

No Show, No Shoer

Late and no-show clients throw off your schedule, which affects your livelihood. Avoid this by establishing some ground rules

By Esco Buff, CF, Ph.D.

Dealing with customers who are late or who do not show up for their scheduled appointment is a common issue for many farriers. The root of the problem usually boils down to the farrier's lack of effective communication, policies and confrontational skills.

Many farriers choose to say nothing to their customers in hopes the issue will go away and will not happen again. If the problem continues, they can become frustrated, resentful and feel taken advantage of. Customers feel the same way when they have to deal with unprofessional farriers who are late or do not show up for appointments and never bother to pick up their cell phones and call.

Here are a few recommendations to help you be more effective in managing your customers who push your scheduling and time management limits.

Establish A Policy

It's easier to start fresh with good habits than trying to change the old bad habits. So, if you're a new farrier, this is the ideal time to establish and begin enforcing Policy and Procedures (see Laying Out Your Ground Rules — Respective Responsibilities, *American Farriers Journal*, September/October, 2009, Page 114).

For all farriers, it will be easier to implement new policies with new customers. However, it is never too late to start implementing a new policy for no-show or late appointments with established customers. Make sure all your customers know of your policy. Display it in your farrier rig. Place it on the back of your business cards. ("To avoid paying for a missed appointment,

a cancellation notice of ___ hours is required for all customers.") Place it in your Respective Responsibilities form and hand it out to all your customers.

Establish A Notification Time Limit

How far in advance do you want to be notified of an appointment change? At least 24 hours, 12 hours, the same day? Adopt a policy that is reasonable. Make sure whatever time limit you require of your customers applies to you as well. It's unfair to expect customers to do something that you would find unreasonable if you were in their position.

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Consider your travel time when formulating your policy. For local customers, you might consider a policy of being notified "By 9 a.m. of the appointment date." For more distant customers, you might require notification "24 hours in advance of appointment." The reason for the difference is that once you start driving to the appointment, you are spending time and money getting there.

For late appointments, you might consider a policy stating, "If you are more than 15 minutes late for any appointment, the appointment will have



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to be rescheduled and a cancellation fee will apply."

Establish a policy of how clients should contact you if something comes up during the day that requires rescheduling or to let you know they are running late. For instance, "If you are going to be more than 10 minutes late, please contact me ASAP." Make sure you follow the same policy; "If I'm going to be more than 10 minutes late, I will contact you ASAP."

Establish A Rescheduling Option

Make sure your policy includes when a missed or no-show appointment will be rescheduled. Perhaps something like, "Late and no-show appointments will be rescheduled at the earliest convenient time allowable in my schedule."

This way the customer will understand that rescheduling may not be as convenient as if the appointment had been kept to begin with.

Establish A Late And No-Show Fee

You need to enforce a late or no-show billing to curb this type of behavior. If the person is not late enough to have to reschedule, then a warning is all that is needed. However, if the customer is too late to get the work done in the allotted time, or does not show up for the appointment, then a no-show/late appointment/cancellation fee needs to be charged.

I would not bill for this fee, as it is costly and can be futile. A better way to

handle it is to inform the customer upon rescheduling the appointment that they will have to pay the cancellation fee at the rescheduled appointment to maintain your services. One of the reasons I charge a barn call fee is to cover my actual time and expenses traveling to and from a customer. So my rescheduling fee is the next barn call fee. If you do not charge for rescheduling, you will be losing money to return for the rescheduled appointment.

Reminder Calls And Contacts

When setting up this policy, you may have to remind your customers of their scheduled appointments. Many farriers phone clients the night before the appointment. However, once your policy has been established, reminder contacts shouldn't be needed. E-mail is another option, but is not as effective, as it's not checked regularly by some customers.

I schedule return appointments before leaving the barn and do not call to remind customers of their appointments. In my worst year, I had four missed appointments. I've trained my clients to understand that I will be there and they need to be as well.

Establish Arrival Time

One of the easiest ways to make sure the customer will be at the scheduled appointment is to establish a policy of what time you expect them to be at the barn for the appointment. I expect my customers to show up early for appointments in order to have their horses in, ready and available by the scheduled appointment time. This also gives me a heads-up on potential late or no-show problems. If the customer is not there a few minutes before their scheduled appointment time, I can contact them and ask why. That lets me find out if they are just running a little late or forgot their appointment and need to reschedule.

Do not let late or no show appointment problems go unresolved. Address the problem immediately and appropriately. It may not be easy for some of you to confront these issues of lateness or no shows. Establishing a clear policy will help curb these problems and

allow you to more effectively manage your schedule.

It's also important to make sure that you are scheduling the appropriate length for appointments and sticking to your own schedule. You'll reduce client no-show and late appointments if you show by example that you are always on time or call if you are going

to be late. 

If you have a question or topic you'd like addressed in this column, e-mail it to ptearney@lesspub.com, with Hoof-Care Bottom Line in the subject line. Questions can also be mailed to American Farriers Journal, P.O. Box 624, Brookfield, WI 53008-0624.




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