

## **HOW TO RELATE SERVICE ISSUES TO THE RV TECHNICIAN**

Let me preface this article with a true story to exemplify what happens when customers “diagnose” their own problems:

“Mr. Customer” calls me for a service appointment. States he has a problem with his furnace on his motor-home. Relates that his furnace is sooting and intermittently fails to ignite. Says he is sure it is the igniter board. Ok, so I'm thinking he may have a couple of issues, possibly a LPG gas pressure issue, or failed gas valve in the furnace itself causing a combustion issue and the sooting. He may also have a problem with a safety switch or it could be the igniter board causing it not to ignite.

So I arrive for the service call, Mr. Customer being a helpful kind of person has partially dis-assembled the furnace for me so it saves time in tear-down to do the diagnosis. In reviewing his symptoms with him, he also mentions that when the furnace does work, it causes the lights in the RV to dim. States this has been going on for about a week.

So I do a quick hot-wire on the furnace to put it in operation. I'm noticing the fan is not turning full speed, but fast enough to close the sail switch. It ignites and sure enough starts sooting. So I check the voltage to the furnace, 11.2 DC volts. Well that certainly explains his symptoms.

In checking the electrical system, it was found that the power converter had failed causing the voltage drop. I explained to Mr. Customer that what was needed to repair his issue was a replacement converter.

He was hesitant that that would fix his furnace, but agreed to the replacement converter.

New converter installed; system voltage 13.6 volts. I again hot-wired the furnace, fan turns full speed, ignites and in its partially disassembled state is working properly. I asked if he wanted me to reassemble the furnace and he said he took it apart, he'll put it back together. Job done, on to the next call....

Later that day, Mr. Customer called me back, pretty upset that his furnace was not working! I told him I would stop back after my last job, but if the problem wasn't related to the work I did, there would be another service call charge. He said the reason he called me in the first place WAS the furnace!

Ok, so I arrive back at his motor-home. The furnace appears put back together. I turn the thermostat on; the fan comes on but no ignition. So I pull the access cover and find several wires in the wrong place. Corrected the wiring and WALA! Works great.

Needless to say, the customer had no comment about the second service charge.

So, what went wrong here?

First, the customer called me with his *diagnosis*, the igniter board rather than relating all his symptoms. Second, it was apparent that the customer had attempted to do the repair himself, had gotten into it and realized he was over his head, hence the partial disassembly of the furnace.

Third, he did not relate all the symptoms to me up front. Had he mentioned all the symptoms including the dimming lights, I would have bypassed the furnace and first checked the system voltage saving him billable diagnostic time.

Forth, he tried to re-assemble the unit himself and got it wrong costing him an additional service call and labor charges.

Now while this situation is extreme, it demonstrates what can happen if problems are not related properly to the technician. Let's face it, most people would rather fix it themselves if they can rather than have to pay a professional do it. But sometimes (more often than not), the "do-it-yourself" approach can cost you more money in the long run, **and in some cases can be dangerous!**

Consider this, if you are going to pay me to come out and diagnose and repair an issue, it behooves you to follow a few steps to help me do my job more effectively and quickly thereby costing you less.

**#1) Tell me exactly what you are experiencing. Be brief and to the point.**

Telling me that the same thing happened to Uncle Harry's RV probably has no relevance to what your problem is. Long stories not relevant to your issue such as what your neighbors say the problem is or your previous bad experiences with dealerships are not relevant. If you feel I need to hear these, it's your choice, at \$100/hr I'm probably cheaper than a psychologist, who by the way could probably make you feel better about your bad experiences at dealerships; I cannot.

I AM A PROFESSIONAL RV DIAGNOSTICIAN which also makes me an *investigator*. Like Sgt. Friday used to say "just the facts ma'am". By being brief and to the point with your description of the problem will allow me to ask questions relevant to me finding the problem. Very often with a brief concise description of the problem and a few follow up questions, I'm pointed in the right direction to locate the problem. Remember, I'm on your time clock, the faster we can work together to locate the problem the less it costs you in the long run.

