







# Welcome to the

# Friendship

## Dealership

Valencia Acura may use a softer touch to build relationships with employees and clients, but the hard sales numbers show it works

**M**ore than 20 years ago, Cheri and Don Fleming took over a dealership ranked at the bottom of Acura dealers

in sales and client satisfaction and transformed it into an 11-time Precision Team award-winner that consistently beats the zone average in sales. How did they do it? By making friends.

"This is a big image dealership, meaning that we don't advertise the best price," Cheri explains. "What we advertise is that it's the right place to come. We call ourselves the 'friendship dealership.' Of course our plan was to increase sales and to maximize our service and parts performance, and we actively pursued that. But we did it by taking great care of our clients and representing the Acura brand well." →

#### WHAT

Valencia Acura

#### WHERE

Valencia, Calif.

#### WHO

Cheri and Don Fleming,  
owners

**T**he Flemings bought Valencia Acura in 1997, and with Cheri as dealer principal and Don as general manager, they put their energy into delivering on the “friendship” message, revamping the culture to be more welcoming to all clients and developing programs to build staff camaraderie and retain employees. Nearly 20 years later, they’ve developed a distinctive culture that garners rave Internet and in-person reviews from clients and earned strong sales numbers as well as local and national awards.

### RECOGNIZING A POWERFUL DEMOGRAPHIC

“Over 85 percent of all car purchases are influenced by women,” Cheri says. “We go out of our way to make sure that women are comfortable throughout the dealership experience.” She started a monthly client appreciation week when clients can get complimentary manicures, facials and massages along with oil changes.

District sales manager Poya Abrar appreciates the keen business sense

behind the spa experience at Valencia Acura. “Not only does it meet the expectations of a luxury client, but it also makes bringing your car in for service something to look forward to,” he says. “Clients stay in the dealership and can see what’s new in the showroom. This dealership’s client retention is way above average because clients give their business to people who show them that respect, the recognition, the warm-welcome feeling.”

### VALUING ONLINE FEEDBACK

The Flemings embrace web reviews and respond to positive comments to thank clients for their time and business. If a client leaves a negative comment, Cheri takes the opportunity to discuss it with her team and reply online. “We always investigate issues from a constructive, proactive place,” she says. “If we made a misstep we own it, thank people for letting us know, and learn from the experience.”

Cheri understands that when clients feel heard and valued, they tend to spread the word. Around 75 percent of

Valencia Acura’s business is repeat or referrals, and the dealership is beating its market in terms of returning clients, according to Abrar.

### COMMITTING TO MAKING THINGS RIGHT

On the rare occasion a client has a less-than-positive in-dealership experience, any employee is empowered to offer up to \$100 in services or discounts to fix the problem without consulting a manager. “If a client is not satisfied, there shouldn’t be a negotiation to try to make it right for them,” Cheri explains. “We would never offer to only pay for half of what it would take to fix the problem. If we drop the ball, we fix it 100 percent.”



WE GO OUT OF OUR WAY TO MAKE SURE THAT WOMEN ARE COMFORTABLE THROUGHOUT THE DEALERSHIP EXPERIENCE



**WHERE THEY'RE ALWAYS GLAD YOU CAME:** The Flemings bought Valencia Acura (shown above) in 1997, with Cheri (at far left, in the showroom with a client) as dealer principal and Don as general manager. They have been delivering on the “friendship” message ever since.





## Valencia Acura Friendship



### REPEAT BUSINESS:

Around 75 percent of the business at Valencia Acura is repeat or referrals—beating its market, according to district sales manager Poya Abrar (at left, with Don Fleming).

## AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

# 2006

**Dealer of the Year**  
American International  
Auto Dealers Association

# 13

**Time Excellence  
award winner**  
Acura Financial  
Services Council

# 11

**Time Precision  
Team winner**

# 12

**Voted Best  
New Car Dealer**  
by residents of  
Santa Clarita, Calif.

# 3 times

**Most Community  
Minded**  
by residents of  
Santa Clarita, Calif.

## CREATING TEAM SPIRIT

The Flemings throw an annual Christmas party, where they hand out a \$100 bill to every employee, and run an employee of the quarter program, for which staff members nominate each other. The resulting camaraderie has kept many employees at Valencia Acura for more than 10 years.

It's also produced better client service. After noticing service department backups because clients were waiting to see specific staff members, the three service advisors suggested a new team system. Now, they direct clients to colleagues instead of letting them wait and pool commissions instead of splitting them unevenly.

## TRAINING STAFF WELL

Not only is the Valencia team up to date on all brand training, they take the initiative to stay sharp. "If we're not busy, someone will start a walk-around, where somebody will play client and somebody will play employee," says Cheri. "There's a lot of engagement and fine-tuning."

Abrar believes training is critical to long-term client relationships and retention. "Training is one of the key components for a dealership to be successful," he says. "When the sales consultant is confident answering questions, the client sees they can trust this salesperson and the dealership."

## EMBRACING THE NEW

When the 2017 NSX was released, Cheri and Don were excited not only for the opportunities it afforded their dealership but also the Acura brand. "The NSX delivered on its promise right away," Abrar says. "This performance has been in our blood and our brand since the '80s, and now it's back."



Don Fleming agrees. "Acura already makes the greatest engine in the world," he says. "Now with the NSX, it's sleek, it's fast, it's all the things we've been waiting for. It epitomizes the Acura brand."

The strong culture of today's Acura Valencia is a complete turnaround from where it was when the Flemings bought the business. And with their 12th best new-car dealer win announced and year-long 20th anniversary celebrations planned for 2017, Cheri and Don are confident in the future of the "friendship dealership." ✨