

PROFIT MOTIVE: YOUR COMPASS TO FINANCIAL SUCCESS

Firefighting and collision repair

Find the cause of fires in your shop by using the “Five Whys” technique

BY TOM MCGEE | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

My son, who is a junior in high school, started school in late August. This year, he started a new program at school that takes him off campus to a local career center where he attends a Fire Science course five days a week for three hours each day.

While he has his heart set on joining the Marines when he graduates, I see a tremendous amount of excitement and passion in him regarding the Fire Science program. During the first few days of class, they were issued their gear — helmet, boots, gloves, mask and everything else that a firefighter uses. The next day they practiced putting the gear on as fast as they could.

Putting on firefighting gear as fast as possible requires having the gear organized properly and putting it on in a specific order. Then he needs to improve his skills through practice to reduce the time it takes to get it all on. The next day they were practicing removing a test dummy from a shipping container that had a simulated fire inside it. By now you're probably wondering what Fire Science has to do with collision repair, so let me explain.

In a body shop, we need to get the car in and out of the shop as fast as possible, which means we need all of our tools, equipment, supplies, parts, etc., organized as efficiently as possible so we can move each car through the shop without delays. And every part of the repair process needs to align to do this effectively. If the fires that occur are quickly extinguished or if fires are kept to a minimum, then the owner

or manager can work on the business rather than work in the business.

In many of the shops I visit, the owners or managers are busy putting out fires. These fires are not all the same. One minute the fire is financial, the next it's a customer, then insurance, parts, an employee, and it continues for the rest of the day, week or month. Eventually they get one or more of the fires out, with some left smoldering in the background unnoticed. And when the fire is put out, they don't look to see who the arsonist was or what caused the fire in the first place.

A simple way to find the cause of a problem, or fire, is to repeatedly ask the question “Why?” Asking “why” five times is a good rule of thumb. Using this technique, you can uncover symptoms that can lead to the root cause of a problem. Very often the reason for a problem will lead you to another question. Although this technique is called “Five Whys,” you may find that you will need to ask the question fewer or more times than five before you find the issue related to a problem.

My recommendation is to start with one problem or fire. Not only can you find the arsonist or cause of the fire in your shop, you can use the information to

develop a written standard operating procedure (SOP) or modify a current process that will prevent the problem from recurring. Don't leave the fire smoldering so that it can ignite again. Another recommendation is to include your team in determining what the best possible solution may be for that problem. Your team will support what they help create, making change in the business much easier.

Just like Smokey says, “Only you can prevent wildfires.” If you practice putting on your gear and develop an SOP for that problem so that it doesn't reignite, you will find that you will have more time to work on other areas of your business, and spend less time putting out fires. The worst that can happen is that your KPIs improve, your customers and employees are happier and you move more cars efficiently through the shop.

You can visit <http://www.atonlinetraining.com/abrn1310> to learn how to use the five why questioning method and to see some examples of how to use the “Five Whys” technique to uncover a problem in your shop. While it sounds easy, it will most likely take some practice before you get comfortable using this questioning method.

Tom McGee is Director of ATI Collision for the Automotive Training Institute, founded in 1974. ATI's 108 associates train and coach more than 1,150 shop owners across North America to drive profits and dreams home to their families. You can contact Tom at tmcgee@autotraining.net and visit ATI's website at www.autotraining.net. Check out “Profit Matters” for mechanical repair management tips in Motor Age by ATI's CEO Chris “Chubby” Frederick. 📖

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