

The work order is what counts

By Joel Levitt

I met Ollie in rural Alabama. I didn't think much of him at first. He owned a small truck repair garage that was used by a client of mine. It was kind of a backwards place that was totally unremarkable in appearance. Computers were just starting to be common in fleet garages and he only had an ancient mechanical calculator.

He was a good vendor and kept most of his promises. His invoices were annoyingly detailed but he did the work and his work tended to stay done (very few repeat repairs). If there was a problem he was right there to make it right. We gave him a good deal of business over the years and I saw him regularly. As I got to know him better it became clear that although he was an everyday kind of guy he also was quite well off.



When I thought about it I thought he must have had family money because it was clear that his garage didn't seem that prosperous.

One day I asked him about it. He said his parents had passed on when he was a young man. He went through a bad patch after being in the motor pool in the Army. But he met Annie got married and sobered up. Basically he had to pull himself up by himself.

He said that since he knew me well he was going to tell me the secret of his wealth. He said it was simple but incredibly powerful and is the reason he earned money when outs in his business went bankrupt or just hung on hand to mouth.

He said when a truck rolls in he immediately puts a work order under the wiper blade. I was listening intently and still waiting to hear the secret. I said that's nice but what's the secret? He laughed and said that's it.

Whenever anyone touches that truck he jots down the time and the work. We may do 4 or 5 little jobs in addition to the big job requested by the customer. Those lost minutes are the difference between prosperity and subsistence. I've never had a customer complain since they know exactly what we did and how long it took.

His success in keeping and getting customers was the quality of his work and his customer service attitude. His financial success was that he got paid for everything he did. It has taken years for that difference to sink in.

In a vendor setting or in an in-house garage setting there are two keys. One key is what you read every day in business articles to be successful focus on service to the customer. That will get you customers (eventually). Ollie's advise will keep you in business and make you prosperous. Simply record everything you do and get paid for it (or get credit for it in an in-house maintenance facility).

Once all working time is accounted for and entered into the CMMS justifying your crews, fighting off outsourcing, choosing between competitive equipment is greatly simplified. Remember the key to all analysis is to know what happened. By the way it doesn't matter what method you use to collect the information, just collect it in a usable form!

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