

Hitting Home Runs in F&I

Excelling in F&I means you're skilled in several areas. Being a strong closer may mean more products sold, but having weak needs discovery skills translates into higher charge-backs and low CSI scores. The opposite is just as frustrating. You may be gifted in discovering why a customer needs your products, but without the ability to close the sale, you will perform at below-average standards.

Throughout my career as a training consultant, I've identified four areas where F&I professionals can and should excel.

So, let's take a run around the bases.

First Base: DEVELOP A CONSISTENT PROCESS

A process that consists of effective and informative steps and is followed consistently with every customer will produce extraordinary profits. You cannot just "wing it" when you bring a customer into the [F&I office](#).

You must utilize a process that focuses on discovering what a customer needs, not what will make you the most profit.

Today's consumer is better informed and less tolerant of a pressure type sales pitch. People hate being "sold" anything. But they will buy more than you could ever sell them if they realize why they need it. Selling intangible products demands that we help the customer "see" the benefit of a vehicle service agreement.

For instance, a father will be much more likely to buy a VSC for his daughter's car if he can picture her on the side of the road waiting for assistance because the engine control module failed. The roadside assistance benefit of the VSC will provide police protection when she is in an unsafe place until help arrives. Paint a picture with words so they can see it happening. Develop a process that identifies needs, projects concern for the customer's situation and then serves the customer by matching up the two.

Second Base: PRODUCT KNOWLEDGE

Every F&I manager should engage in extensive and ongoing research into the products he or she offers. The more knowledgeable you are about a product, the more you will believe in those products, and that translates into more products sold.

You will never get to second base in [F&I](#) unless you consistently learn everything you possibly can regarding the products you offer. You must know what your products cover: the limitations, exclusions, and the benefits to the customer. An F&I professional should be able to recall 10 or more benefits of each product he offers. Selling intangible products requires transferring your own emotion and belief to the customer. You must learn the names of auto parts that are covered by your VSC, what they do, where they are on the car, what happens when they fail, and the cost of replacing them.

Third Base: PRODUCTION SKILLS

Roger Clemens, one of just four pitchers to surpass 4,000 strikeouts, was 42 when he earned his last Cy Young award. His secret to success is simple. He practices every day and practices harder than anyone else in the game. An F&I professional spends time every day trying to get better at what he or she does!

Knowledge of the process and products alone is not enough. You must also become extraordinary in the needs discovery process. More importantly, you must know how to apply what you discover in a manner that motivates customers to buy. Roleplaying the F&I needs discovery and sales process with others is a great way to improve your ability to lead customers to a buying decision.

Some managers are so skilled that even after a customer says no to all the products offered on an F&I menu, they can then sit back with confidence as they bring the needs they have discovered to the surface, and help the customer understand why each product is important to him or her.

Home Plate: DEALERSHIP PROTECTION

These days compliance is a buzzword in a dealer's vocabulary. Simply put, an untrained F&I manager who refuses to use a consistent process puts all the assets of the dealership at risk. The climate in financial transactions and the multitude of regulations demands that F&I managers become experts at the rules and regulations of their craft.

Dealers, GMs and F&I managers are all guilty of focusing on only one facet of the F&I process—profits. Making profits for the dealership is a top priority.

In today's F&I environment, equally important is a legally compliant process. Unfortunately, some still believe you have to choose between profits and compliance. The fact is, you can have excellent F&I income and remain legally compliant at the same time. Dealerships around the country are doing it every day.

About the Author

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