

TRADE OF HEAVY VEHICLE MECHANIC

PHASE 2

Module 1

Induction/Customer Care/Bench Fitting/Welding

UNIT: 3

Customer Care

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Aims and Objectives

By the end of this unit each apprentice will be able to:

- Recognise internal and external customers
- Identify the importance of customer retention
- Liaise with other members of staff to help resolve customer issues
- Identify when a matter needs to be referred to a higher level of authority or another area of enquiry

1.0 Business and Customer Awareness Terms

1.1 Business Terminology

Business terminology is the words or ‘jargon’ used by people in business or financial transactions. Here we are only concerned with those words or terms that specifically relate to the service department of the automotive workshop.

1.2 First Word, Business

The first word in the commercial arena is the word ‘business’. The purpose of ‘business’ is to make profit. A business concern is a group of persons, men and women, of varying ages, experience and degrees of skill, all working together to a common purpose.

1.3 Automotive Firm

An automotive firm is a business that deals in automobiles and their ancillary services. It is usually an independent retail outlet that sell and service motor vehicles. Some may only do one or the other. So, a business is a venture that is created for the sale of goods e.g. cars, accessories etc. and services e.g. vehicle servicing/valeting etc.

1.4 Ownership of the Business/Firm

The owner/s who may or may not be the working managers of the business/firm has invested money in the business. It is always their right to withdraw this money (close down or sell the business), remember, the purpose of conducting a business is to make a profit.

1.5 Management

Management is often said to be the ‘art of directing human activities’. The task of the manager of any business is to provide direction, supervision and co-ordination of the efforts of the individuals that work in that business to the common purpose.

1.6 A Definition of a Customer

A customer is person who is engages in ‘consumer behaviour’. Consumer behaviour is the selection, purchasing and use of products and services. The customer is someone to do business with’. However, it is the customer who has the choice to select the product or service on offer; it is the customer who has the choice of purchasing that or any other product or service on offer. Also, remember, it is once again the customer who has the choice to use any product or service on offer

1.7 The Objectives of the Motor Trade Retailer

By now you appreciate that the purpose of the business venture is to make profit. To achieve this, the Motor Trade Retailer has a principal objective of (a), having vehicles, service facilities, spare parts and accessories available for sale and (b), ensuring the safety and comfort of the customers that use the vehicles or avail of the services on offer. The profits are used to provide a stable income for the employees and owners.

2.0 Organisational Chart for an Automotive Company

2.1 The Organisational Structure Chart

Any business, no matter how small, has to have different divisions or departments in its organisation. The layout of this is can be shown on an organisational structure chart. Such a chart shows the function and reporting structure of all the persons working with the firm including;

- Who and where the leadership decisions are made, e.g. Management of the firm
- Who and where the customer interaction takes place, e.g. Sales, Service manager, Stores etc.
- Who and where the administration (i.e. financial control) is carried out, e.g. Accounts, invoices (bills), wages etc.
- Who or where any practical work is carried out, e.g. Service dept. personnel.

2.2 Service for Sale

In the motor vehicle workshop, the method of business for the firm is to buy the time of the employees (the service repair personnel) and sell this time to the customers as the time required to service or repair their vehicles. Therefore each hour has to be accounted for. The staffs that are being paid for eight hours work in a day in the service dept. are expected to furnish that department with eight hours of saleable work.

2.3 Costs and Expenditures of a Motor Trade Retailer

The firm or company has much more expenditure than the wages of its personnel to pay each week/year. It has 'fixed' and 'flexible' costs. Money must be available at all times for the 'fixed' costs. 'Flexible' costs are possible optional expenses that may change as the amount of money available changes.

2.4 Fixed Costs of a Motor Business

The ‘fixed’ costs of a business are costs that must be paid every week, customers or no customers. Sometimes these are very visible e.g. new buildings, all glass fronted showrooms, new technical equipment, wages for all employees, management /owners or possible shareholders, etc. but sometimes these may not be so visible e.g. cost of land/site, repayment of bank loans, rising bank interest rates, ground rental, local utility charges, e.g. water and waste disposal, insurance and environmental safety, heating and cleaning, supporting administration staff and offices.

