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If the weather is in the upper 50's call to set up the maintenance and tell your customers this: Let us perform your semi-annual maintenance. We guarantee our work. If there is a problem when the first hot day hits, we will immediately come to your home and take care of the problem. There will be no diagnostic charge or labor charge. If there is a problem, the only thing you will pay for is a part.

If a customer has been a maintenance agreement customer for years and you properly maintain her equipment, the likelihood that there will be a problem is very small. Over the years with thousands of customers, I can count on one hand the number of times that a service technician went to a customer's home to take care of a problem the first hot day.

Being in the customer's home gives your technician the opportunity to do a thorough diagnostic and determine if there are repairs that should be completed. It also gives the technician the opportunity to discuss indoor air quality products, hot or cold spots in rooms, or other issues that the customer may be having. It is an opportunity to educate the customer about things that can help her be more comfortable in her home. She can make the right thing to invest in your add on products.

Some contractors guarantee no repairs for the entire season. To do this, the customer must agree to all repairs that a service technician finds on the spring maintenance check. Technicians must do a thorough diagnostic. If the system needs to be cleaned (including pulling an evaporator coil) the cleaning must be done for the guarantee to be in effect. Slightly pitted contactors must be replaced, weak capacitors must be replaced, etc.

Starting your maintenances when the phone isn't ringing is an opportunity to educate the customer which results in more sales, loyal customers, and referrals.

### **Help Technicians Generate More Maintenance Agreement Customers**

The first 90 days of my 301 day challenge to grow your maintenance agreement base are over.

The industry average is about 30% of your customers will invest in a maintenance agreement program. So, approximately one out of three people asked will say yes. Here are the results we've gotten with contractors who are participating in the challenge:

With the exception of one contractor, everyone following the program has been getting over 40% positive response rate. 25% of the participants have been getting a 50% response rate or better - in a traditionally slower time of the year. That is one out of two people asked saying yes.

Why have we received great results? Focus on a plan and following through with the plan. Before you even think about getting involved with the challenge, ask these questions:

1. Do your technicians believe in maintenance? Are they doing the maintenance on their own systems at home? If they live in an apartment do you allow them to take care of their parent's or another close relative's system instead? If the service technicians aren't maintaining their own systems, how can you ask them to recommend to a customer that she invest in a service agreement? It's like going to an overweight doctor who tells you that you have to lose weight.

2. If your technicians don't believe in your maintenance program, why don't they believe in it? In one company I worked with, the answer was as simple as they didn't think it was a good deal for the customer if they were still doing the checks in June (or December). So, the company made a promise to get them done earlier than June. That solved the problem.

3. Ask the technicians to design the maintenance agreement. Using this method, the service agreement is their agreement and they should believe in them. Interestingly, when I've done this and we've priced the agreement, the price always came out higher than the competitors' agreements. The technicians didn't care. They enrolled customers because they believed that these agreements were a good deal for the customer.

4. Have a contest. When everyone focuses on expected results, the results usually occur. Remember that when you set up the contest, it is a team effort. Everyone wins or everyone loses. For example, if the goal is 100 new agreements by June 30, 2010, what do the technicians and office personnel get when the group reaches the goal? What do they have to give up if the group doesn't reach the goal?

I prefer group prizes rather than individual prizes. This way if one person is way ahead, then everyone keeps trying because the goal is a group goal rather than an individual goal.

Continual focus on a process is key to growing your maintenance agreement base. The more maintenance agreements you have, the more replacements you have, and the more profitable you are. From a long term perspective, you'll have a more valuable company to sell when the time comes.

### **Six Things to Decrease Stress When You're Busy**

This has been a bizarre spring. Parts of the country had summer in April. Parts of the country haven't had spring yet. At some point spring and summer will come for most of the country.

When it's busy the days fly by. At the end of the day we often wonder what we got accomplished. It seems that we are focused on selling (or order taking), answering the telephone, and solving problems and making sure that the jobs get done.

Your business should see more overtime and more profits. If you are in the south, summer is generally the busiest time of year. Enjoy the profits. For those of you in the north, summer might not be your busiest time of the year. Either way, here are six things to keep your sanity and keep your customers happy.

1. Don't tell a customer that you're busy. I hear dispatchers giving the "we're busy" excuse to customers all the time. Customers don't care. All they want to hear is that you will take care of their problem quickly. Tell the customers what you can do for them rather than what you can't do for them. Reassure them that you are working to get their problems resolved as quickly as possible.

2. Keep a smile in your voice, even if you are tired at the end of the day. This applies to everyone in your company. Obviously people want a friendly voice on the telephone. But, if you sound grouchy, many times your employees won't ask about critical things they need to complete a job, get ready for the next job, etc. They prefer to stay away, figure it out themselves, or wait until another time that you appear to be in a better mood.

