

Selling cars in uncertain times

There's opportunity in uncertainty, and with some easy tweaks you can still bring your A-game



Many of us are tariff-ied and when the economy wobbles, interest rates climb, and headlines predict turbulence, one thing becomes clear: it isn't business as usual.

Customers tighten their wallets, hesitation creeps into the showroom, and dealerships feel the pressure. But history shows us something important — these are also the moments when true professionals rise above the noise and start to pay more attention to signals.

Uncertain times don't kill car sales; they simply separate the average from the exceptional. Adapt or Die: as always.

I have seen several periods when the market feels unpredictable, the economy unstable, and consumer confidence shaky. I've seen the 1980's interest rates, the 1990's credit collapse, in the 2000's it was 9/11, for the 2010's it was the global banking system, in 2020 "The Germ" and now tariffs.

Uncertain times test not only the resilience of the industry but the creativity and commitment of those who make their living within it. For automotive salespeople, this is not a time to retreat — it is an invitation to adapt, refine, and ultimately thrive.

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focused on what you can control.

The reality is we are always living and selling with uncertainty. Isn't that what we get addicted to and want to learn how to master? The worst part about a great month and a great sale is that it ends, and the best part about a terrible month and difficult sale is that it also ends. It's always been onward and upward day after day!

MINDSET IS THE FIRST GEAR

The most critical asset we can control is our mindset. Customers sense confidence and conviction immediately, just as they sense hesitation.

In uncertain times, buyers are naturally cautious. They may be delaying purchases, shopping harder for deals, or rethinking budgets altogether. If we mirror that hesitation, the conversation stalls. But if we project calm, assurance, and optimism, it gives customers a sense of stability.

One of the best approaches is to see uncertainty not as a roadblock but as an opening. When customers feel unsure, they are also more open to guidance.

They need someone to help them sort through options and make sense of the noise. Salespeople who step into that role — educator, consultant, and

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advocate — become trusted partners rather than transactional sellers. Be the signal.

FOCUS ON WHAT DOESN'T CHANGE

Markets shift, incentives come and go, availability expands and contracts, but certain customer desires remain constant. People still want safety, reliability, fuel efficiency, style, and value. Families still need practical vehicles, professionals still want comfort and technology, and enthusiasts still crave performance.

By focusing on these timeless motivators, salespeople keep conversations grounded in benefits that truly matter, regardless of the economy.

Instead of opening with "rates are up" or "inventory is low," strong sales professionals reframe the discussion around long-term wants, needs and satisfaction. For example, highlighting how a hybrid SUV can save a family hundreds of dollars a month in fuel is a more constructive and personal conversation than speculating about interest rates.

TRANSPARENCY BUILDS TRUST

In challenging times, trust becomes the ultimate currency. Customers are more skeptical, and rightly so — they are protecting their resources. This means

honesty about pricing, financing, and product availability is more important than ever. Gone are the days when vague promises or pressure tactics could push a deal across the finish line.

A transparent salesperson who acknowledges current conditions while offering clear solutions earns credibility. Saying, "Yes, rates are higher this year, but let's calculate how this vehicle's resale value and fuel economy can offset that over time," demonstrates both honesty and problem-solving. Customers don't expect perfection, but they do expect fairness and respect.

LEVERAGE RELATIONSHIPS, NOT JUST LEADS

Uncertain markets can slow down showroom traffic, but they don't have to slow down sales. Strong professionals use this time to lean into relationships. Past customers, referral networks, and community ties become invaluable sources of business.

A quick follow-up call to check on a customer's vehicle service experience can open the door to a new purchase conversation. A referral program can turn satisfied clients into brand advocates.

In many cases, customers who bought years ago may now be facing new lifestyle changes — growing families, relocations, or job shifts — that require a different vehicle. Salespeople who maintain relationships are the first ones these customers call when needs arise.

ADAPTING TO DIGITAL BEHAVIOUR

Another undeniable shift during uncertain times is the way customers shop. Online research, video walkarounds, virtual appointments, and digital financing tools are no longer optional — they're expected.

The salesperson who embraces technology and meets the customer where they are gains an edge. Instead of waiting for walk-ins, proactive professionals send personalized videos, highlight key features, and answer questions before the customer ever sets foot in the dealership.

By combining digital accessibility with human warmth, salespeople create a balanced experience that feels both modern and reassuring.

CONCLUSION: THERE'S OPPORTUNITY IN UNCERTAINTY

While uncertain times can seem like obstacles, they are also opportunities for the best salespeople to stand out. Customers remember who guided them through difficult decisions. They remember who was honest, empathetic, and knowledgeable. And when stability

returns, those customers reward that trust with loyalty.

The automotive industry has always been cyclical, but the fundamentals of great salesmanship remain steady: mindset, trust, value, relationships, and adaptability.

By doubling down on these principles, sales professionals not only weather uncertain times — they redefine themselves as indispensable to their customers and to their dealerships.

In the end, uncertainty doesn't

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have to be feared. For the automotive salesperson with skill, discipline, and heart, it's simply another gear to shift through on the road to success. Be better than what you were yesterday, everyday. Anything worth having is worth studying. Your only competition is yourself.



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