

WHEN EXCEPTIONS OVERTAKE THE RULES OF YOUR SHOWROOM

How to Get Back on Track

The term showroom control has been around for years, and it exists for good reason. For example, on a busy Saturday when deals are happening left and right, it's easy to lose control and start making exceptions and, as a result, mistakes.

Many of us have been taught the rules of the road. But how many times have we taught the rules of our dealership, and our showroom? Why do they exist? What happens when they aren't followed?

When exceptions to the rules overtake the rules themselves, what do you do to get them back on track? Start by identifying them, and the process it takes to make sure they're being followed consistently.

Recently the Academy Awards had one of their biggest screw-ups ever — announcing the wrong Best Picture winner to over 30 million viewers. The reasons it happened were simple: Details were overlooked and there were distractions.

While most of us won't suffer a worldwide embarrassment and lose all credibility, our industry does when missed details and distractions start adding up. It can ruin the customer experience and the profitability of a dealership, as well as contribute to the lackluster reputation of our industry.

My wife and I bought an SUV last month. As usual, it wasn't from a salesperson I knew, although I'd purchased from the dealership 15 years before and had actually hired several of their top brass in the 1990s. It was a big-box store. The salesperson was a "veteran," having been there six years.

Even though I've been in the business for close to 30 years, and can get a quick and easy fleet deal, I enjoy seeing how the retail side of dealerships is progressing in the eyes of a retail customer. Specifically, I like to see if we're improving our reputation or holding onto our long-held "traditions."

What struck me most about our visit was it was way too impersonal for either of us to quickly "fall in love" with our new car. Sure, we liked the salesperson, and he did a great job building rapport, but we were in the showroom cubicle for at least an hour searching inventory on the computer since they had at least 100 in stock.

Getting a proper walkaround and sitting in a car, let alone driving it, didn't happen



for well over an hour and a half. Six and a half hours later we took delivery.

It was a snowy Thursday in Denver with no customers and I had a trade. I will give them an hour off since it took that long to get my fleet price and negotiate on the trade. They were all very nice and had a really nice delivery person, but over five hours if you take out the trade/negotiations?!

I had helped family friend Patricia buy from another dealership only two months earlier. They were a local dealership, with an awesome reputation, and the experience was incredible. They didn't miss a beat. Every "I" was dotted and every "T" crossed, and she was in and out in just a couple of hours.

As complicated as some like to make it, showroom control isn't rocket science. A deal is made up of a lot of little pieces, and if those pieces aren't spelled out time is lost and so are deals. With defined rules everyone knows, business can flow through quickly.

In my friend's case, her salesperson and dealership had every process done from start to finish with no room for mess ups. Her sales rep had only been in the business for six months. She worked through a sales manager but also had a "modified four square" as well.

The sales rep didn't have a finance person, but sold every alternative and finance product I'd ever seen, and did a great job of it, even though she was fairly inexperienced. My friend bought a warranty, even though it was a certified used car. It made sense, and her salesperson took the time to build the value.

Pat is the happiest customer and is still talking up her great deal and how nice and respectful they all were. She still tells me

how much she appreciates me walking her through the process and helping her get such a great deal.

Coincidentally, it was a one price store, and I didn't get her a penny off. Her deal was quick, easy, and was profitable for the dealership.

My six-hour deal included receipted state documents, and a credit app that was virtually impossible for all of us to read. We kept taking pictures of the application, just so we could blow it up on our phones to see what they really needed.

When we got to the finance manager, he didn't even attempt to sell us anything, and immediately slashed his warranty price because, in his words, "You're from the business so I won't try to sell you anything. I'll just give you the warranty at cost plus \$100."

I didn't buy it. It might have been a good deal, but he never showed me what it included other than a "6-year, 100k" and an internal price sheet.

In our business, it's all about the details. In key ways, it's like football. When a team executes on its game plan consistently, touchdowns happen. When it doesn't, interceptions leading to an opponent's touchdown can result. That's a 14-point swing.

In your market, the difference in the details can mean finishing at the top of the heap, or struggling to make payroll and keep your franchise or lease. Don't let the little things make or break your store. Stay on the details and finish strong. ☺



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