

NewsStand - Overcoming FUD

by Ed Newman

AMSOIL Director of Advertising

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The relationship between our emotions, thoughts and bodies is complex. Because of the way we're wired as human beings, our thoughts can have an effect on how we feel and those feelings, as science has demonstrated in a variety of ways, can affect our health.

Laughter, they say, is good medicine that not only makes us feel better but can actually keep us healthy. According to the American Cancer Society, "Although available scientific evidence does not support claims that laughter can cure cancer... it can reduce stress and enhance a person's quality of life. Humor has physical effects because it can stimulate the circulatory system, immune system, and other systems in the body."

On the other end of the spectrum are emotions that can literally eat us up. Fear is a distressing emotion aroused by impending danger, evil or pain, whether the threat is real or imagined. I think first of stage fright, which can be crippling for many folks. But a whole range of examples can be cited to demonstrate how fear alters behavior, from the child who is afraid to sleep with the lights out to the man who hides money inside his mattress because he doesn't trust banks.

Uncertainty is another negative trait that affects all of us at one time or another. It's a Wall Street maxim that "the market doesn't like uncertainty." Uncertainty creates confusion because investors don't know whether to double down or barricade the gates. Uncertainty undermines confidence, an essential attitude that enables us to put hard-earned resources at risk. We need to feel confident that our investments will grow, or at least not be eroded.

Doubt is a mental state in which we find ourselves in two minds about a matter. It results in a paralysis of the will so that we become afraid to act, once again undercutting confidence and initiative. It causes people to feel hesitant about making a decision or taking action.

I recently learned that there is a name for this triple whammy of negative emotions. It's called FUD, an acronym for Fear, Uncertainty and Doubt. Though I've seen the consequences of FUD in many situations, I never knew there was a name for it.

Years ago I worked with a marketing director who shared a keen insight about this matter. Whenever we are selling something new -- a new product or a new way of doing things -- the customer is nearly always inwardly thinking, "Don't mess me up." Our recommendation might be the best solution in the world for their situation, yet inwardly they have a nagging fear which creates uncertainty and doubt. In sales we need to recognize that FUD is almost always a factor in a new sale.

Here are just a couple areas where FUD can mess you up:

1. During a 21-point check you notice that the transmission fluid is black and has a burnt smell. In recommending the transmission fluid be changed, the customer gets a little prickly.

It's very possible that FUD is at work here in a couple ways. I know quite a few people who have been misled by an unscrupulous mechanic at some point in their lives, especially if they were young or a female. Once bitten, twice shy, as they say. Furthermore, the occasional bad publicity from high profile instances of unnecessary repairs or bogus up-sells goes a long way toward staining the public perceptions of our industry. Sadly we live in a society that practically trains us to distrust those in authority.

1. You tend to recommend a premium, extended service life synthetic motor oil to all your customers with a mechanically sound engine. You believe in the convenience, the environmental benefit of less waste oil to dispose of and that cleaner engines last longer. They balk, however, at the idea of extended drains.

We've come a long way since the days when synthetic oil was 10 times more expensive than petroleum and no one knew what it was. This new technology motor oil was an unknown and motorists were skeptical, thus easily unsettled by their uncertainty about whether synthetics were safe.

Today, though synthetics have now been in service for 40 years and are so widely accepted that they are factory fill on more than two dozen makes and models of cars, there is still FUD regarding extended drain intervals and the cost benefits of these high tech oils.

That's okay It still makes economic sense for motorists to switch to synthetic motor oils without taking advantage of the longer service life capabilities of their fluids. Fewer repairs and higher resale value of a well-maintained vehicle are bonuses not to be discredited.

Conclusion

Good followup is always important with new customers or when up-selling existing customers. Customer emotions are in play during any change of routine. The customer wants to feel good about the choice he or she has made. Good followup will have a calming effect and reduce the stress of change. Your confidence is part of this. If you are able to answer questions, provide knowledge and affirm your expertise, you'll also have a positive impact. And as you know doubt know, I'm always prepared to explain why I like to recommend a synthetic solution.