



**CAPRICORN**

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## How not to spook customers with a long repair list

Every automotive technician has an absolute responsibility to report everything that needs attention on a vehicle to the customer.

There is no exception to this rule – it must be 100 per cent of the time to 100 per cent of your customers. Anything less and you are putting your customers' safety and finances at risk.

The risk you take as the bearer of sometimes bad news, is that you might spook your customer. After all, they only booked in for a service, and then you present them with a page-long list of repairs that should be done sometime in the near future. Their initial reaction may well be that you are taking them for a ride. If it's a new customer, there's a fair chance you won't see them again.

This puts you in a sticky situation. Do you take your responsibility to the letter and present them with the page-long list, risking losing them as customers? Or do you compromise and only present what you think they can afford, hoping this will retain them as long-term customers?

Prioritising the list with the customer is the answer. This way, the customer is made aware of everything that needs repairing. By getting the customer to share some of the responsibility for maintaining a safe vehicle, you are creating a trust that may well keep that customer on your books for life.

The key with successfully prioritising the repair list with your customer is to break down their defences.

When you present a customer with an expensive repair list their initial reaction will be defensive. They will try to extricate themselves from making decisions with comments like ‘I need the car now and will come back next week’ or ‘I’m going to sell the car’ or ‘I need to talk to my partner first’.

While the customer is working flat out on their exist strategy, they won’t be paying any attention to your attempts to prioritise the repair list for them.

The right way to handle this delicate situation is to seek the customer’s permission right at the beginning, with ‘The service went well and your car is in pretty good nick, but our detailed inspection revealed some important items that we need to bring to your attention. Can I work through these with you, and then we can prioritise them to suit your time and your budget?’

With this approach, you are putting the customer back in control of the situation. Their defences are down, and the atmosphere is conducive to working together through the list of future repairs.

By mentioning the magic word **‘budget’**, the customer is left with the impression that his workshop is not motivated by greed.

In the prioritising process, safety must always take precedence over service work. Having said that, you must continue to stress that preventive maintenance is always the best policy.

Most customers have no idea what a coolant flush or brake fluid flush really means. If you are expecting them to prioritise future repair decisions, it is up to you to equip the customer with enough information to enable them to understand why such things are necessary.

It is worth taking the time to explain to them what each repair item does, why you are recommending it and what the benefit will be to the customer.

There are three key reasons why customers will authorise repairs or maintenance on their vehicle:

1. Safety – if not carried out, the safety of the individual and their family is at risk.

2. Future cost – if not carried out, further damage may result, costing more money in the long run.
3. Reliability – if not carried out, the reliability of the vehicle is compromised.

Your approach could be 'We're recommending replacement of the rear brake shoes and cylinders because you are starting to lose your breaking efficiency. This is a safety issue for you and the family and if not performed there is increased potential for long term brake damage that is very expensive to repair.'

Don't take declined work lightly. If you recommend something that should be done today, it's because it needs to be done. If the customer is on a strict budget and opts for certain items to be put off, you must discuss a timeline for the customer to return. If you merely accept the declined work without giving any thought to getting the customer back, you have just told the customer that what you just recommended was nothing more than a suggestion, and not that important.

Make sure that any declined work is clearly noted on the invoice to limit your liability should the car encounter problems after they leave your workshop. If you are feeling uncomfortable about this, it is advisable to have the customer sign a copy of your invoice to keep on file should something go wrong and the finger of blame is pointed at your workshop.

Maintain your standards and make sure you report everything thing that needs attention to 100 per cent of your customers. If it's a long list, win their loyalty by asking permission to prioritise the list according to their budget. Don't look too shocked when they give you permission to go ahead with everything you have recommended

The place to start is [www.tatbiz.net.au/resources](http://www.tatbiz.net.au/resources)

*Just go for it!*