

Are You Passing the Baton to Win?

By Kimberly Skaggs

One of the events I really like at the Summer Olympics is the Track & Field 4x4 Relay. That's where four runners pass a baton every four-hundred meters before crossing the finish line. An intriguing aspect of this event is that it tests not just an individual's talent as a runner, but their ability to perform as a team.

If you think about it, vehicle dealerships pretty much run the same way.

Just like the 4x4 Relay, speed is a critical factor for dealerships after closing a deal. Making it to the finish line requires a strategy based on diligence and accuracy.

In the 4x4 Relay, one teammate is at the starting line and runs the first 400 meters. The second teammate waits at the line ahead to receive the baton when the first runner completes the lap. The process is then repeated by the third and fourth runners. Each team member is running the same distance, but the order in which they run is strategically determined.

At the average car dealership, let's say the first "runner" is the Sales Associate. He or she sets the pace of the race by showing the customer available vehicles, presenting them with options, and getting them to agree to purchase.

A good performance by the second runner, the Sales Manager or sales desk, is to approve the deal and tweak the final sales numbers, which puts the team in a favorable position to advance closer to the finish line.

The third runner is the F&I Manager. This is a pivotal role because it's the last chance to put some space between the dealership and its competition based on the products the F&I Manager can offer.

Now, we are headed for the final lap. The fourth runner is the anchor. This is the Title Clerk. The Title Clerk carries the responsibility of finishing the race for the team without doing anything that would jeopardize the team's chances of winning. That's a tall order, so, I want to pause for a moment to focus on the hand-off between the F&I Manager and the Title Clerk.

Basically, the F&I Manager is the last person in the dealership that has face-to-face or "across the desk" time with the customer. F&I has the final opportunity and ability to make sure the Title Clerk receives everything they need to finalize the ownership transfer for each deal. So, if the F&I Manager is quick to accurately gather all required documents such as proof of insurance, current driver's license, social security number, power of attorney, etc., then the Title Clerk can properly do their job in a timely way. While this may seem obvious, we must remember that the buyer doesn't know or understand that the title and registration process doesn't even begin until after the deal is funded and cleared to process. Any delay undermines the buyer's expectations, which can affect a dealership's reputation.

Too often, dealerships overlook the true benefit of "passing the baton" strategically from F&I to the Title Clerk—that being higher CSI scores and a smooth and complete sales process. At most dealerships, paperwork processing begins with the F&I Manager and ends with the Title Clerk. Therefore, documents must be complete and accurate by the time they reach the Title Clerk. If the Title Clerk does their job quickly and accurately, the dealership is better positioned to "cross the finish line" and get a WIN for the customer and the business.

About the Author



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