

Broadening the Scope of a Customer Service Representative

In June of 2018, ABRN published my article, [Is Your Customer Service Representative Empowered?](#), where I talked about getting your Customer Service Representative (CSR) more involved in the inner workings of the business. Things have changed in our industry over the last two years and affects how we handle our customers, making it even more important to broaden the scope of your CSR.

One of the key points is to separate customer service from vehicle repair. There will be a time when the CSR will transfer the customer to a damage appraiser or repair planner, hopefully after capturing the keys. Your CSR should be the customer focal point rather than a message taker, providing one-stop service for fulfilling customer needs by having all communication going through them. Being able to repair a vehicle is a given, but how well you take care of the customer is what sets you apart from your competition.

Think about a doctor's office for a minute. They have a front office receptionist, a nurse and then the doctor. Most communication is handled by the front desk. You might get to talk with a nurse, but very seldom do you talk with the doctor when calling the office. We can compare this to a collision center. They have a front desk, and instead of the nurse there is a damage appraiser, and the doctor would be the manager or owner. If you routed all communication to the customer through your CSR, you could eliminate interruptions to the damage appraiser and manager allowing them to be more productive.

Helping your CSR develop in this way requires additional training. In my June 2018 article I mentioned the training offered through I-CAR to help groom CSRs. The [Automotive Management Institute](#) (AMi) saw the need for enhanced training for front office personnel and created a Collision Repair Customer Service training program. Understanding that the CSR in a collision center is a key role in the business's success, their 30-credit hour course covers 18 core competencies with over 200 elective courses available, as well. Without sounding like an AMi commercial, I would like to point out some training elements they provide that will help develop your CSR.

If you took the advice from my June 2018 article, your CSR has already completed the I-CAR courses and is ready to be more involved in customer care. Two of the competencies I feel work the best are Selling Skills and Estimating Basics. These two courses would help your CSR streamline and improve the process of capturing the keys from customers. We all know customers just want their cars fixed and don't want to make multiple trips to your business to orchestrate the repairs. How valuable would it be to you if your CSR could sell repairs over the phone and schedule the repair appointment without involving your damage appraiser? Using the selling skills and estimating basics learned through AMi, they would be able to determine damage through discussion or photos and schedule the proper repair slot for the customer.

Additional competencies like Effective Communications, Marketing Basics, Customer Relations and Phone Skills would sharpen the CSR's skillset where they would be capable of handling the majority of customer needs and concerns. Couple that with Negotiation Skills and Conflict

Resolution and your CSR would easily be able to meet the demands of a modern collision repair facility.

A CSR with enhanced skills would provide the balance needed in a collision center to keep the repair separate from customer service. There would no longer be the need to transfer a customer to talk with a damage appraiser or production manager to gain vehicle status. They would be versed in production management and be able to provide those updates by reviewing the repair plan in your management system.

I think we have learned that damage appraisers are more skilled in documenting damage rather than properly keeping a customer updated. A trained CSR would be proactive in communication to ensure the customer was updated on a regular basis, preventing angry customer comments that result from not being kept informed. This would also be true for rental cars and other updates a collision repair center struggles to keep current.

I believe that you will find that broadening the scope of your CSR has multiple benefits to your business. Putting this practice into place would not be hard with courses being available online and self-paced. Reach out to your management system provider to see what tutorials they have available, as well as the I-CAR and AMi training I discussed in this and my June 2018 ABRN article, and enjoy the immediate improvements you will see in your customer base and CSR team.