

# H.E.R.: Honesty, Excellence, Respect

Giving women what they want in a car buying experience by Joe Sage

Cathy Droz is an accomplished automotive journalist, author, speaker and radio host whose passion for the automobile industry started early. Starting at age 10, she would help her dad buy a new family car every year, and by age 17 she had learned everything she needed to know to go it alone. Her parents encouraged this, as she went before the family with storyboards and brochure cutouts outlining her thought process and conclusion as to what vehicle they should buy that year. Her dad dropped her off at the dealership, where she asked all the questions, chose all the options and negotiated the deal. Her dad then came by just to sign the check. A star was born.

Droz's career soon led to her own full-service automotive advertising agency for years in metro Phoenix, giving her particular insights into the dealership environment. And working in automotive media, she has test-driven more than 500 vehicles, giving her deep knowledge of makes, models and features. Together, these foundations fed an ever-expanding knowledge base about the automotive purchase experience, and—being very familiar with it from the female buyer's side of the equation—she published her first book, *A Woman's Guide to Buying a Car with Confidence and Street Smarts—Don't Let These High Heels Fool You*. (Droz is originally a native of New York City, so you'd best believe she has the sharpest of street smarts.) The book's fundamental goal is to effectively educate the car-buying consumer and to make the search for that perfect vehicle a pleasant and rewarding experience.

## HER Certified® and the H.E.R. Academy

In parallel with this effort, Droz is founder and CEO of HER Certified®—named for the interrelated goals of Honesty, Excellence and Respect—the industry's first comprehensive certified dealer program aimed at helping dealerships better serve female car buyers. HER Certified's "trifecta" full-service employee training is designed to ensure a dealership not only meets, but exceeds, a woman's expectations when buying (and when servicing) a vehicle.

Qualified dealerships who participate receive in-person sales training, on-line training (the H.E.R. Academy), downloadable workbooks, a personal copy of *A Woman's Guide to Buying a Car with Confidence and Street Smarts* for each participant, an award for the dealership to promote their achievement, and a hundred more copies of the book to hand out to customers.

Up to 100 employees are included in the program, which focuses on optimizing sales, service, finance and overall relationships with female customers. Everyone gets trained, even the receptionist. (Sometimes the program runs in two or three sessions within a day, as those in sales, service and finance successively break away for class.) Each employee must achieve a score of 85 percent or higher online (which is done at the individual's own pace), then receives a framable document.

Dealerships have learned plenty from this process, as has Droz herself.

Some dealers face their own challenges in becoming HER Certified. Ninety percent of dealerships are run or owned by men, who generally already feel they are doing a very good job with their female customers. Online reviews, however, sometimes suggest a different story. HER Certified is engineered to close that gap.

Women are supremely important to dealerships. Sixty-five percent of purchases are made by women, 85 percent are influenced by women, and these numbers—and women's buying power—are rising daily. Nonetheless, sales-

men tend to look at the man when both genders come in the door, even when specifically told that the woman is the buyer.

"I hear it all the time," Droz says. "Women are still afraid to go to a dealer by themselves to purchase a car for themselves. If they don't have a male in the household, they will ask a male neighbor to go with them, because they fear they will be ripped off or disrespected."

This is not just in the sales experience, either—it's especially true now in the service department, where customer service is extremely important, the dealerships make good profit, and long term relationships really develop.

"Most women want to work with another woman," Droz has found. The perhaps surprising downside is that there's a risk that if a female customer is then dissatisfied, she will feel as though a sister has dissed her.

Droz's book aims to build a woman's confidence so she can go in by herself, not bring a man along, know how a dealership operates—and know they have so much buying power. "They just need to do their research before they go in," says Droz. "Research is key. The internet provides so much information, including what your neighbor paid for the same vehicle."

This whole process also helps a dealer draw more women in an era when more people are avoiding traditional dealerships completely, utilizing more on-

A WOMAN'S GUIDE TO BUYING A CAR  
WITH CONFIDENCE AND STREET SMARTS...  
DON'T LET THESE HIGH HEELS FOOL YOU  
CATHY DROZ

line research and sales resources.

The HER Certified program can raise a dealer's Customer Service Index (CSI) score, particularly with women customers. This is important—and also educational—for the dealerships, as it turns out women may not only rate them lower due to experiences in the buying process or the vehicle itself. Statistics show female customers also have a keen interest and concerns about factors beyond the purchase experience, such as the facility's cleanliness, amenities and general presentation. Surveys show dealerships being dinged for such items as a burned-out lightbulb in the restroom or lack of coffee creamer. These are easily remedied, but it has often taken the HER Certified process to put them on a dealer's radar.

Droz notes that much has changed in recent years, as family-owned dealerships are consolidated into corporate takeovers. "What I expected to be natural and what I expected to always be the way any car-buying situation should be has changed," she says.

"When a mom 'n' pop owned a dealership or two, they really concerned themselves with how it's run and how the place was kept up. Now, with huge chains taking over, it's all about the numbers. But when the big groups realize that if they treat people with Honesty, Excellence and Respect, then they can have the good numbers like in the old days. It should always be about customer service—for men and for women."

Droz has had women call after they have made an unhappy purchase or questionable deal, and they are sometimes a little embarrassed that they, as women, are now calling another woman who knew the things they didn't.

Women who have read the book, however (which she considers a more private experience) have contacted her to say how proud they are that they bought a car on their own, without a man, and negotiated a great deal. She says this has been the most rewarding aspect of her whole program. Everyone's a winner. The customer benefits from a better relationship, and the dealership benefits from better all-important referrals.

## Smart Women Series

In addition to HER Certified within the automotive industry, Cathy (with three other women) has now embarked upon an event series that offers programs for women, in unique venues, on such topics as financial wealth, real estate, reinventing oneself and, yes, car buying.

The first program, directly tying in with Droz's HER Certified background, was *Women Auto Know*, held at Alfa Romeo/Fiat of North Scottsdale. It included a speaker on finance for women, a book signing, and discussions on how buying a car "doesn't need to be like a root canal." Men are also always welcome at these events.

## More about Cathy Droz

Cathy Droz's HER Certified's dealership program participants are predominantly in metro Phoenix, while her book is sold globally. Droz has also been flown to manufacturers' headquarters to share her knowledge and methodology.

A champion of community service and leadership, Cathy is a member and past president of the Phoenix Automotive Press Association, a past president and executive board member for Silent Witness, a distinguished member of *Worldwide Who's Who of Entrepreneurs*, a 2016 *Phoenix Suns Amazing Women* award winner, a 2018 Honoree for *Outstanding Women in Business*, a volunteer for the NFL AZ Legends (an organization of retired players living in Arizona), and Alice Cooper's Solid Rock charity. She donates four percent of all revenue to help promote financial literacy in young girls via the Girl Scouts of America, explaining, "it is with the Girl Scouts that I learned and developed my leadership skills."

Cathy Droz lives in Phoenix with her husband Manny. They are proud of their three children and nine grandchildren (including two daughters and four granddaughters). Cathy's wish is that her efforts will create a better world for women, as a legacy to her family. ■



For more information, visit [www.hercertified.com](http://www.hercertified.com)

Photo: Hark Studio