

# Last Word



## The Slow Death of the Honest Technician

BY BRYAN ORR

Part 2 of 2

In the January issue I talked about how new service technicians become jaded. They realize that what the boss really wants is for them to make as much money as possible with as few customer complaints and callbacks.

When I was still in trade school back in 1999 I participated in a skills challenge against other students from schools across Florida. There was another guy who was already working in the field and I remember him saying, “I never just change one part, I change as many as I can and the customers never know the difference and their unit will last longer.” I was appalled then as I am now by this type of thinking, but I’m pretty sure he honestly believed he was doing the right thing. He had been brainwashed into thinking that this was what being a technician meant. So this all begs the question, who is to blame and what can be done about it?

### The Root Cause

It is just easier to make money when you focus on selling instead of technical excellence. You can be great at what you do and still not make a profit but when you focus on profit at every level you will usually make more of it — for a while. I actually blame the quality techs and companies who don’t charge enough for what they do as one reason this happens.

I have been one of these contractors for years. We squeaked out a meager profit every year driving used vans, using cheap tools, trying to make ends meet and praying the vans don’t break down. All the while, the sales-focused businesses have new trucks and spiffy, clean uniforms.

The good guys need to stand up and stop apologizing for what we charge and what we do. We need to charge for the high-quality maintenance we do so that we actually make a profit on it. We need to diagnose the whole system and make quality recommendations to our customers based on the solid and complete diagnosis we perform. There is no reason we shouldn’t be able to afford quality tools and a well-stocked van *if we are the ones who actually know how to use them*. Instead, we beat one another up on price, calling another good, quality contractor who charges more a “rip off” or a “scam” just because they have their pricing figured out to where they can actually make a profit.

This company that went out to my friend Josh’s house was going to charge \$5,400 for a 3.5-ton 14-SEER heat

pump system. That isn’t a crazy price, but to some it may be seen as a “ripoff” because they would charge \$4,500. We might charge \$6,000 for the same system, along with a new return liner and line set, installed with nitrogen flowing, evacuated to 300 microns, with a proper load calculation, permits and a perfectly weighed-in charge confirmed by manufacturer’s specs to a proper subcooling level. The “ripoff” is the one who doesn’t deliver on his promise, not the one who charges more.

### What to do about it

If you are a manager or owner of a company, make sure you are supporting your techs to get more technically sound and support them to use those legitimate technical skills to translate into profitable repairs and quality workmanship.

Communication skills are key for a residential tech; a tech who understands IAQ like the back of his hand will naturally sell more IAQ products; a tech who understands airflow and duct design will sell more duct upgrades, and the tech who understands complete system performance will make more needed repairs. There are no shortcuts.

R-22 isn’t illegal, not every customer needs a UV light, a hard start kit doesn’t magically extend the life of all compressors, every PM isn’t an opportunity to sell something and every system out of warranty doesn’t need to be replaced.

If you are one of the good guys, then let’s band together, keep our heads up and charge enough to have a good life. ☺

*Bryan Orr is the co-founder of Kalos Services, a multi-discipline HVACR contractor in Central Florida and Founder of HVACRSchool.com and the HVAC School Podcast.*

### ▶ TROUBLESHOOTING ANSWER

On a heat pump in heating mode the indoor coil becomes the condenser so indoor airflow issues will cause high head pressure and ultimately compressor overload or shutdown on high pressure. A visual inspection of the filter, blower wheel and evaporator coil would be a good place to start, followed by testing static pressure at the fan coil.