

# High Maintenance Talent

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# High Maintenance Talent vs. Low Maintenance Sales Teams

HERE 'ETHICS & CHARACTER'  
BY SCOTT BERGERON



Too often, dealers think they have to deal with a high maintenance employee just because they can produce. The reality is most successful dealerships aren't successful because of high maintenance talent, rather in spite of it. In the long run, it may pay to cultivate salespeople with impeccable ethics and strong character (and they may not always come from the sales ranks).

## The High Price of Hiring High Maintenance Talent

For years, some dealers have hired talent away from other dealerships to boost sales. It can work well at first. However, after the ether has worn off for both parties that "enthusiasm" can morph into pushiness and impatience with colleagues. And what about loyalty? Rethink recruiting/hiring if you see a recurring "grass is greener" pattern in previous employment.

## High Maintenance Talent Characteristics and Behaviors

We all may have different opinions of what constitutes a high maintenance salesperson. In my world, high maintenance talent displays three major defining characteristics and behaviors:

- They need to be out of the box all the time. They're pushing the boundaries through virtually every step of the sales process. They rarely, if ever, follow the dealership's prescribed sales steps.

- They over-promise and under-deliver. An all-too-common occurrence is that they promise a prospect floor mats or some other extra without telling the sales manager. Then they expect the sales manager to fulfill their commitment, even at the expense of the deal.

- They only rely on their talent, convinced they can sell

anyone - new or repeat. While they may talk the talk about repeat and referral customers, they rarely follow up with customers consistently.

**Lessons from the Old Man**  
Last month, I did what we all have to do every now and then - be a third baseman for a family member. Having spent much of my adult life in auto sales, I have empathy for salespeople and all the behind-the-scenes work that goes into each sale.

Both of my sons - Jake, 27, and Nathan, 28 - bought new (to them) used vehicles. Both cars are super nice, are in great shape, and were great deals. But only one of my sons walked away happy.

To start off, about a month ago, Nathan decided since the lease was coming due on his Jetta and he wanted a BMW X3 it was time to do some research and shopping. He was searching like crazy online, and found two dealers who had nice 2011 models with low mileage. He decided the second one was a better deal.

The only problem was that the seller's process harkened back to somewhere between 1970 and 1990 - old school to the hilt. Nathan already knew the price. He already had fallen in love with the car. His finance person soured the experience just by playing a traditional "shell game." He ultimately bought a warranty, and got the car at the right price, but didn't realize he had his term stretched by three months.

And all this with a top credit rating and \$12,000 down that he could adjust to keep his payment where he wanted. Nathan really felt cheated - he wanted to stay at 60 months, the finance person remained vague about the rate even though he was selling a warranty, and Nathan had already locked down his own rate. Nathan would have been happier with a firm financed amount and payment so he could adjust his payment with a greater down payment.

The point is Nathan wouldn't return to the dealership because he didn't feel like he was dealt with squarely. Perception is reality.

The experience Jake went through was the total opposite, and it was because

the dealership was focused so much on a positive experience it shone through. Jake was looking at a used MINI Clubman. The dealership he found the vehicle at had maintained at least a 30-year stellar reputation in our marketplace. For the last two decades, practically every message they had on the radio focused on a one-price philosophy. Their process worked, and worked without hiring outside talent.

At the dealership, the salesperson, Joe, knew exactly what he was doing. The funny thing was, he had never sold cars before but had worked in a detail shop. Joe was kind, ethical and able to speak intelligently. He gave Jake a proper walk around, even to the point of noting any paint touch-ups. This guy was a detail freak, and I respected him more for it.

He took Jake on a great demo, and explained what the process would be all the way through. When he ultimately closed Jake on the deal, he actually did all the finance paperwork and sold, and sold well, every product usually sold in finance. He was a one-stop shop, and it was the first time I've ever witnessed it. I quickly became Joe's biggest fan. I even told him to keep an eye out for a particular vehicle I'm seeking.

The point is that even a salesperson with no experience can sell, upsell and make the customer the most important priority if he, or she, cares for the customer and takes the time. But it's up to the dealership to make sure that process and experience happens.

That said, do you want to hire high maintenance talent that can come out of the gate fast but be difficult thereafter, or someone like Joe?

## Don't Hire "Talent" - Hire "Ethics & Character" to Meet Your Goals

Hiring high maintenance talent forces you to accommodate a prima donna, and alienates you from other salespeople who "follow the rules." Ultimately, this will damage performance, profits and reputation. Reviews exist everywhere now. Even one problematic salesperson can

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generate multiple bad reviews that divert a prospect from your showroom floor to a competitor's - without you ever knowing it.

To achieve great sales figures, look for talent that doesn't undermine anything or anyone, doesn't allow your dealership to lose credibility, and doesn't cost you and your dealership time and money. ■

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