2.5 Flexible Costs of a Motor Business

The ‘flexible’ expenditure of a business may include building and equipment maintenance, possible employee bonus schemes, advertising and business promotion, customer support facilities e.g. courtesy cars and waiting area facilities, customer follow up etc.

2.6 Reporting Structure

The firm or company will indicate the recommended lines or channels of communication between individuals in the firm. In the service department, the apprentice reports to the workshop foreman or service manager who will assign tasks and work arrangements. They, in turn report to the service department manager who, in turn, may report to a general manager.

2.7 Company Ethos

All business firms/companies of all types and sizes have an ‘ethos’ or ‘corporate culture’. This can be described as the values or broad beliefs that affect decisions made by the management and staff on behalf of that firm. This ‘culture’ may be positive or ‘negative’, but the decisions and actions that are made or carried out by staff members are influenced by these underlying or ‘core’ values.

2.8 The ‘Observable’ Positive Ethos of a Company

Some garages/companies may have a strong and positive ethos towards excellence and professionalism and this is noticeable as a ‘positive culture’. This is what you and obviously, customers may observe as the positive things that are seen and heard as you walk around the premises either as an employee or visitor. You will see, e.g. people dress neatly, behave in a positive manner to each other etc. and you will hear people talk ‘up’, i.e. talk positively about all aspects of the company, its service and personnel, and events of daily life etc.

2.9 The 'Observable' Negative Ethos of a Company

A firm may also have a strong ethos or culture that may fail to appreciate the efforts of its employees or in some cases the value of each and every customer. In the worst case scenario, the ethos here may be financial gain at all costs. Employees may not reflect an outward positive image of their own or their fellow compatriots appreciated worth/value as a member of the company 'team'.

2.10 The Importance of a Positive Ethos/Culture

The 'culture' of the firm is its overall 'personality'. Where this is positive, staff sees themselves as members of a successful team. Decisions and actions are based on the shared values and successful interpersonal relationships. You as the new apprentice should feel accepted and appreciated as the new member of the service department team. All customers, irrespective of any misconceptions that may develop by either party, are appreciated equally.

2.11 The Mission Statement

A 'mission statement' is a special sentence or small group of sentences that a company or firm will write and then use in a public manner to indicate, (a) the industry that the firm operates in, (b) customers and products that it intends to serve and where this will be carried out, and most importantly for the employees, a description of the underlying 'philosophy' of the firm.

2.12 What is meant by Underlying 'Philosophy'?

This is a sentence printed by the firm that gives a guide to the employees and customers alike as they make decisions. For example, it may say, "We will be the leading service department in the country". Contained in this statement is an intention by the firm to provide top quality service to its customers. When a customer see this, they will expect all service tasks will be correct at first attempt, no "take it away and try it out" here! No returns for second attempt to solve that engine misfire! No dirty overalls, oil/grease soiling internally or externally on the customer's vehicle!

2.13 The Mission Statement

The mission statement gives a public indication by the employer of the level of technical expertise that is required from all employees of that firm to both the employees and customers. This should be reflected in the image portrayed by individual employees either between themselves or in public to the customers. Should this service not meet the customer's expectations, they will always have the opportunity for legal redress.

3.0 The Relevance of Customers to the Company

3.1 The Customer

The most important person in any business is the customer. A crowd at a football match is simply a large number of individuals that when together, make up the crowd. If some of those individuals had earlier thought that the weather was too bad and they decided not to travel, then there would not be a crowd, no 'crowd' of customer's means no money being made! No excitement! This is the same in the workshop, the individual customers are all equally important to the success of the business. It is the combined number of individual customers that make the volume of business.