**#2) Tell me anything relevant that may have led up to the problem.**

Did something happen that may have caused this? Was any work done recently either by yourself or another repair service? As an example, if your problem is a GFI electrical receptacle won't reset, I would ask if you recently had any water leaks? If you relate that the washer overflowed last week and water flowed on to the floor, that points me to look for water intrusion into the electrical system. If your batteries are not charging, I would need to know they were just changed. I would ask if there were any possibilities that the cables were hooked up wrong. If you said yes, then I would immediately focus on the converter reverse polarity fuses. So any information like that could be relevant and save time in locating the problem.

**#3) Be honest, not ashamed.**

We all have done "stupid" things in our life. Believe it or not, I'm often called out to repair something where the owner did something "stupid" to cause it, but is too ashamed to admit it. In these cases I go through steps to figure out what caused it so I can repair it, when if the owner came clean on what happened would significantly shorten the repair time. Case in point, customer reported his toilet was leaking at the base. When I went to inspect it I found a leaking toilet base and sewage on top the black tank. I started tearing things down looking for the sewage leak, only to have the customer confide that he had forgotten the black flush was running with the valve closed and had overflowed the tank. He just didn't want his wife to find out what he did.

If you have attempted repair on something but could not fix it, let me know. It often helps to know something has been recently worked on when investigating a problem.

#### **#4) Unless you are sure, don't diagnose!**

Ironically, while writing this I received a phone call from a customer stating that his inverter had gone out. I asked him how he knew his inverter had failed? He said his symptoms were the same as the last time his inverter had failed. I asked what he was experiencing? He related that his inverter powered outlets were all dead, same as last time. I asked if he checked his circuit breakers? Yes, he reset all his circuit breakers, he even knew of the ones on the inverter, they were all ok. I asked which outlets were dead? He replied all the ones that his inverter powered, restated this was the same problem he had last time the inverter failed. I asked if his microwave clock was on? He said yes. I told him it was not his inverter (knowing his coach is configured so the inverter powers the microwave too). I asked him to go to the bathroom GFI power receptacle and press the red reset button. To his amazement those dead circuits all came to life! Customer was thrilled he didn't have to buy a new inverter, and even more thrilled I solved his problem over the phone! He's lucky he called me because in this case this customer was opening himself up to be "taken" by some disreputable RV service who would have gone out and realized what the problem was, but followed up on the owners suggestion that it was a failed inverter and sell him a \$2k inverter, then pressed the little red button when he was done. He would have made himself a pretty penny, and have a perfectly good used inverter to sell to some other poor victim. So in this case, the customer related his current situation to a previous problem he had in the past which was similar to his current complaint. And rather than saying "I have some electrical outlets that are dead" he fell back on his previous experience and made a *diagnosis* of a failed inverter.

***Once again, unless you are ABSOUTELY SURE what the problem is, don't relate a diagnosis, just relate what you are experiencing and let the professional tell you what's wrong! That's what I get paid for!***

Another important (and simple) first step before calling for service is to refer to your RV's owner's manual. It's important to familiarize yourself with the manufactures manuals, and you would be surprised how many owners have never read and familiarized themselves with the manuals! Another case in point, a regular customer who owns a National RV product calls me, relates that he just brought his RV out of storage. He "thinks" he has a problem with the water heater. It seems to come on and heat, but he has no hot water in the RV. I asked him if he checked the water heater bypass valve in the plumbing bay? He wasn't even aware of what that valve did. I told him to take it out of the bypass position and put in the normal position and check for hot water. Problem solved! But, had he referred to the owner's manual first regarding this problem, he could have solved it himself.

Often times, if the problem is related properly to me over the phone, seemingly major problems have a simple fix. I'm always willing to help out over the phone if I can. Some service companies want to come out and get their service call charge to fix these relatively simple fixes, I don't work like that. So when you call me, follow the steps above in describing the problem, sometimes I can point you in the right direction over the phone.

Another fantastic source of common problems can be found in my service blog page on my website: <http://www.sundancecustomrv.com/support.html>

Many common issues and resolves are listed there, as well as helpful and informative articles. It's a good source to check first before making that call for help.

Wishing you Happy and Trouble-free RVing!  
Kevin Bell  
Sundance Custom RV  
(760) 408-2836