



Back to the basics

Core business concepts still have to be maintained and adjusted

In business, we're always looking for the latest and the greatest, the newest thing to come along in hopes that it will create the change needed to take our business to the next level. We often forget that the basic business concepts we learned when starting our businesses still have to be maintained, audited and adjusted as needed. We forget that our employees still need supervision, still need direction and, most of all, need our encouragement and guidance.

- What has to be done?
- Whose responsibility is it?
- When does it have to be completed?
- How much will it cost?
- How much can I charge?
- Who will make sure it is done?

If we take these six questions and apply them to each process, task or operation that we work with in the collision repair industry, we can get a much better picture of how we are doing.

Customer service

We know the customer is coming into the store and they are greeted, but how effective is the greeting and does it "sell" the store? Is the customer getting the message that you want their business? The message is a collaboration of what you want, what the customer needs and what your employee is promising and delivering. Your employees are your first point of contact with your customer. How are they doing? Is that message getting delivered?

When getting back to the basics, are you observing their behavior? Do you listen to calls to see how they are presenting your store to the customer and how the customer is responding? Do you ask your customers how the service was? Do you complete performance reviews with your employees? If you don't provide feedback and they are doing something improperly or not to your standard, you've lost the opportunity to take corrective action and improve the process.

Estimating and repair planning

How often are you checking employees' estimating or repair plan quality? Do you listen to discussions between your estimator/blue printer and the customer, insurance adjuster and other employees? These conversations will tell you all about the task performer and their ability to communicate. This includes technical and non-technical information as well as the negotiating processes. Reviewing estimates and repair plans weekly will help identify unintentional mistakes.


The frequency at which this occurs is almost always directly tied to the frequency of the estimate reviews. The less frequent the reviews, the more frequent the errors. The review process is a basic process of comparing the vehicle to what has been written to repair it. The negotiation process is a bit different. Preparation wins negotiations.

If an adjuster or insurance supervisor is coming in for a review, make sure that you are checking your estimator's documentation to be sure that it is complete. Do you review the information that is provided to a negotiation opponent before a negotiation takes place? All employees who will negotiate with non-employees must be unified in their decisions, which is a key success factor in keeping negotiations from going off track. If one employee finds information that is critical to decisions being made within the estimating or blue printing processes, it should be shared so that all employees have the benefit of that knowledge.

A united front makes things consistent and repeatable. Why is this important? If the information is used successfully, and a pattern of successes is shared, the chance of the information being challenged is reduced. Therefore, the ability to improve estimating accuracy is maintained.

Most importantly, we have a customer asking us to restore their vehicle back to its pre-loss condition. We have a responsibility to validate that the repair is done in accordance with specifications provided to maintain the overall integrity of the vehicle. Information gathering has become a routine part of this process. Helping negotiation "opponents" that are less technically skilled and that are questioning our repair methodology by providing them documentation is now an important part of our work.

Get back to basics and make sure that:

- The customer is serviced properly.
- Your employees identify everything that is required to put the vehicle back to the condition it was in prior to the loss.
- No one compromises on any steps that need to be performed.
- You review all the process steps.
- You and your employees make sure that you are returning customers' vehicles with only high-quality repairs.
- You create a simple audit tool. 



KEITH MANICH is Director, Collision Services, at the Automotive Training Institute. ATI's 115 associates train and coach 1,400 shop owners each week. Contact him at kmanich@autotraining.net