

**INSTALLATIONS**

**THAT  
KEEP  
CUSTOMERS**

**COMING BACK**

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# **“In an increasingly digital world, customers can buy almost anything online—but they can’t install a fireplace with the click of a button.”**

## **The Enduring Edge: Why Installations Matter More Than Ever**

In an increasingly digital world, customers can buy almost anything online—but they can’t install a fireplace with the click of a button. That’s where local hearth retailers still have an enduring edge. Because unlike mass-market retailers, we don’t just sell products—we also provide the expertise and craftsmanship needed to turn a hearth into the lasting centerpiece of a home. And that expertise is what keeps customers coming back.

At my company (Classic Stoves & Fireplaces), we’ve learned that a successful installation isn’t just about getting the job done—it’s about creating a seamless customer experience along the way. After all, a well-executed installation doesn’t just complete a business transaction. It also reinforces a retailer’s reputation, builds customer loyalty, and generates word-of-mouth referrals that can fuel long-term growth.

So if you handle your installations in-house, how do you ensure those jobs are growing your business instead of staining your reputation? By investing in training and technology, ensuring a seamless installation experience, and preventing problems before they happen. When you take the time to master these key areas, every installation becomes an opportunity to strengthen your brand, create customers for life, and boost your bottom line.

With this massive opportunity in mind, let’s start with the foundation of every great installation: ensuring your team has the training and technology they need to succeed.

## **Preparing Installers With Training and Technology**

A great installation is about more than just the final product—it’s about professionalism, communication, and confidence throughout the entire process. That’s why investing in both training and technology is essential to creating an effortless installation experience.

Beyond technical skills, installers must be trained as brand ambassadors who represent the company at all times. As Grant Falco often says, “It’s not what it is; it’s what it looks like.” The way installers present themselves—through their clothing, their trucks, and their demeanors—sets the tone for the entire job. A clean uniform, an organized workspace, and a respectful attitude all build trust with the customer before the first tool is even picked up.

But professionalism alone isn’t enough. Installers also need to be trained to think on their feet. While manuals outline ideal conditions, real-world installations often present unexpected challenges. The best installation teams work through “what-if” scenarios in their training so they can troubleshoot on-site, solve problems efficiently, and deliver a smooth experience for the customer.

Just as importantly, installers need to be trained in customer communication. Installation is the final point of contact before a job is finished, and tensions often run high. Well-trained installers know how to set expectations upfront, address concerns with confidence, and explain how the product should be operated and maintained. A single conversation can be the difference be-

tween a frustrated customer and a life-long advocate.

Of course, having the right technology is also crucial, and the best installation teams use technology to increase efficiency, reduce mistakes, and create a better customer experience. One of the most important ways technology improves installations is through job site documentation. Taking thorough photos from start to finish and uploading them into a company cloud isn't optional—it's a safeguard for the future. What may seem like an unnecessary extra step today could be the thing that protects both the company and the customer years down the line. Similarly, using digital installation forms ensures consistency. A strong installation process relies on repeatability, and standardized digital forms help every job get documented the same way—every time.

Real-time communication is another simple but effective way technology can improve installations. Installers should call before arriving at job sites so customers know when to expect them, and they should also check in with the office every 45 minutes to provide status updates. A phone alarm set to 45-minute intervals makes this second nature, keeping the office ahead of schedule changes and ensuring that customers stay informed before small delays become big problems.

When training and technology work together, the result is a confident, prepared team that installs with precision and communicates with customers.

## **Building Customer Confidence From Start to Finish**

As the previous section demonstrates, a great installation doesn't begin when the crew arrives—it starts well before that. The steps leading up to the install are just as critical as the installation itself. Success hinges on preparation, professionalism, and clear communication every step of the way.

That's why install teams need to start their days in their warehouse with a structured approach. Before heading to the job site, installers should meet

with the installation manager to review job notes and pictures, ensuring they fully understand the scope of work. Checking parts against the work order is another essential step, since confirming that everything is loaded onto the truck prevents costly delays from missing components. All tools (including ladders, stove lifts, gas line parts, and floor protection) should also be accounted for. When installers take time to prepare in the morning, they set

themselves up for success long before they reach the job site.

Once the crew is on the way, the first interactions with customers begin. A quick call while en route reassures homeowners and lets them know when to expect the crew. Upon arrival, professionalism is key. Knocking on the door, stepping back a couple of feet, and keeping hands visible all help put customers at ease. A friendly greeting, a handshake, and a clear introduction go a long way in establishing trust from the very start.

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Before unpacking any tools, the lead installer should walk the customer through the scope of work, confirming expectations and addressing questions along the way. While one team member handles this conversation, another should begin unloading tools and protecting the workspace: laying down floor coverings, moving nearby furniture if necessary, and ensuring all work areas are properly prepped. Taking these extra steps shows respect for customers' homes and reinforces professionalism from the beginning.

When the installation actually starts, attention to detail becomes the priority. Every action should be precise and intentional, from verifying measurements to triple-checking clearances before making any cuts. Consistently following best practices helps prevent mistakes and ensures a smooth, efficient workflow. Throughout the process, installers should also maintain an open line of communication with both the customer and the office. This includes setting expectations on timing, confirming each phase of the job as it progresses, and being proactive if any challenges arise. In short, a well-managed install isn't just about technical expertise—it's about making the process feel effortless for the customer.

