

Control the Trade. Own the Desk. Lead Like They've Been Burned Before

Let's get one thing straight — today's customer isn't coming to you cold. They're not "just exploring." They're not "kicking tires." They're not looking for a VDP read-back. They're showing up defensive — because the last time they bought, they got smacked around.

Think back three to five years. Many of these shoppers bought at the peak of the pandemic. Limited inventory. Sky-high prices. Sticker shock in finance. Zero control. They felt burned then, and they're afraid of feeling burned now.

That means trust isn't earned gradually. It's earned fast. And it's earned at the desk.

DON'T CHASE STOCK NUMBERS, CHASE INTENT

One of the biggest mistakes I still hear on the phone and in the showroom? Salespeople scrambling over a stock number like it's gold. It's not.

If your team is still panicking to confirm availability, tabbing through your website and reading back specs the customer already memorized, you've lost the upper hand. That stock number trick was useful when we had no inventory. But now? Inventory is flowing, shoppers have more choices than ever and 84% of them don't end up buying the exact car they first inquired about.

So why are we still following them down the rabbit hole? They're not fixated on that stock number, they're fixated on feeling safe. That car is just a conversation starter.

So instead of reacting, take control. Ask, "What caught your eye about that one?" "Did you get a chance to drive it?" "What else are you considering?"

Now you're diagnosing instead of reacting. Guiding instead of chasing. And that's when you can pivot into what really matters — the trade.

THE TRADE HOOK: GROSS PROTECTOR, SHOWROOM DRIVER, TRUST BUILDER

Let's be clear: the trade isn't just a step. It's the strategy. It's not just about working the deal; it's about working the customer. When you ask the right trade questions at the right time, you do three things at once:

1. **Protect your front-end gross** by shifting the conversation from price to value.
2. **Drive showroom traffic** by creating urgency and a reason to come in.
3. **Build trust** by making the conversation emotional, not just transactional.

So let's stop treating the trade like a checkbox. The script? You already know it: "What are you driving now?" "Would you consider trading it in?" "Awesome! Can you tell me a little about it?"

Then lean in. Show excitement. Make it clear this isn't a sales ploy; it's real demand. Letting the customer know that you

are excited about their vehicle — because there is demand — is a simple explanation that does something your pricing conversation never will: it makes them feel like they're wanted. It replaces fear with opportunity. That's the emotion that gets people off the couch and into the store.

APPOINTMENTS ARE EMOTIONAL — TREAT THEM THAT WAY

You've done the work. You've had the call, opened the conversation and hooked the trade. Now what?

Don't let the appointment die on the vine with a weak confirmation text. This isn't logistics. This is your first close, letting them know what you will be doing before they arrive to prepare for the appointment. That message hits different. It's direct. Personal. Urgent. It makes the customer feel like showing up matters — because it does.

And don't forget: you're not just confirming the appointment. You're confirming your commitment to work with them and solve their problem, purchasing their new vehicle.

FOLLOW-UP WITH PURPOSE NOT PLATITUDES

If they miss their appointment, don't default to the same tired "Just checking in" message. That's not value, it's a reminder they ghosted you.

Instead, lead with opportunity: "We've got fresh numbers and new arrivals. I thought of you immediately." "The vehicle you liked? It's still here — for now." "Let's take a quick look before the weekend rush hits."

Every message you send should sound like a reason to act, not a plea for a callback. If you're not using video yet, now is the time. A 30-second clip saying "I'm here, I saw your inquiry and I've got your back" is more powerful than any email you've ever sent.

Today's buyer doesn't need more options. They don't need another quote. They need someone they can trust to help them make the right decision.

That means every call, every text, every email, every desk TO needs to be driven by value. Value in the vehicle. Value in the trade. Value in the experience.

Your role at the desk isn't to manage the CRM. It's to lead the sale. Set the tone. Guide the interaction. Control the trade. And remind your team what trust sounds like — because that's what today's customer is really shopping for. Get out there and crush it. ■



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