingly.

- **Extended hours.** Another way to serve more customers is to extend your daytime hours. Maybe offer service at regular rates until 6:00 PM three days a week. Or perhaps offer half-day Saturday service by appointment, especially for repeat customers. This will send a signal that you respect your customer's busy schedule and are prepared to be flexible with yours. As mentioned before, you will be serving both your customers and your bottom line in the process.
- **Planned Maintenance.** Does your HVAC service provider call to remind you when seasonal service is due at your home? If he runs a tight ship he does. The HVAC industry understands the importance of planned maintenance and the better contractors have top-notch PM programs. In addition to providing much needed mechanical maintenance, the burden of remembering to do it is removed from the homeowner's busy to-do list. This value added service is a win-win for the customer and the contractor. Garage door dealers that are serious about their service business get it and have robust PM programs. They manage the data already in their computer system to market

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this program to new and existing customers. Typically the fee is modest but it assures the dealer of being in the customer's home at least once a year. It is also guaranteed work that can be done when times are slow or used to fill in your schedule at your discretion. In addition to prolonging the life of the door and opener, PM work affords yet another chance to offer additional product or service to your customers. Maybe even a neighbor will see the truck and ask for service on the spot. Planned maintenance is another way to provide "Positively Outrageous Service". Don't believe it? Watch what happens when you call the customer unsolicited to remind them that their garage door system is overdue for service. Most customers will say "wow", which is the ultimate goal of P.O.S.

Performing Onsite

Up to now we've only discussed preparation and logistics needed to provide world-class service. Now let us examine how our techs should perform while at the customer's home or jobsite.

Techs are a reflection of you - Your techs are ambassadors for your company. They should reflect your company's values and brand. First and foremost, as a person they need to be helpful by nature and get a charge out of solving problems for people. Secondly, they need to be friendly, courteous and look the part. Sharp looking trucks, clean, well-identified uniforms and properly groomed technicians help build your company's image in the mind of the customer. Perhaps even an employee photo I.D. badge. Then there is the work itself. Performing garage door repairs should go beyond fixing the obvious problem. Addressing the cause is also important. In addition, each service call should be used as an opportunity to inspect the customer's door and opener, document the particulars for future reference and provide maintenance as needed. Always perform the UL325 test when there is an operator involved and document the results. The job is not finished until the tech spends a few minutes discussing what caused the problem, what work was performed and the overall condition of the door. Customers appreciate this. They also notice the little things. So leave the garage cleaner than you found it. Clean away cobwebs from the photo-



eyes, wipe away excessive lubricant and set the customers Homelink for them. The tech should work steadily once on site being careful never to appear to be rushing or just going through the motions. It is sort of like going to the doctor. You want to think that the doc is generally interested in your problem and is eager to solve it. So each tech should consider himself a door doctor!

Sales people provide service too – Customer service is not limited to your service department. Your sales staff needs to understand that they are a big part of your company's service culture. Calling ahead to confirm the day of the sales appointment, being on time (or even better 5 minutes early), providing the quote and product information quickly and being respectful of the customer's time are things that promote good service. One of the best things a sales person can do is LISTEN. Let the customer fully explain what they need before you jump in with all of your vast garage door knowledge. It's the polite and smart thing to do while allowing you time to think before you speak, which is always in the best interest of the seller. Just like your techs, sales people need to reflect your company's image and culture. Your sales reps should be well spoken, neatly dressed, properly groomed and mentally ready to meet with your customer. Being prepared with product samples, brochures, color swatches and perhaps even an iPad for visuals will put the presentation right into the customer's hand. A clean, well-marked vehicle in the driveway is also essential. The most important skill a sales person can add to his or her customer service game is communication. Great sales people are great communicators. Keep your customer informed throughout the buying process, especially remembering to follow up after the installation is complete. Customers appreciate your interest and follow up. It also gives you an opportunity to offer additional products or ask for a referral. Make it a point to just show up immediately after the job is finished and ask your customer about his opinion of your product and service. This will only strengthen the sales relationship by sending the message that the company cares about its customers. People want to do business with people they like and respect. A professional sales person uses customer service skills to meet those expectations.

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Don't disrespect Call-Backs – Of all the requests you receive for service, the one that causes the most consternation is warranty call-backs. Often they are considered a drain on the organization and take a back seat in the scheduler's list of priorities. The perception is that every minute expended going back for warranty work is a dead loss. In reality it is quite the opposite. Door dealers that provide superior service embrace these opportunities. They consider it of utmost importance to pounce on these problems in order to reinforce the customer's trust. My company looked at it as quickly healing a "black eye" that's out there for the customer to see. Treat call-backs like any other service request and prioritize accordingly. Sometimes all that is needed is a return visit by your sales person to educate the customer about the product and how it works. The point is to act swiftly and decisively when there is a product or service defect.

