

Last Word

The Slow Death of the Honest Technician

BY BRYAN ORR

Part 1 of 2

I was sitting in a session at the HVAC Excellence Educators' Conference (which was excellent by the way) and my phone buzzed. So like a typical punk kid I looked down at it to see that my friend Josh had sent me a Facebook message asking if we served the east side of Orlando because he wanted an A/C maintenance on his home. I told him that we did not serve that part of town and I didn't think anything else about it.

Then I see this post:

 **Josh**
Yesterday at 10:03am · 🌐

Heating A/C question:
Paid \$89 for 'AC tune up'. (Actually was a \$49 Groupon).

Guy comes out. Says, "It's clean and your pressure is good. You have a leak and that'll be \$5400 to replace everything. Lemme know!" He did absolutely no work other than check level & sniff for leaks. Total time: 20 min - only because I was asking the dude a lot of questions.

My Spidey senses are tingling... Seems a little scammy to me - but maybe that's just how it works? [Bryan Orr?](#)

So we go out to look at it, and sure enough. The system is barely low, like 3°F of subcool low, and we added ½-lb. of R-22 (weighed in) and did a leak detection. Yes, there was a tiny leak in the evaporator coil, so Josh will probably end up getting a system at some point. However, the other tech did not do maintenance at all, he did not quote a coil or anything other than a system. He literally showed up, saw the unit was 14-years-old, pulled out his leak detector, found a hit and wrote up a proposal for \$5,400. He tried to close the "deal" right on site. No load calculations, no looking at the ducts, just a leak detection, a proposal and run. How many 14-year-old units have zero leaks?

He didn't clean the drain or the condenser coil, he hardly even checked the charge. Heck, Josh has a UV light that wasn't even working due to a simple loose connection; he didn't look at that.

Unfortunately for this company, my friend Josh is a local consumer advocate who goes on local TV news regularly to talk about ways to save money and expose scams.

When I contacted the owner of this business to try to reason with them, they wrote me back that they were going to report me to the EPA because we recharged the unit. When I explained that recharging R-22 on systems under 50-lbs. is perfectly allowable, they responded with more threats and emotional ranting.

The standard narrative is that there are just a bunch of greedy scammers out there trying to take advantage of people. Clearly this is true sometimes, but many times the story is longer and sadder than that, often this type of thing happens when well-meaning people get worn down. Tell me if this sounds about right.

A new tech gets hired into the trade, maybe he has some schooling, maybe he doesn't. Either way, he gets his EPA license

and starts riding around with another tech. The tech he rides with spends most of the day complaining about his boss, dispatch, other techs, customers and politics but almost no actual training. When they arrive at the job there are two main objectives.

1. Get in and out as quickly as possible with as little work as possible.

2. Sell as much as possible during that short time. This can be hard start kits, capacitors and surge protectors some places, IAQ products others and at some it's finding a way to push a new system. For many, it's all three.

Usually, this makes the new tech feel at least a little uncomfortable, but this starts to fade as the days of riding around whining broken by short stints of selling continue.

After a few months, the new tech is put into a van with some parts, pamphlets, invoices and proposal forms and set loose on the world. If he is smart, he realizes pretty quickly that when his bosses talk about customer service what they really mean is making as much money as possible with as few customer complaints and callbacks. Usually, the easiest way to do that is to condemn everything. When you do a PM there is always something you can point to as a major issue that gives you an easy out. Cleaning, after all, does not ring the register. We'll finish this next month. ☺

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▶ TROUBLESHOOTING ANSWER

Many techs would advocate for measuring the microamps on the flame rod circuit by attaching a multimeter and putting it on μA scale in series with the flame rod. This is a good test and a good thing to monitor, but a low μA measurement doesn't mean a single diagnosis.



Because the flame rectification (sensing) circuit requires current flow through the burner ground, that is a practical place to start.

In this case, it is a brand new system so the most probable cause would be either a loose connection or a grounding issue rather than a part failure. A wise course of diagnosis would be to visually inspect and snug the furnace field connected ground, the burner ground and check the ground to the board. Next check in the disconnect switch and at the panel to ensure the ground is properly connected.