**Are You Confident with Your Service Department's Ability to Properly Diagnose Problems?**

***By Valerie Ziebron***

Your dealership's service department plays a critical role in keeping your customers happy. Once the initial sale is complete, it's the job of the service department to step in and hold your customer's hands as they learn what it means to own a boat. Inevitably, there will come a time when each customer has a reason to call on the service department, be it for regular maintenance or unexpected issues, it is the latter of these two reasons that can really make or break a "customer for life" relationship and it all starts with a proper diagnosis.

The ability to properly diagnose a problem is vital for both customer satisfaction and profitability. For many customers, a misdiagnosed problem is almost always perceived as the technician's fault. However, misdiagnosis is often a problem that is caused by support roles.

Below is a list of a few areas you may want to check within your service department as well as some tips that can help your service team properly diagnose the problem during the customer's first visit.

**A proper write up is critical for an accurate diagnosis.** A good write-up starts with good listening skills. Make sure your service team is listening to the customers, asking clarifying questions and documenting the customer's concerns. Even though it can be tempting, it's important that service team members do not attempt to diagnose on the dime. One good way for them to avoid this is to start work order lines with the words: "customer states..."

**Dispatch is the key to getting the right tech to look at the boat.** It may help to have a 'dispatch guide' that lays out the areas in which each technician is specifically skilled. It is also important to make sure that your techs are comfortable telling you or someone else on your management team if a job is outside their skill set.

**It can be very helpful to look at the boat's history.** If a repeat service customer comes in, looking at their boat's service history often gives many clues that can help to diagnose the issue correctly. The history can be attached to the work order if a computer is not easily accessible for the techs.

**Reading the entire work order is important.** The first thing a tech should do is to read the entire work order - not just the lines assigned to them. There may be other concerns that are linked to the root issue that appear throughout the work order.

**Be thoughtful and take the necessary time.** Make sure your service team schedules enough time to properly diagnose and follow the proper diagnosis procedures. Even customers who are in a hurry can appreciate the time it takes to do a job the right way.

**Duplicate the problem.** In order to properly diagnose an issue, your technicians need to know how to duplicate the problem. This sometimes requires running the boat on the water. Again, taking the necessary time and steps comes into play here. And if your techs don't have enough information to duplicate the concern, the customer should be contacted for additional information.

**Ask for help.** Do your techs feel comfortable asking their fellow techs for help? If not, it might be a good idea to cultivate an environment where they do feel comfortable asking for help. Usually, a service department has a wide variety of skill levels and working as a team can result in a proper diagnosis.

**A second trip may be required.** It is important to note that in some situations the repair may require a second trip. Make sure your service team is honest and upfront with the customers. This approach can build credibility as well as educate the customer as to exactly what is happening with the boat.

Having reliable, skilled technicians on your service team is arguably one of the strongest competitive advantages of your dealership. Their ability to diagnose problems right the first time will only strengthen your customers trust in your service department and keep them coming back for years.