**Remember to Remind Your Service Customers They are Important**

Even When Your Service Department is Busy

 ***By Valerie Ziebron***

Summer is the busiest time of year for most marine service departments. Many days, your service team is doing the best they can to keep their heads above water. With an endless stream of tasks and requests, summer service customers can start to look almost the same, when your service team sees so many of them every day. The problem is that the perception of the 'generic customer with a problem' can be projected directly toward that customer who is standing on the other side of the desk waiting for service. How do you think that customer feels when he or she is treated like a number or just another person who wants something from the service team? How can you help your service team avoid making your customers feel like they are annoying and just another ticket to add to an already large work order pile?

   The nature of the service department can make it challenging to achieve great customer satisfaction. It is often noisy, chaotic and out of the comfort zone for many customers. Phones are ringing, technicians are working, delivery people are constantly coming and going with forms to sign, etc. These reasons and more make it imperative for the service staff to excel at delivering friendly and professional customer service. It is not enough to tell your service team to do a better job. Here are some actions your whole team can incorporate into their daily routine that create a positive customer experience and have a direct impact on improving overall customer satisfaction.

**Consider the tone and volume of your voice.**

If it is loud in the shop, be sure to speak at a volume that allows the customers to head and understand what you are saying. However, it's important to be very careful of the tone of voice, both on the phone and in person, as it could sound like yelling.

**Greet everyone with a smile.**

Even if your service team is busy with someone else or on the phone, acknowledge a new customer with a quick smile letting them know someone will be with them shortly.

**Practice good eye contact and pleasant facial expressions.**

    Nod your head in agreement when a customer is speaking, lean forward slightly and be aware of your body language.

**If your computer or work station forces you to turn away from the customer, be sure to face them frequently to 'check in' with them.**

**Put yourself in the customers' shoes and work on empathy statements.**

     If this is difficult for you, repeat back what the customer says to clarify what they are saying.

**Make effort to make the customer comfortable.**

This may mean talking to them outside near their boat rather than in the service department. Get out from behind your desk to stand next to them when possible.

**Stay calm.** If you appear stressed, or overwhelmed, it will impact your customer service in a negative manner.

**When discussing anything technical, be sure to use language that the customer understands.**

This may require visuals or analogies. Again, using the customer's boat as a visual, may help to clarify technical questions.

**Always thank the customer for waiting, for being helpful in describing the boat's condition, and finally for their business.**

 Thank you notes are also an excellent way to build customer satisfaction. The combination of a verbal and written thank you can really boost a customer's opinion of your business.

     Remember, customers want to service their boats with a dealership they know, like and trust. It's the people behind the actual service who ultimately make that lasting impression, more than the appearance or sounds of the shop. If a customer feels important, welcome and comfortable, they will return again and again, sometimes even despite long wait times for the finished product. Observe your service team and see if you can determine how the customer feels as they are received in your shop. Is it time to make a few changes? Implementing the small actions listed above can make a big difference.