

Take Down the Great Wall Between Departments

By Valerie Ziebron

Ideally each department would work together for common dealership goals, but all-too-often conflict arises when we are trying to do our different jobs in sales, service, parts and accessories. It's up to management to use each squabble as an opportunity to strengthen our internal processes, clarify our communications and remind everyone that the customer-in-the-middle is important to all.

Can you imagine if each employee simply told the customer what they wanted to hear?

“Yes, we can deliver the boat by the weekend.”

“Sure, we have the parts.”

“No, there won't be any additional costs.”

It wouldn't be long before we'd have some very unhappy customers on our hands! As crazy as that sounds, many stores find themselves doing battle over the same issues time and again because people are doing what is easy instead of what is right. Each instance causing more strife and grief between co-workers and departments. And each one re-writing what is an acceptable way to do business. The line keeps getting pushed. And it will until management clearly communicates what, why and how our departments will do business with each other.

Look at what each department needs from the others to succeed. Here you will often find the areas that need extra attention including:

- Scheduling rigging
- Pricing rigging or accessories
- Educating customers on maintenance needs and costs
- And more...

Recently a savvy manager realized his dealership was creating unhappy customers and internal strife between departments because of the way sales was selling repowers. From the sales professional's perspective, they were selling new motors and still saving the customers money. From the service perspective, sales was setting them up to look bad and fail. The fight could have been on! Instead, the dealer took the helm and clarified the issue and the mission to everyone with a memo similar to this...

Memo: Repowering Considerations

Hi Team –

We all want to give our customers the best price but giving them the best value is more important. Something may be less expensive but if it keeps them from being able to enjoy their boat, it isn't worth it!

Recently, we have had various customers complain after having us repower their boats. In each case, the problem stems from using existing older rigging components including:

- Ignition switch
- Main engine harness
- Gauges and gauge harness
- Fuel system components
- Battery and selector switch

From the customer's perspective, they just spent thousands of dollars – or are still making payments on a boat that doesn't run shortly after we worked on it. This puts our dealership in the difficult position of having to ask the customer for more money or to goodwill the work even though it isn't really our fault.

Everyone can help in explaining upfront to the customer how critical it is to upgrade their rigging with new components when they re-power. The investment upfront will keep them on the water and keep our dealerships reputation strong.

If you have any questions or suggestions, I welcome your input.

Thanks,

Denny Dealer

Notice the positive tone of the memo. It's not publicly humiliating anyone or taking sides. It oozes empathy and puts the focus on helping the customer and the dealership. It clearly explains what has been happening, why it is hurting everyone and how we should avoid the issue moving forward. Management now has a powerful tool to coach and hold everyone accountable moving forward. The team knows exactly what you expect.

Whether you use e-mails, memos, meetings or one-to-one communication – the choice is up to your personal style and what you think will be best received by the people involved. The key is to do it! One of the wisest managers I ever had the opportunity to work with put it simply "You can't communicate enough."

The better we communicate internally, the better we are able to communicate with our customers.