

ARE YOU AND YOUR TEAM PREPARED?

SHOP SOPS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR PREPARING FOR THE UNEXPECTED

BY CHRIS “CHUBBY” FREDERICK | CONTRIBUTOR

HAVE you ever heard the expression “Never do something permanently foolish just because you are temporarily upset?” I have, and I keep that quote right on my desk where I can see it all day, every day. I think most of us who have ever owned or managed a business like to think of ourselves as being prepared to handle those surprises that the day might throw at us. The real question is, are we really ready? Is our staff ready? Do we have the training and skills to respond properly? Do we use them when they are most needed? When you get right down to it, you can handle any situation in only one of two ways—you can respond or you can react. The difference all comes down to training!

Let’s listen to coach and former shop owner Kim Hickey explain how to prepare yourself and your team for challenges that happen in your shop.

For a comparison, let’s think about the qualities and skills necessary to be an EMT or any other type of first responder. (In addition to EMTs, police, soldiers and firefighters are among the ranks of people trained as first responders.) Upon arrival at the scene, the first responder’s job is to be able to quickly assess the situation. During this time of crisis and assessment, there isn’t any room for personal feelings. Professional behavior is required at all times. The ability to remain calm and work well under pressure is of the utmost importance. The decisions made will have long-lasting, irreversible effects. Once the decisions have been translated and



formulated into a plan, orders must be given to the team. The team must be able to clearly, concisely understand what has to be done. In order for this to work, every person has to know his or her team members, what they are capable of under pressure, and who is the best possible man or woman for each of the tasks.

This especially means you. You, like the first responder, must without fail, and at all times, be totally in control of yourself, your body language and your emotions.

Reactors Cannot Be First Responders

Most people are reactors. Reactors cannot be first responders. They are slaves to their emotions and allow

themselves to be affected adversely by difficult situations or people. At times they cannot even stop to look at the whole picture or find out all the details first. Some people look at what they perceive as the immediate threat and get tunnel locked from there. Many times they immediately start yelling and once they have blown off their steam, they still don’t have a solution or plan. Even worse than that, very often they quickly shout out words or a directive only to have it be something they regret having said or done after they have had time to think things through. They can’t adapt or improvise — they have gone into survival mode. One of the definitions that can be found for the word “react” is “to move or trend

“WHAT IS THE BIGGEST REASON WE LOSE PEOPLE, PRODUCTION AND CUSTOMERS? WE LACK WRITTEN SHOP STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES AND TRAINING CHECKLISTS!”

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in a reverse direction.” Every time you react to something or someone, instead of taking a step forward in your business, you are taking the proverbial two steps backward. Because reactors immediately start barking at people or yelling out orders, they feel that they are “responding” in an admirable fashion. This could not be further from the truth.

I want you to close your eyes for a moment and picture a technician pulling into a bay and without warning. They slam right into a piece of expensive equipment and then into the wall. The front end of the vehicle is demolished, the hood is up, steam is rising from the engine and the horn is blaring. Now close your eyes again and picture how you would handle this. What do you do? Do you carefully run over to the vehicle (while quickly scanning the floor for any spilled oil or chemicals that you could slip in) to see if your tech or anyone else is hurt? Do you calmly reach in and turn the vehicle off? Do you help your tech get out of the car and take him or her to a safe place away from the wreckage to sit down? While escorting your tech, do you already know where the closest fire extinguisher is and mentally assess how long it would take someone to get their hands on it in case of a fire, and then direct someone to get it and be ready? After the situation is under control, do you continue to maintain your composure and ask the tech what happened? Do you interview the service advisor and ask if the customer mentioned anything about braking problems? Do you review the work order and see if it was written on the work order? After you have had time to deal with everything, do you institute an emergency protocol in case something like this ever occurs again?

If you imagined any of what I just asked, chances are you are a responder. But if when you imagined this scenario happening at your shop, your blood went cold, you were yelling at the tech for being an idiot, you care-



lessly ran over and kicked the side of the vehicle or punched the hood while screaming at the tech to get the hell out of your shop (including the use of words you couldn't say in church) before you find out why or how it happened, then you, my friend, are most likely a reactor.

Shop standard operating procedures

Adversity and unpleasant or unexpected situations that test our patience can occur at any time or anywhere. The situations don't have to be as drastic as a tech driving into a wall. It could be an employee who is habitually late, a vendor that has delivered the wrong part for the third time, a disgruntled customer who is carrying on at your counter in front of a new customer, or maybe the computers going down. Whatever the situation, you must handle it professionally. People are waiting and watching to see how you respond or react. They will be looking to you for guidance. It's always easier to know what to do when you have already thought through the situation. Having an SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) in place before the incident occurs will allow you and the staff to understand what needs to be done and in what order. The next step is to train! Practice running through the steps required to handle the problem. The key that allows first responders to do the right thing without thinking is their training. They have done the same drill so many times that when faced with an emergency, instead of the brain shutting down, it just does what it has been trained to do.

Let's dial it down a notch to the small, everyday crises that we face in the shop. Technician A is taking

too long on a diagnostic and it threatens to throw the whole schedule off. Technician B has a car that is suddenly beyond his skill level. Technician C has been gone way too long on a test drive: has something gone wrong? How about something even closer to home: We have a great young tech that is giving us notice, and we don't know why. The question now becomes, do we have a training program in place for all of these things? For our young technician, did we have a progressive training checklist so together we could track his or her progress? Too many times we lose people, production and customers because we lack SOPs and training checklists.

Training checklist download

No one is perfect. Sometimes situations get the better of us. But when faced with adversity, do you respond or react? The answer to this question boils down to the training you have provided for your crew. It starts the first day they arrive and needs to continue throughout their career. If you would like to receive training checklists, training tools and accountability tools that will get you started on the right path with a new employee, for a limited time you can go to www.ationlinetraining.com/2015-12 and download your own copies of our checklist. [\[Z\]](#)



Chris “Chubby” Frederick is the CEO and founder of the Automotive Training Institute. ATI's 115 associates train and coach more than 1,400 shop owners every week across North America to drive profits and dreams home to their families. Our associates love helping shop owners who are having the same struggle as many of them have had, and who are looking for the same answers – and in some cases looking for a lifeline. This month's article was written with the help of Coach Kim Hickey.

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