But the job isn't finished just because the product is in place. A great installation ends when the customer feels confident using the new fireplace or stove. Before packing up, installers should take a step back, acknowledge the completed work, and

let the customer know they're excited about how it turned out. Walking customers through the final product is essential—not just to showcase the installation, but also to ensure they understand how to use it. If possible, the unit should be test-fired to demonstrate operation and confirm that everything works as expected. Customers should also be shown how to adjust the settings, maintain their unit, and perform necessary cleaning. Taking the extra time to answer all their questions minimizes frustration down the road and helps prevent unnecessary return trips.



Finally, the customer experience shouldn't stop when the crew drives away. A simple follow-up call a few weeks later reinforces professionalism and provides an opportunity to address any lingering concerns. Asking if customers have any questions, confirming that they're happy with their installation, and thanking them for their business shows them that they're valued—not just during the installation but long after.

When handled with care from start to finish, the entire process leaves customers with more than just a fireplace or stove—they walk away with confidence in their purchase and a reason to recommend your business to others.

### **Avoiding Common Pitfalls**

Even with the best training, technology, and processes, challenges can arise during installations. One of the most common issues involves structural surprises—hidden obstructions behind walls, unexpected electrical or plumbing lines, or unforeseen framing challenges. To mitigate these risks, install-

ers must be prepared to adapt quickly. Keeping extra lumber like 2x4s and 2x6s on the truck ensures that minor structural modifications can be made on the fly. Installers should also be ready to encounter anything behind a wall—whether it’s a gas line, a water pipe, or an old electrical junction box. Having a contingency plan in place before making any cuts helps avoid costly delays and keeps the job moving forward. Since opening up a wall is sometimes unavoidable, carrying a small amount of drywall and spray-on texture allows installers to restore the space as neatly as possible when such adjustments need to be made.

Another common pitfall is improper product placement. Even minor misalignments—like a vent pipe that’s slightly off or a hearth pad that doesn’t sit square—can lead to long-term issues. The keys to avoiding these mistakes are precision and communication. Before cutting or drilling anything, installers should confirm the placement of the product with the customer and verify all measurements. Keeping 24-inch and 36-inch levels on the truck at all times ensures that vent pipes are aligned both functionally and visually. On free-standing stoves, managing customer expectations early is also critical. Depending on ceiling framing, elbows or offsets may need to be visible in the main room. By discussing this possibility upfront, installers can prevent mid-job frustrations and even find a creative way to work around the challenge—turning a potential problem into a win.

Beyond on-site challenges, one of the biggest sources of installation mistakes starts before the crew ever arrives at the job. As Tim Reed explained

in a previous edition of *The Fire Time Journal*, disorganized warehouses and inadequate staging lead to more installation delays than most businesses realize.<sup>1</sup> A missing piece of pipe, an incorrect finish, or a part that wasn’t converted before installation can bring a job to a screeching halt—wasting time, frustrating customers, and cutting into profitability.

To prevent problems like these, Tim outlines a simple but transformative approach in his article: the Yellow Zone and Red Zone system. Jobs in the Yellow Zone are staged in the warehouse with everything that’s available at the time, while missing components are flagged and tracked. By the time a job reaches the Red Zone—just 5 days before

installation—every piece should be present and ready to go. Installers conduct a final check before loading the truck to ensure that nothing is missing, then shrinkwrap the entire job together for easy transport. If a critical component is still unavailable, the job is rescheduled proactively, allowing the company to maintain control rather than reacting to problems on-site. This system reduces return trips, elimi-

nates last-minute scrambles, and keeps installations running smoothly.

Ultimately, avoiding installation pitfalls isn’t just about reacting to problems—it’s about proactively preventing them. By training teams to anticipate structural challenges, prioritizing precision in product placement, and organizing warehouse operations effectively, businesses can eliminate costly mistakes and create an installation process that’s as seamless as possible.

1. Reed, Tim. "Lost Profit Starts in the Warehouse." *The Fire Time Journal: A Map for 2022*, vol. 1, 2022, pp. 98–101.

**A GREAT  
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## The Competitive Advantage: How Great Installations Lead to Long-Term Success

All in all, a great installation isn't just about completing a job—it's about creating an experience that builds trust, strengthens relationships, and fuels growth. But exceptional installations don't happen by accident. Instead, they happen when companies train teams to a high standard, use technology to enhance efficiency, and design every step of the process with the customer in mind. From preparation in the warehouse to the final follow-up, every detail matters. And by proactively preventing common pitfalls before they happen, businesses can turn installations into a competitive advantage instead of a source of stress.

If you've made it this far into this article, then you probably agree—so now it's time to take action. Look at your installation process and

ask yourself: "Where can our team improve? Does our training program truly equip installers to represent our brand? Are we leveraging technology to streamline efficiency? Is the customer experience as effortless as possible?" By making even small improvements in any of these areas, you can transform your installation department into a powerful engine for customer satisfaction, brand loyalty, and overall profitability.

In the end, installations leave lasting impressions that determine whether customers feel frustrated or walk away happy. And when customers walk away happy, they usually return at some point—often with family and friends. That's why proactive preparation and seamless installations matter. Because when every detail is handled with care, every installation becomes more than just a job—it becomes the reason customers keep coming back.

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