3.3 What is the Motor Service Department trying to sell?

As you have already seen, it is the 'time' that the technicians and apprentices take to carry out the service, diagnostic techniques and repair procedures to vehicles that belong to 'customers'. This is a competitive world. "Time is money", The time that it takes to get the seat and wing covers on, the bonnet open, etc., all this time costs money, can someone else (e.g. competitor) do those tasks in a lesser time? Lesser time - lesser cost! Time waiting for parts at the stores counter, all time costs money to the customer. Less time – cheaper job, the service is easier to sell, more competitive in business, more success which will ensure greater job security for all.

3.4 'Internal' and 'External' Customers

Customers are all around each of us. Fellow employees are customers. Business is done between the service dept. and the stores. The sales dept. interacts with both. Remember the definition of a business; 'a group of people working to a common purpose'. All employees are customers of each other. The term 'internal' customer is used to describe this working relationship. The term 'external' customer is used to describe persons who are not directly employed by the firm.

3.5 Customer 'Impressions'

Customers form 'positive' or 'negative' impressions of the products or services that they already have purchased, or intend to purchase in the future. 'Positive impressions' bring return business and local 'good' word of mouth. 'Negative impressions' can be a very serious problem; the person may or may not choose to talk a lot. If they take their business elsewhere, it can be a very public demonstration of their dissatisfaction with the service that they had received.

4.0 Required 'Life Skills' of Company Personnel

4.1 'Life Skills'

These are the personal skills of accepting and appreciating the different talents and skills of your fellow employees, combining these with the direction, supervision and co-ordination of your employer for the common purpose. Every member of the staff of a firm, irrespective of the number of staff in that firm, has to accept responsibility to support the business challenges facing that firm. Remember, "One for all, all for one", can inspire continual enthusiasm for success.

5.0 Recording Customer Data

5.1 Customers 'Rights'

The customer has many legal rights and supports for any products or services that they may purchase, but here you should reflect on the right of the customer to 'free choice'. The customer has the right to acquire knowledge about what they may or may not choose to purchase, e.g. they do have the right to question the technician!

Also, they do have every right to complain.

5.2 Customer Expectations

A lot is being written here about customers, but Service Department Personnel need to be aware of the improving technology and reliability of the automobiles being purchased by ever increasingly discerning customers. These customers are not easily 'fobbed' off with shoddy workmanship, they now demand and expect any repairs etc. to be 'right first time' i.e. no returns or repeats or breakdowns, (or they get the help of their legal advisor). They also expect value, convenience, personal contact and 'trust' which may possibly be the most difficult for service dept. personnel.

5.3 The 'Trusting' Customer

Customers trust service dept personnel with their vehicles. Wheels are removed/refitted, brakes and steering components etc. are similarly removed and refitted. Out on the road, those vehicles may then travel between countries. Are those vehicles safe? Are all wheel nuts, bolts etc. at the correct torque? All brake pipes, fluid levels etc. correct? The customer has placed their trust in the service dept.

That trust has to be responded to appropriately.

5.4 Customer Satisfaction

Customers are satisfied if the expectations or beliefs that they held before making the purchase of product or service are seen to be realised after the event. In one short sentence; Customers are satisfied with automotive service if Their expectations on the cost are realized If the work was completed within the time agreed, and If the quality of the work was up to their expectations, (service/task e.g. puncture repair, carried out correctly on first attempt).

5.5 Customer Dissatisfaction

Customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction can happen if when the customers evaluate (as they always do) the product or service that they have purchased and as a result they come to the conclusion rightly or wrongly that they did not get what they expected. If the customer is then unhappy, they have the choice of returning and possibly having the problem sorted, but when some customers are unhappy, they do not complain directly, they simply go away to do their business elsewhere. That customer is now lost to the business.

5.6 The Complaining Customer

The complaining customer is not happy. They now believe that they have found a fault in the product or service that they have purchased. The provider of the product or service now risks losing the customer and further business as result of possible bad publicity. The complaining customer is giving 'feedback', it is now the responsibility of the person appointed by the firm (e.g. service receptionist) to listen carefully, evaluate the situation and decide what action to take to attempt to rectify things.

