



PROFIT MATTERS

HOW DO YOUR NUMBERS LINE UP? | BY CHRIS "CHUBBY" FREDERICK

What Happened to the Dream?

Most of us who join the automotive industry at a young age end up spending our entire lives in the business. It just gets in your blood! Shop owners and technicians usually have a dream of achievement that is different for all of us. Some want to be the best, some want to be rich and others just want to be comfortable while helping others. All of these dreams require continuing education by investing in yourself, whether you are a tech or a shop owner.

When we founded ATI in 1974, we began training about 200 technicians a week in drivability and underhood services. Profit really matters these days because the motoring public expects a lot of perks while servicing their cars. One perk they don't think much about but is critical to their happiness is technician training.

I wanted to share an unfortunate story from one of my senior coaches, George Zeeks, as he describes the unfortunate demise of a technician. During his time talking to shop owners and helping them realign their business for success, he says the conversation of staffing always comes to a head at one point or another. Namely, at what point does employee loyalty become a liability? When does that loyalty need to stop?

Don't Let The Dream Die

The average worker in the U.S. typically reaches his or her maximum earning poten-



tial between the ages of 45 and 55. They have paid their dues and have risen through the ranks, they know the job they have to do and have usually become good at it. In many

occupations, the golden years can continue well past 55. In order to do that, continuing education plays a major factor in maintaining ability at its peak level. The senior tech in many of our shops might be 50 or older, might have worked with us for an extended period, might have been a valuable asset to the organization and might be reaching the end of their best producing years.

We all know we cannot stop time and the effect it has on the body, but it is even harder for the technician. After 30 years of bending under a hood, the up/down/squat/kneel of setting thousands of lifts, the busted knuckles, the smashed fingers and the strain on shoulders and elbows, the body starts to protest.

Now let's hear it straight from George Zeeks. "At the time of writing, I am almost 50 years old. I have never been a technician, but I am well aware of the limitations that my body is starting to place upon me," he says. "My body has started to slow down, but my brain has not. The key here for myself and the older technicians we are talking about is to keep the experience and knowledge that we have now at the forefront of the industry.

"My wife has often reminded me that our experienced workers usually are the ones who come in on time, appreciate the job, are willing to go that extra mile and call off from work less often," Zeeks adds.

"All that is well and good, but if we do not encourage the continuing education of these same technicians, their skill level can drop too far."

QUESTION OF THE MONTH

QUESTION:

Do most shop owners pay for technician training?

Yes, most owners we work with build it into the labor rate calculation. Many times technicians pay for ASE testing and then are reimbursed when they pass.

*Do you have a question for Chubby?
E-mail him at cfrederick@autotraining.net.*

Technical Challenges

When cars switched from carburetors to fuel injectors, some people fell behind. When the computers became part of the cars' operating system, some people fell behind. When those same systems switched from OBDI to OBDII, some fell behind. Now we have hybrids, electric cars and who knows what else in the future. How many more will fall behind?

As shop owners, are we providing the opportunity for continuing classes? We all know that the classes are out there; are you doing your part to make them a part of the culture of your shop? Are we encouraging all of our staff to attend?

As technicians, are we attending these classes? Are you seeking out training on your own if it is not provided to you through the shop? Are you taking the responsibility for your profes-



sional and personal life? If you are not finding that additional training, growing your knowledge base and putting it to use, then problems are looming on the horizon to rob you of your "Golden Years."

We Are All Responsible

Recently, I had to advise one of my shops to let a technician go. He is 59 years old, was once a Master Technician but now is not much more skilled than the average C tech. He has not kept up with the changes in the industry. The work that he is performing can easily be done by technicians making far less than his \$28/hour flat rate wage. Worst of all, he is only producing, on average, 26 hours of billed hours a week at that lower skill level.

There was once a time when any technician could get a job almost instantly. That time is not now. Shops are closing, the economy is not the best and literally

thousands of shop bays are now behind locked doors. Who bears the ultimate responsibility? We all do. Shop owners need to reward the loyalty shown them and encourage the constant technical upgrading that is vital. You also need to provide financial training and support so your staff can prepare for their future. The alternative is letting someone go who has been with you for years, but the industry has passed him by. Technicians need to find the classes and attend, and the training must never stop. **MA**

Chris "Chubby" Frederick is CEO and president of the Automotive Training Institute. He is thankful for assistance from George Zeeks and Brian Canning in preparing this monthly column. Contact Chubby at cfr frederick@autotraining.net.



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