3. Learn how to say no without saying no. If someone is having a problem the last thing he wants to hear is someone saying "no" or "can't" or "won't". These negative words frustrate an unhappy person and have a tendency to make him more upset. So, if you can't get to a job until two days later and it is 100 degrees outside, then say, "our first available appointment is \_\_\_\_\_. If there is a cancellation, I will move you up in the schedule to fill that cancellation." You've said no without saying no. The variation to this is to say, "If you can do \_\_\_\_\_ we can do \_\_\_\_\_". This says that if the person is willing to perform a specific task, then you can do the thing that he wants you to do.

4. Make sure that your technicians and installation crews have water in their trucks and they drink it. It is critical that they drink water, especially if they are working on hot roofs or attics. You don't need a technician or installer passing out because of heat exhaustion. Train your technicians and installers to look for the signs of heat exhaustion. You want them aware of what may be happening to them so they can prevent getting sick, hurting themselves, etc.

5. Take a few minutes to ensure that the materials and instructions for your jobs are complete. You don't have the time to waste running to the parts house (not that you do at other times of the year either). This is the time of year to be productive. Stopping work to pick up a part hampers productivity. In addition, customers appreciate your starting and completing a job without having to stop in the middle and disappearing for a while.

Likewise, make sure that everyone finishes jobs. From the customer's perspective, they appreciate your crew's additional effort to finish that day so they don't have to spend part of another day at home. In addition, the job is complete and they can get back to their normal routine...more comfortable than they were the day before. They don't have to wait an additional night for that comfort. If it takes an hour of overtime, it is much better to finish a job than come back the next day. You'll spend more than that hour in labor and truck expense getting back to the job and completing it.

6. From a service perspective, fix the disease not the

symptom of the disease. When it's busy, the technicians have a tendency to find the first problem they see and fix it. Many don't take the time to find out why that problem occurred. The last thing you want, and the customer needs, is a callback a few days or a week later. The first 90 days of my 301 day challenge to grow your maintenance agreement base are over.

### **Do You REALLY know where your cash is going?**

First, it's Memorial Day. Take a minute to honor those brave men and women who have served our country and some who have given their lives for our country. We owe them a debt of gratitude and our profound thanks and appreciation for their sacrifices.

### **Three stories:**

#1. I was in the airport going to visit a client and I noticed a penny on the ground. It was VERY noticeable...it was right where you pick up the gray trays to put your belongings in as you go through security. There were four people in front of me when I noticed the penny. None noticed it. Or, if they did, they didn't bend down a little further to pick up the penny when they got their gray trays. When I got there I picked it up.

#2. A few months ago I wrote about picking up the unscratched off lottery tickets while I was running in Texas. Four dollars that someone wasted. Saturday when I was running I picked up another unscratched off lottery ticket. This time three dollars. Why would someone spend the money and literally throw it on the ground?

#3. When I'm working with a contractor, one of the things that I often do is go through the service tickets. When I was doing this at one contractor's location, I found a check. That's right, a customer's check from a few months ago that had never been processed and never been cashed.

These three stories are symptoms of how cash is handled. A penny is a penny. Many pennies add up to thousands of dollars over time. Lottery tickets? Well, that shows how some people value cash. Easy come. Easy go.

From my perspective, the really dangerous thing is finding a check in a drawer of filed service tickets. It shows that there are no checks and balances to ensure that all of the checks coming in the door, and those checks that should come in the door, are accounted for.

### **Here's how to track your service tickets and balance your cash:**

1. They should all be numbered. Or, your dispatch program assigns a work order number to the ticket.
2. If the tickets are numbered, each technician is assigned a certain range of tickets.
3. So that no payments get lost, technicians should have staplers in their trucks to staple the cash, checks, or credit card receipts to their service tickets.
4. The service technician turns in his tickets. The person receiving the ticket puts his/her initials on the ticket that he/she has received the payment.
5. The tickets are matched against the numbers or the work order numbers printed out of your dispatch system. Missing tickets are questioned.
6. The dollar amount of the ticket is recorded in the computer system (either manually or automatically when the dispatch ticket is priced).
7. Balance the total dollars that you should have against the actual dollars that you did get. Find the discrepancies.
8. Make sure that all of the dollars got deposited.

### **Here's how to track replacement or new construction jobs:**

1. Assign a job number to each job. There are many different ways that companies track jobs and job costing. For all jobs there should be the following two actions:
2. Match the payments against the jobs. In these cases there may be partial billings.
3. Run a report at the end of each month to ensure that all payments to all jobs were made and deposited in the bank.

Cash is the lifeblood of your company. Safeguard yours.