

Stop Saying "No" to Service

Saying "No" Costs More Than You Know

After more than two decades in the hearth industry, I've had the chance to see it from just about every angle. I started out in Montana in 2002 as an installation assistant—just looking for temporary work during the off-season of guiding hunting trips. But I quickly saw that this industry could be more than seasonal. I moved into a lead installer role, and from there, pursued new opportunities across Eastern Washington and eventually to the coast, taking on everything from new construction installs to retrofit projects.

Over time, I stepped into service, then into management. Eventually, I became the service manager at a large hearth company in the Seattle area and found myself wearing just about every hat—from making sales at the Western Washington Fair to troubleshooting the toughest jobs in the field. If something couldn't be fixed, I was the one they sent.

In 2021, I was ready for a new chapter—something that would be easier on my body and better for my family. That's when I joined [Associated Energy Systems \(AES\)](#) as a territory rep in Idaho. The funny part? All of the companies I once worked for are now AES customers.

So why am I telling you all this in an article about service? Because installation and service weren't just my path into the industry—they're the reason I know exactly how valuable service can be. That's why, as I visit retailers around

BY DAVE ANDERSON

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the Pacific Northwest, I'm still surprised by how many say "no" to service—claiming it's not profitable, not worth the trouble, or not part of their business model.

But from what I've seen, that mindset is costing dealers more than they think.

Today, I visit stores across the Pacific North-

west and regularly hear dealers say things like, “There’s no money in service,” or “It’s just not worth the hassle.” I’ve watched businesses turn service calls away—handing those customers off to someone else, thinking they’ve dodged a bullet. But in reality, they’re giving up tens of thousands of dollars in service calls—and, more importantly, handing over future sales.

When I worked as a service manager, I quickly realized I wasn’t just fixing fireplaces. I was building trust and creating new opportunities. I had an iPad, access to pricing, and the ability to write installation contracts on-site. If a unit was old, unsafe, or beyond repair, I could walk the homeowner through a replacement—ethically, respectfully, and with full transparency. I wasn’t trying to upsell everyone. I was simply there to offer solutions when replacement made more sense than repair. And I was paid a commission when it did.

Of course, not every tech starts with that skill-set—but you can train people. With a clear plan for moving entry-level employees up the ladder, you can build a service team that’s smart, professional, and profitable.

Still, I hear the same excuses over and over from businesses that avoid service altogether. These usually boil down to five main objections:

1. **“Service customers are a pain.”**
2. **“Service doesn’t make money.”**
3. **“I never have all the parts I need.”**
4. **“I can’t find good service techs.”**
5. **“I only service what I sell.”**

I’ve heard these same five objections over and over again—and I get it. But after more than 20 years in this industry, I know they don’t hold up. So let’s take a closer look at each one and explore what’s really possible when hearth dealers like you stop saying “no” to service.

Objection 1: “Service Customers Are a Pain”

Most service customers aren’t a pain—they’re just frustrated. They want someone to help them fix a problem they don’t understand, and

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when your team doesn’t have a clear process, tensions rise. But if you communicate well on the front end and walk in prepared, service calls can be smooth, productive, and even profitable.

The key is asking the right questions upfront. If you’re diagnosing what’s wrong with a gas fireplace, for example, here are some questions you should ask:

- **What brand and model is it? (You may need to give them tips on where to find that info.)**
- **What seems to be the issue?**
- **Does it have a standing pilot or IPI? (Explain the difference if they don’t know.)**
- **Does it use a wall switch or remote?**
- **Can you see the pilot light? What color is it—blue or yellow?**
- **Is the main burner lighting? Is there a fan?**
- **Can you send me a picture of the unit inside the house, along with a photo of the termination outside the house?**

For pellet stoves, the questions are similar:

- **What’s the brand and model?**
- **Is it an insert or freestanding?**
- **When was the last time it was professionally cleaned?**
- **How do you turn it on—thermostat or onboard controls?**
- **What’s it doing or not doing?**



Most of the time, customers think they've cleaned their stoves, but they've really just wiped the glass and vacuumed the firebox. My rule was always this: *You can't truly service a pellet stove unless it's clean.* Start there.

At the end of the day, service customers only become difficult when they don't feel heard or when there's no clear plan. Give them both, and they'll often become your most loyal, grateful customers.

Objection 2: "Service Doesn't Make Money"

Service absolutely *can* make money—but only if you run it with the same intentionality as the rest of your business. That means knowing your numbers, charging appropriately, and setting your team up for success in the field.

If I were starting a service department today, I'd structure pricing around both time and travel. I'd charge \$249 for a local service call, which would include the first 30 minutes. After that, I'd bill \$89 for each additional half-hour. For non-local jobs, I'd set rates between \$289 and \$319 (depending on the distance). And if I had to return for any reason, I wouldn't charge a new service fee—just the additional time. Of course, these numbers will vary based on your market. But the basic pricing

principle should stay the same: Price your work in a way that's competitive and profitable. If you're not sure where to start, secret shop a few competitors to get a feel for what others are charging in your area.

Pricing is just one part of the equation. Presentation matters too. Service techs should show up clean and in uniform, with booties on their feet and drop cloths for every work area. They should avoid smoking in the driveway or swearing in a customer's home—and they should treat every house like it belongs to their grandma. Little things like this make a big difference in how customers perceive your company.

