



HOW TO START (OR GROW) A TRUE SERVICE DEPARTMENT



By Greg Hayne, Roof Management

Part 1 – Common Mistakes that Paralyze You

This is the first in a multi-part series on “How to start or grow a true service department.” The ideas, concepts, fundamentals and tools that will be presented have come from our work helping commercial roofing contractors grow their service departments, interviews we have done over the years with those running top-performing service organizations and through sharing best practices among contractors participating in formal peer groups we facilitate.

What we will share works. You have competitors already successfully doing these things.

What we see in the marketplace is that those contractors who are struggling to grow their service departments are usually making (multiple) key mistakes that are setting themselves up for difficulties, if not outright failure. Let’s start this series of articles with a discussion of some of the most common fundamental mistakes or poor choices. Because if you don’t get these things right, most of the rest of what we will share won’t work as

well.

The owner of the company, “the boss,” must be personally involved in the initiative to grow a service department. This isn’t something that she or he can delegate. Why? Because the type of individual who is good at running a service department thrives on routine and structure. They “need” those things. And they do a great job in that context. They also hate change, uncertainty and risk taking, all of which are going to happen if you grow a department. They are oftentimes described as a perfectionistic, a good characteristic to have in the role of running a department, but perfectionists are afraid of making mistakes. These two characteristics tend to reinforce each other. The department manager also tends to fear change and they fear making a mistake. The result is inaction on new initiatives and a ton of reasons (excuses) as to why they have not yet been able to move things forward.

So “the boss” needs to be involved to guide and, well, “push” whoever will otherwise be in charge of the day-to-day activity. This requires more active involvement than you, the boss, think it will. Let me say that again: this is going to involve more active involvement than you think it will. When we

train service departments the contrast is striking. When a roofing company owner is actively engaged and involved, results come. When they are not, results are either puny or non-existent. Are there exceptions to this? Sure. Will you be one of them? No, because if you were the exception, your department would be growing and you wouldn't be reading this article!

The second observation I would make about the "mistakes" contractors make is that they bring the same type of attitude and approach to their service departments that they use in production work. The construction industry, in general, is set up to foster "adversarial relationships." There is a drive for productivity, because the greater the productivity, the greater the profit. This is completely understandable and necessary. Unfortunately, the individual most contractors put in charge of their service department's day-to-day operations usually has come from that sort of mindset and that is not good in a service culture! The operative word in "Service Department" is "service" and "service" really means "customer-service oriented." This is often the opposite of the production mindset. Hayne Coaching Group conducts behavior assessments on our client's key employees and the last time we checked, the number of reports we have for people who are really great at customer service was less than 5%. For you to be successful at service you need somebody who is customer-service oriented. Next, we will start talking about how to find that special someone.

Part 2 – Skills (or Roles) Needed.

There are fundamentally two specific skill sets needed in your office in order to build a successful service department. First, you need sufficient knowledge of basic roofing issues and solutions. The name that we assign to this role is "service superintendent." This is the individual who will be responsible for making sure the guys doing repairs and other work in the field have the right materials, can get their technical questions answered if they get stuck and, generally, provide any and all technical help required. He should be able to help with troubleshooting in the field and should be responsible for and able to check jobs to make sure the guys are performing as they should.

Secondly, you need a "service coordinator." This individual receives incoming service requests, schedules work, processes office paperwork,

produces invoices, interacts with the customers and, basically, is the prime contact point for all incoming requests and questions. Although this individual will need to learn the mechanics of scheduling in terms of which customers get priority over others and which crews should be sent to handle certain types of roofing systems, fundamentally, this role does not require roofing skills, it requires people skills. This role needs to be filled by somebody good at customer service.

In a small department, these roles are often handled by one individual, which is understandable, but most roofers tend to choose someone with the roofing skills over someone with good customer service skills. That is a mistake. Now, if you are reading this and saying, "But Greg, how can you expect somebody with no real roofing knowledge to handle roofing technical issues?" You can't. But here is the other side of that: How can you expect somebody with no real customer service skills to skillfully handle customer service issues? You may think your "roof guy" can do both, but almost always he can't. At least not well. What you are sacrificing by doing this is the customer service, and frankly, doing what makes your job easier. Hopefully, though you can begin to understand that this choice also is the thing which makes your customer's life in dealing with you more difficult. And the service business is about making your customer's life easy, not yours.

In a larger department, there could be multiple people involved in either of these roles, but that does not change the fact that you need people with super customer service skills to interact with your customer base every bit as much as you need somebody who can handle technical issues in the field. In the next Issue of MR Magazine, we will start talking about how to actually do that.

Greg Hayne owns Roof Management, a traditional roof consulting company with a nontraditional twist. A few years ago, Greg became intrigued by the exceptional service some roofing contractor service departments were providing to his building owners. He decided to find out exactly how these particular companies got so good at service

"I believe there are better, smarter ways to work. We help companies find and implement those better ways." ~Greg Hayne

