

Maintenance: The Silent Killer

Kurt Vonnegut, my favorite author, wrote, "Another flaw in the human character is that everybody wants to build and nobody wants to do maintenance."

Such a true statement - Maintenance is just so important.

You go out and buy yourself a nice new car. The years pass by, and you drop it off at the mechanic for state inspection. She calls to tell you that the shocks are gone, the brakes all need to be replaced, the CV joints are shot and the clutch is about to give out. You stop and think, how could I have not noticed all that? The answer to that question is simple: It is because those things wear out over time, they do not just "give up."

When things wear at a slow rate, we tend not to notice it.

The daily wear on your store or practice is the same as it was for that car. Except you don't have to take your store in for a yearly inspection. Maybe you should.

Owning and operating a business is no different than owning a home; something is always in need of repair. Even if your office has a cleaning service, things do happen between visits. Every office should have a toolbox with some basic tools to do general repairs. Every office should have a vacuum, broom, dustpan, sponge, cloths and glass cleaner.

In case of an emergency like a burst hot water heater be sure to have the phone numbers clearly posted for your rental property maintenance people (if applicable), a plumber and a handyperson. You may want to mark and review with staff where things like the water cut off valve and main electrical panel switches are.

Your business is a direct reflection of you and the old saying still holds true:
"You never get a second try at a first impression!"

Be sure that all staff understands that it is their job to fix what they can. When they cannot fix it, then they notify you. If it is your job to assure that the office looks good, then avoid a negative response when something is brought to your attention. You may be tempted to look disappointed when being told that yet another thing needs to be repaired or replaced but be sure to say, "Thank you I'll get that done." do not sigh, roll your eyes or complain.

Also make it clear that no one in the office is below putting away a magazine, picking up a piece of trash, wiping down a counter or cleaning the front window. This includes you whether you are the doctor, office manager, optician or desk clerk - lead by example.

Grab the checklist and with a co-worker, take a walk around your entire office. You might be surprised.

To make this work you have to have someone willing to take a critical look at these things. If you are not a neat-freak and a slightly critical person then this is not the job for you. Close is not good enough here!

Walk outside (at least 50' from the store front) and have a good look around.

- Is the parking area free of trash? (I don't care whose job it is!)
- Are any bushes/landscape nearby trimmed, alive, healthy and not blocking any windows?
- Is your business sign still in good shape?
- Does your storefront look inviting?
- Can people even tell you are open?
- Is the sidewalk safe?
- Is it clear which door they are supposed to go to?

No? Then FIX IT.

Next, walk up to the area directly in front of your entrance door.

- Is the "Welcome" mat clean and in good shape?
- Is the front door clean from top to bottom?
- Is the window or glass free of fingerprints?
- Is the doorknob or push bar clean, free of tarnish and wear?
- Is the door 100% free of any old peeling paint or old decals?
- Are your posted hours correct?
- Does the door open easily?
- Is "Push" or "Pull" easily determined?

No? Then FIX IT.

Now, open the door, step just inside the front door and STOP. Look around and see what your customer sees when they enter your store.

- Is this an inviting space?
- Is the floor clean?
- Is your front desk staff welcoming?
- Is there a logical place where your customer should go next, or is the customer in purgatory, waiting for directions?
- Is it too warm or cold?
- Does it smell? (damp, moldy, stale, etc.)
- Is the space well lit?
- Is the area free from fall and trip hazards?

No? Then FIX IT.

Now, step forward to the reception area. How does the reception area look to your customer?

- Is the countertop clean, no scratches, no gouges?
- Do the staff areas behind the counter look neat and organized?
- Is there actually room for a customer to approach the counter?
- Is the counter large enough for the customer to set down their bag?
- Too many or too few brochures, signs and accessories?
- Is any paperwork easily available and ready to be filled out?
- Is there a working pen ready for use?

No? Then FIX IT.

Now step back and actually take a seat in the waiting area.

- Is there actually room enough to sit down?

- Are the chairs all clean and comfortable?
 - Sit in all of them and find out
 - Stains = throw it out
 - Feels unstable = throw it out

- Is any reading material fresh? Are the magazines customer-friendly or are they copies of Golf Digest from 1997?

- Are the seats facing the wall instead of the display boards?
 - Facing the frame displays encourages sales.

- Do customers have a place to hang a jacket?

- Could a child entertain themselves for twenty minutes?

No? Then FIX IT.

It is exam time! So, walk down the hall and into the preliminary exam room.

- Is it inviting?

- Is it clinical but not medicinal?

- Does your equipment look modern and not like something out of Frankenstein's lab?

- Can the customer easily and smoothly transition between instruments?

- Does everything work like it is supposed to?

No? Then FIX IT.

Preliminary tests are complete, so now head to your exam room.

- Is it inviting?
- Is it clinical but not medicinal?
- Does your equipment look modern and not like something out of Frankenstein's lab?
- Does everything work like it is supposed to?

No? Then FIX IT.

Grab your optician, because now it is time to sell some glasses.

When was the last time you dumped and restocked ALL your POP items?

- Are all posters current and not yellow, curling, faded, etc.?
- Are all fashion blocks current?
- Are all cards current and standing upright?
- Are all manufacturer displays current?

- Are the displays clean?

- All frames current and fashion-correct?

- No broken parts or pieces on any boards?

- Is the lighting flattering to the merchandise and the customer?

- Does the board have some color?

No? Then FIX IT.

You have been working hard. It's time for a bathroom break. Ask the magic question: Would you want to be locked in your bathroom for more than a half hour?

- Is the toilet clean?

- Are the toilet and toilet seat free from wear and stains? Rust stains are 100% unacceptable!

- Does the toilet reliably flush like it should?

- Ample toilet paper and paper towels available?

- Anti-bacterial soap?

- Does it have a trashcan **with a lid**? (not optional)

- Can the door be opened with a towel and then be thrown away?

No? Then FIX IT.

Finally, it is break time, so let us head to the break area. Again, ask yourself the magic question: Would you want to sit down and eat here?

Rules – This is a company break area not a kitchen!

- No microwave popcorn ever – it stinks!

- No full course meals prepared in the microwave.
 - Customers do not want to sit and smell your nasty reheated Kung-Pao chicken.

- No left over food and empty soda and drink containers sitting on tables/counters.

- [Might be a really good day to finally clean out that fridge!]

Now, just one last step to go:

Retrace your steps and look at your entire office from floor - to - ceiling.

Paying close attention to LOOKING UP!

Do you see?

- Chipped paint?

- Broken or stained ceiling tiles?

- Torn carpet? (Are you kidding me?)

- Chipped wallboard?

- Lights that are out?

All overhead lighting must be “natural white” or “full-spectrum.”

This includes all your usual overhead fluorescent fixtures.

Just changing bulbs from old stale ones to full spectrum will increase sales!

A check in this last column is a RED FLAG!

FIX THEM NOW

When things wear at a slow rate, we tend not to notice it.

Fail to address these issues and you are basically telling your customers, “We don’t care about the business anymore.” From the customer’s perspective that translates to, “They don’t care about me anymore.”