More importantly, never leave a job site without a solution or a clear plan for what happens next. That's where a lot of service calls fall apart. If you walk out the door without answers, customers feel ignored—and that often turns into bad reviews or lost business. If you hit a wall during the call, don't hesitate to reach out to your manufacturer or distributor while you're still on-site. Most customers don't expect you to know everything, but they do expect to see you trying.

And whatever you do, don't leave without collecting payment. That's another place where money gets lost. If parts need to be ordered, take full

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payment before you leave. If the job is done, collect on the spot. Telling someone "the office will follow up" only increases the chances of a payment delay—or worse, a dispute.

The bottom line? Service can absolutely be a reliable profit center. But you have to run it like one. That means charging what you're worth, stocking your vans with what you need (more on that next), and showing up like a true professional every time.

Objection 3: "I Never Have All the Parts I Need"

You'll never have every part—but that's no excuse for being unprepared. In my experience, the second you drive away from a service call, you're losing money. That's why the goal should always be to stock your warehouse and your vans with the 90% of parts you need most often.

For gas fireplaces, your basic inventory should include items like gas valves, thermocouples, thermopiles, pilot assemblies, control modules, remote systems, snap discs, and fans. For pellet stoves, it's just as important—especially if you're the one selling them. You'll want to keep things like control boards, igniters, combustion and convection blowers, auger motors, snap discs, burn pots, grates, and gaskets on hand. These aren't just "nice-to-haves"—they're essential if you want to fix things on the first trip and keep your service team efficient.

At AES, we've put together a spreadsheet that lists the most commonly used parts by brand. We've done the legwork to help you stock smarter—and reduce those dreaded return trips.

The parts you need should be inventoried in both your warehouse and your service vehicles. Yes, keeping parts in stock ties up money—but it saves far more in lost time, frustrated customers, and second trips that could've been avoided. Think of it as an investment in first-call success. It's the responsibility of both the service manager and the technician to make sure those inventories stay accurate. When your team is properly stocked, they show up ready to work, fix more on the first visit, and leave behind happier customers—all while building a more profitable business.

Objection 4: "I Can't Find Good Service Techs"

Good service techs aren't impossible to find, but they are impossible to keep if you don't treat the role like a real career. Finding people is one thing—keeping them is where many companies fall short.

Our industry is a professional trade. We're not just installing boxes; we're *putting fire in people's homes*. That should come with pride, purpose, and a clear path for growth. If you want to build a strong service team, start at the bottom and give people a way to move up. When you're hiring entry-level installer assistants, show them how they can progress from assistant to lead installer, from there to service trainee, then to full technician, and eventually to service manager or even into sales or leadership roles.

Personally, I'd much rather hire people who are eager to learn and train them in our company's systems than bring in those who think they already know everything. The key is structure. Tie pay raises to milestones like NFI certification and completed training. Don't just talk about advancement—map it out and support it.

One of the best ideas I've heard lately is re-branding the "slow season" as the "invest season." That's the time to double down on your team—to cross-train, sharpen skills, and introduce new product categories like outdoor living or new construction.

And above all, treat your people like professionals. Offer competitive pay. Create a culture of respect. Provide benefits that show you value your team. When you do that, you won't just find good techs—you'll keep them.

Objection 5: "I Only Service What I Sell"

This one always baffles me. If your company only services the products it sells, you're missing out on a huge opportunity.

Let me give you an example. Imagine that a homeowner calls your store and asks about service on a GTI GDV6000. You sell Enviro.

What do you do? If your policy is "we only service what we sell," you've just turned that homeowner away—and handed them (and their future business) to a competitor.

But let's say you say "yes" instead. You go out there and find that the unit has a bad pilot assembly, a cracked burner, and a failing gasket that needs a new glass assembly. You walk the homeowner through the repair cost—and then you explain what it would take to replace the unit with a modern model that fits the home better. The customer chooses the replacement. You do the install. And just like that, you've earned a customer for life.

I've seen jobs like this add up to serious revenue—especially when you treat those calls as opportunities to offer real solutions, not just make repairs. So instead of turning away a service lead just because it's not a product you sold, ask yourself this: What's the lifetime value of one great customer? Because when



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you help someone fix a problem no one else wants to touch, you don't just win the job—you become their go-to fireplace pro for life.

Don't Let Service Leads Slip Away

At the end of the day, service isn't just an afterthought—it's a cornerstone of a successful hearth business.

Yes, service calls require planning. Yes, they involve training, parts, and people. But when you push past the common objections—when you stop saying, "Service customers are a pain," or "It doesn't make money," or "We don't stock enough parts"—you open the door to consistent revenue, stronger customer relationships, and long-term growth.

You build trust by solving problems. You build loyalty by doing what other companies won't.

And you build a thriving team by creating a roadmap that turns entry-level hires into confident professionals.

In today's market, it's not enough to sell great products. You have to stand behind them—and the best way to do that is with service.

So build service processes. Stock the right parts. Train your techs well. And say "yes" when others say "no."

Because, as the old saying goes, "Word of mouth can be your best friend or your worst enemy." If you have good people and provide excellent customer service, then you'll have consistent customers for life. When someone's ready to add a fireplace, fire pit, or outdoor heat—or replace an old unit—you'll be their first call. So don't let your service leads slip away—capture them today!

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