Service Request Case Study

Let's examine the flow of how a repair request is handled by a busy garage door dealer who provides first class service.

1. A previous customer calls at 9:00 AM and reports one of their home's garage doors is stuck in down position.
2. Customer Service Rep (CSR) listens to customer's description of the problem while pulling up their account in the computer system and begins to look at the type of equipment in place and its service history.
3. CSR quickly scans the daily schedule while asking the customer when would be a convenient day/time to schedule their service appointment, all the while seeing how it could possibly be inserted into today's schedule.
4. Since a car is trapped inside, the customer requests same day service if possible. The CSR explains that the schedule is full but she will try to work their request in during the work day but offers a fall back position of after hours service, at stepped up rates of course.
5. CSR places service request in a "stand by" status which identifies it as a repair that should be worked in if there is a cancellation or opening in the schedule of any kind.
6. At 1:00 PM the CSR contacts the customer and let's them know that there is no opening yet but she will touch base before the day is out to see if the customer will want after hours service if nothing else is available.
7. At 3:00PM one of the installers calls into to the dispatcher to report that his job for the day is complete and is headed to the shop. Dispatcher let's CSR know that he has a man available and the tech is dispatched to the "stand by" repair call. CSR sends driving directions, equipment information and service history to the tech via text or email so he'll have an idea of what to expect. CSR confirms with customer that tech is in route. She also provides the tech's name and an idea of his experience level.
8. Tech arrives at site, making sure not to block the driveway so the other garage door is accessible to the homeowner.



- He notices that the newspaper is still in the driveway, retrieves it and goes to the front door. He identifies himself and asks the homeowner to meet him in the garage. The tech does not walk through the home unless absolutely necessary and if so will provide covers for his shoes or removes them completely before entering the home.
9. Once inside the garage tech asks the customer to describe what happened. As he listens to the customer he is observing the condition of the door and sizing up how to approach the repair.
 10. In this case the problem was caused by the cable slipping off of the drum causing the door to go out of level and bind during closing. Tech then corrects the problem by

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leveling and rebalancing the door being careful to see if he can spot what caused the problem. He notices a broom handle next to the garage door that had slipped into the track area as the door closed which caused the door to bind.

11. In addition to repairing the problem the tech services the garage door and opener, using the company's standard 20 point inspection. Once complete he performs the UL325 reversing test and documents the results of the test and the overall condition of the door and opener.
12. Tech then cleans the area around the garage door where he was working and wipes down the door for hand prints or excess lubricant.
13. Finally, the tech spends a few minutes discussing what caused the problem, what fix was required and how to avoid the problem in the future. He also shares with the customer the inspection and test and provides them a copy of the documentation, making sure to get the customer's signature (whenever possible) to acknowledge the results. He provides some door safety education and reminds the customer about the need for periodic testing. He also provides the customer with a pamphlet that showcases all of his company's products and services.
14. Tech then prepare the invoice, collects the payment and asks if he can answer any questions, having none, the tech marks the customer's copy of the invoice paid and leave the site.
15. Upon returning to the shop the tech turns in his paperwork to the dispatcher and discusses the particulars of the service call. Data is entered into the customer's equipment history file.
16. The next day the CSR calls customer (or emails) and asks how the service went. At that point the CSR explains that there is no history of routine maintenance being performed and offers to add the customer to the company's PM program and provide annual maintenance. CSR again thanks customer for their business and reminds them of the company's 24/7 emergency service should the need arise. Customer agrees and file is noted and a confirmation email is sent.
17. One year later a post card or email is sent to remind customer that service is due. If no reply is received within 10 days, a follow up phone call is placed.

As you can see, providing superior service is not easy. It requires practice, patience, evaluation, failure, reflection and the willingness to make changes to the process when needed. You really have to work at it. But when you get it right your customers will be fans for life. How much is that worth to your bottom line? A lot. There is no secret that service is the pinnacle of profit margins in the garage door industry. In addition to providing cash flow, it directly



feeds into your replacement sales, which are also higher margin products. Having a quality service business is the best possible foundation for a lucrative door dealership. It weathers economic downturns better, provides more stable employment and is a source of constant demand. Of course it cannot replace the dollar volume of new products sales but it certainly acts as a firm foundation for more speculative sales efforts to stand upon.

Summary

Whether you classify your company as a door dealer, distributor, franchisee or whatever, if you are to become the best and most profitable in your market you will consider yourself in the service business first. As a door dealer you are providing your time and talent to provide access for your customers; access that just happens to be through the garage door. Now that more and more people use their garage as the default entrance to their home, how important is this access point when it is blocked? As a professional you are providing a vital service that encompasses safety, security and street appeal. The true door professional understands that he is selling solutions while his competition is selling "stuff". All solutions begin with providing high quality customer service. That's really the business we have chosen.



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