5.7 Feedback

Feedback can be positive or negative. Negative is complaining, fault finding etc. and can be demoralising. Positive is praising and can be very rewarding for the recipient. However, feedback in the Motor Service Dept. is more often of the negative type, but a complaining customer does tell some story. It may be genuine, think about it, were all those wheel nuts fully torqued? The complaint does give the firm the opportunity to try to rectify the situation and retain the business of that customer.

5.8 Talking to the Customer

Most motor service departments (garages) will have an appointed service receptionist or service manager. These persons are authorised by the firm to speak on behalf of the firm to customers and as such they are 'agents' of the firm. This is a legal term and means that decisions or promises that they (agents) make on behalf of the firm to third parties may be legally binding on that firm. Unless, that you are appointed by the firm to represent it, leave such promises or decisions that effect your employer to those that are appointed to do so. Be careful of loose talk, you may find yourself being responsible!

6.0 Preparation and Returning a Vehicle

6.1 Accepting a Vehicle for Service /Repair

The Service Dept. will generally have an appointed person (service receptionist) to meet the customer, listen, discuss and make arrangements about any work that is to be undertaken. But before they do or you do (should it be the case), accept the keys and the associated responsibility for the safe return of the vehicle to its owner, the vehicle should be visually examined carefully externally and internally for bodywork damage, scratches, dents, etc. The mileage should be carefully recorded and note taken of any customer's property remaining in the vehicle. The condition of the windscreen etc. and the tyres should also be noted carefully.

Remember the following; if your firm has a recommended standard procedure, follow it diligently. If a company or manufacturers procedure is not used, take note of the following points;

- Do you or the service department have the equipment and the skills necessary to complete this task to the vehicle manufacturers recommended standards? If not, explain courteously to the customer that you/the firm is unable to provide this particular service. Do not start something that you know you may not be able to finish successfully!
- Assuming that the answer is yes to the first point, then, ensure that you and the customer are clear and in full agreement on what work is to be undertaken.
- And also, ensure that you and the customer are clear and in full agreement on how long this work will take, then think about the following points as you proceed;
- Are any spare parts etc that may be required immediately available?
- When, where or how is the vehicle to be returned/collected?
- Is the cost and method of payment agreed with the customer?
- If the radio code is to be disturbed, be sure to explain this and get the code from the customer prior to commencing work.
- Do you have the full permission from your firm and appropriate insurance cover to drive customer's vehicles on behalf of the firm?
- Do you have the competence to drive this vehicle? (e.g. automatics, hybrids, light commercials etc.)

Now proceed to the practical action,

- Note the exterior and interior condition of the vehicle, its mileage and visible contents and get the customer to sign the report on this visual examination, (Freedom of Information Laws only apply to State Organizations).
- Ensure that your personal protective equipment, clothing and personal tidiness is appropriate for entry, driving and working on this customer's property e.g. clean safety boots and overalls, hands/gloves clean etc.
- Remember, the vehicle belongs to the customer, all in-car entertainment facilities (ICE) are not there for the use or enjoyment of service dept. personnel.
- Customers may feel an intrusion on their privacy and get quite upset to find their personal settings on the ICE systems all changed/disturbed.

- Fit seat covers, floor mats and steering wheel cover.
- If working under the bonnet, fit wing and grill protective covers.
- Carry out the task using manufacturers recommended procedures only!
- Do not use a power washer under the engine bay unless it is absolutely necessary; remember the corrosion that water/moisture can cause to electrical connections!
- On successful completion of the work, carry out final quick visual examination of all wheels for tightening, fluid levels etc. Remember, this is the last opportunity that you have to correct any mistakes, this vehicle is now away with its driver/s passengers and other road users, to be driven at all speeds, possibly in other countries, is it safe? Are sure? If you are finally satisfied that all your work is completed to the vehicle manufacturer's standard, then remove all protective covers etc, clean off any accidental oily marks/finger prints and return the vehicle to its owner or service receptionist etc.



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