

Editor's Desk

Steve Relyea



To build long-term relationships with customers, give them the facts and then let them decide.

BUILDING LOYALTY

How can an outsider tell that a business behaves ethically? A 56-year history of doing business in the same neighborhood is one piece of evidence. A majority of customers being repeat customers or referrals is another. Employees who have been with the company as long as 33 years and counting is a third.

All of these accomplishments can be claimed by Guido's Auto Service Centers of Phoenix, Arizona. Guido's is comprised of two automotive service facilities: Tony's Auto Service Center and 25th Street Automotive.

Guido's recently added another accomplishment: They were honored with an International Torch Award for Ethics from the Council of Better Business Bureaus. This new award is presented to businesses in recognition of best practices in leadership character and organizational ethics.

When presenting the award, the judges highlighted Guido's caring for their employees, engagement with their local community, and commitment to developing strong, long-term relationships with their customers.

Catherine Guido, general manager at Tony's Auto Service Center, described to *IAPA* some ways the company nurtures these relationships.

Guido's Auto Service Centers' caring for employees includes offering a 401K plan and paying for disability and insurance, she said. The company not only pays for training, but also pays the technicians to go to training.

Guido's engagement with the local community includes offering a major discount on car repairs for individuals being helped by a charity. The company also offers free car care clinics open to the entire community.

Guido's commitment to developing long-term relationships with their customers takes many forms. Catherine Guido described some:

- In staff meetings, situations that might come up in an auto repair shop are described and staff members are asked how they would handle them. "We have meetings bimonthly to go over ethics," she said. "We ask questions and we discuss, 'How would you handle this situation?' That keeps us all on the same page."

- Staff members advise customers about which services should be done now and which can wait. "We have an A, B, C situation where A means you shouldn't even drive it off the lot, B means it needs to be repaired in the next couple months, and C means it is maintenance or it is just starting to be a problem, so they have time," Guido explained. "We let the customer make the decision."

- Staff members explain the vehicle's problems to the customer. "We explain it in layman's terms," Guido said. "We will also bring the part up or bring a schematic up on the computer and show them what goes wrong and what causes it."

- If a customer says another shop has quoted a job at a lower price, staff members make sure the customer has all the facts. "I make sure they are comparing apples to apples," Guido said. "I call the other shop and I find out, oftentimes, that they are using an inferior part or they didn't include tax, supplies, or environmental fees. I get a lot of customers that stay with me by making that call. They can't believe I actually checked on their estimate for them to explain the difference."

- Guido's competes by offering quality, service, and prices that are not always the cheapest, but always competitive. "I've had customers say, 'We know you're not always the cheapest, but we know that you're going to do it right,'" Catherine Guido said. "We're not about being the cheapest, we're about being the best."

For information, visit www.guidosautoservicecenter.com. **IAPA**

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