

PROFIT MOTIVE: YOUR COMPASS TO FINANCIAL SUCCESS

Finding future technicians

Know where to find technicians and how to train them to ensure industry longevity

BY TOM MCGEE | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

I couldn't tell you how many times I've heard: "I've been doing this for more than 20 years, and I know how to create a damage report, repair plan or perform the repairs." Today we have many highly qualified individuals working in the collision industry.

However, vehicle manufacturing and construction methods, new materials, accessories and safety systems have made it impossible for anyone to remember everything they need to know about how to repair every vehicle. Today, we must provide continuing education and documented repair procedures for technicians doing the repairs and for those preparing the damage reports and repair plans. We also need to be preparing people for careers in the industry.

We look at the financial performance and key performance indicators from many shops across the country every month. As we have discussions with owners and managers, finding staff, technician skills, labor rates and margins and productivity become common themes of the conversations. While all are critical to shop success, let's look at finding technicians.

Current staffing

In just about every survey you read about the collision industry, the average age of technicians is increasing. The 2013 Collision Repair Education Foundation survey shows an average age at 38.7 years old, up from 35.5 in 1995. Other statistics in the survey show that almost 20 percent were hired from a non-automotive industry or as their first job. Just less than 8 percent were hired from a related automotive industry. These figures have not changed significantly from previous surveys. Twelve per-

cent were hired directly from a technical school program, up from 7 percent in 2007.

Technical schools, colleges

Although the survey shows that 12 percent of technicians were hired directly from a career and technical school or college, I find that shop owners are not sure where to look for these new graduates. I direct them to the I-CAR website (ABRN.com/Schools) and show them the list of approximately 250 career and technical schools and colleges that utilize I-CAR curriculum. So not only do their graduates have collision repair training, they may have already earned credits that can help the shop qualify for the I-CAR Gold Class designation.

Another source shop owners may not be familiar with is the National Automotive Technicians Education Foundation (NATEF). While NATEF utilizes industry experts to maintain a current list of national skills and equipment standards, I encourage shops to utilize the NATEF website to find schools that are ASE certified to NATEF standards (ABRN.com/Accredited). This site allows the user to search for schools at both the secondary and post-secondary levels by state or by a radius around their specific location.

First jobs

I find the results that almost 20 percent were hired from a non-automotive industry or as

their first job very promising for the future of the industry. We need to continue to bring young adults into this industry. If you have a young adult that has a good attitude, wants to learn and shows up for work on time every day, then spend some time and create a training plan for them.

Apprentice training

When you assign an entry-level technician to a more experienced technician, have a plan that includes specific tasks to be performed. Organize your training plan to include a sequence of learning objectives. For example:

- Task identification
- Demonstration. The mentor makes sure the apprentice knows exactly what the learning target looks like (e.g., via modeling, visual supports, etc.).
- Perform with instruction. The mentor invites the apprentice to participate as a collaborator as much as possible.
- Perform with inspections. The apprentice performs specific steps within the task with the mentor having periodic checkpoints to ensure successful completion and provide coaching as necessary.
- Perform with completed inspection. The apprentice performs the task with the mentor having a final inspection to ensure successful completion and provide coaching.
- The apprentice acts independently only when fully ready to do so.

Task list and tracking

If we develop a specific list of tasks for the apprentice and mentor to complete, we increase the likelihood of success. We have created a worksheet for you to help design a plan for apprentices. Try it free for a limited time by going to www.atonlinetraining.com/abrn1412. It also makes a great communication tool for your staff providing the mentoring. ☑

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