

INCREASING SALES

30 DAYS MAY BE ALL YOU NEED TO SEE A DIFFERENCE IN YOUR SHOP.

BY CHRIS "CHUBBY" FREDERICK | CONTRIBUTOR

EVERY week I hear from clients, "Man, in the good old days," or things like, "When it turns around and things go back to normal." It got me to thinking, what if this is the "new normal" or what if 20 years from now we

look back on today and say, "Man, 2012 – now that was the good old days?"

In fact, as time goes on, I am more and more convinced that the present time is, in fact, the new normal. I personally don't believe that we are ever going to see things like they were

pre-2008. Credit lines certainly have tightened. Cars are more reliable than ever, and consumers are more cautious than ever before – they want to know what they are spending on their cars. Let's hear Rick Johnson, a successful shop owner from Nebraska and a senior coach with ATI, tell his side of the story.

The Good Old Days

Twenty-one years ago, most of the cars coming in the front door were still carbureted, front wheel bearings still needed to be repacked, radiators were still copper and brass and needed to be pulled and repaired every three years it seemed. Tune-ups were every 25,000 miles, and, of course, the good old carburetor needed to be overhauled every couple of years as well. Choke pull-offs constantly went bad and caused engines to flood, and we all used our valve grinders a lot.

We were booked up weeks in advance, just about anyone in the shop could answer the phone and life was good. Now all that good, reliable gravy is gone and we face sealed hub wheel bearings, fuel injection, aluminum radiators and plastic tanks and 100,000-mile tune-ups. I imagine most techs in the shop today never have had to overhaul a carburetor or install a set of points or even adjust a choke pull-off.



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Those skills are really not in demand anymore, unless of course you are a classic car flavored shop.

With all the above-mentioned work that we no longer do out of the picture, how is a shop owner supposed to make a living? How is a tech supposed to hit his hours so that he can bring home a decent paycheck? I mean if we no longer are repacking wheel bearings, overhauling carburetors, removing and repairing radiators and only replacing spark plugs every 100,000 miles, it would appear on the surface to be very bleak for repair or maintenance opportunities.

Of course one thing I failed to mention is that 21 years ago, when the average car hit 100,000 miles, it was headed to the junkyard. Its useful life was over and it was time for a new vehicle. Today it is not unusual to see the average car go 200,000 to 300,000 miles with good maintenance. Twenty-one years ago, that meant power steering pumps, brake fluid systems, differentials, transmissions, coolant and so on only needed to make it 100,000 miles as well.

Twenty-one years ago, about the only fluid most shops were replacing was the coolant. Almost no one had heard of transmission fluid exchange, power steering flush, brake fluid flush, fuel injection cleaning, air intake cleaning or differential fluid exchange.

The New Good Old Days

I would like to suggest that fluid exchanges have more than replaced carburetor overhauls, repacking front wheel bearings and even the 25,000-mile spark plug replacement. That is, of course, if you have invested in the equipment required to get into the fluid



exchange business. Most of these fluids need to be replaced every 30,000 miles to ensure that the power steering pump and rack and pinion and the water pump and transmission and differential make it to 300,000 miles along with the rest of the car.

In fact, most of the better flush companies offer lifetime warranty on the components that the fluid runs in – providing that the fluids are exchanged every 30,000 miles before the vehicle hits 36,000 miles.

Now imagine how that could impact your business. Every 30,000 miles you exchange the fluids on your customer's vehicle and you keep the shop busy, the techs making hours and the customer's car covered under warranty, and all by just doing the factory-recommended services that are required in the owner's manual. Sounds like a win-win-win situation to me.

So let's do a little math here to see what the potential of your shop is with fluid exchanges. The average automobile has five fluids that need to be exchanged. If your car count is 40 cars a week, that is the potential of 200 fluid exchanges. Now of course not all 40 cars are going to need all their fluids exchanged, right? But if you run with the ATI model of 30 percent maintenance, then there should be around 60 potential flushes in your shop every week.

So how many fluid exchanges are you currently doing? I would bet that

unless you and your staff are really focused on this great service, it is fewer than 60 a week. How would 60 fluid exchanges a week affect your bottom line? How would 60 fluid exchanges help your techs hit their hours? I certainly do believe that the customers win with good clean fluids in their cars, don't you?

The New Normal

Then how about you try focusing on fluid exchanges this next 30 days? Get your staff on board and train them and equip them to be successful on this. At ATI, we have built a very good tool for you to use called the Flush and Maintenance Goals form. It is a live Excel spreadsheet that you can update on your computer or a sheet that you can print out and keep track of the number of fluid exchanges that you do based on car count.

Delegate it to your service manager or fill it out yourself every day. You simply enter the number of vehicles in the shop today and track the number of fluid exchanges that you do, keeping in mind that 30 percent is the number we are looking for.

Just go to www.ationlinetraining.com/2012-07 and ask for your very own copy of the Flush and Maintenance Goals tool. Keeping a diary for just 30 days will increase your profits, make it easier to support your customers, keep you from losing maintenance to competitors and help you stay the best shop in your area.

I really encourage you to get in on these new "good old days." In a lot of ways it is better than what it was 21 years ago if we really think about it. It's a whole lot easier to do fluid exchanges than to overhaul carburetors, and with cars going 300,000 miles it's a lot more profitable. **MZ**

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