

# The Future is in Our Hands

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**There is so much talk these days** about the technician shortage. But the reality is, we need to work on building our entire future workforce, not just technicians. Our industry will need service advisors, managers, bookkeepers, and other support staff.

Let's face it, if we don't act on this issue ourselves, it's not going to happen. Thankfully, there are many organizations, trainers and industry leaders that are taking a proactive approach to address this issue. We just need to do more; and it has to be a collective effort from the independent shop owners.

By far, the most demanding position in our industry today is the position of technician. The amount of training, tools and equipment needed today is staggering and will only become even more so in the coming years. Technicians need the same structured educational approach as any other highly skilled or academic profession, if not more. Shop owners will also need to equip their shops with the right tools and equipment. Of course, this will require money, which I will address last.

We need to attract quality people to our side of the industry, the independent aftermarket. Many graduates from technical schools and colleges end up in dealerships, where too many of them get stuck on the Lube Line with no true career path. It takes a tremendous amount of initiative and persistence for an entry-level hire to stick it out and become a seasoned technician. Far too many get disillusioned and end up in a different line of work.

Shop owners; get more involved with your local high schools, vocational schools, and technical colleges.

Find or help create apprentice and shadow programs where young people can get a feel for what's it like to work at a professional independent shop. Get involved with your local community too. Take part in local fund raisers, youth associations, business groups, career days, and more. Let's show the world who we are and demonstrate that we are a profession that cares about the future of our youth.

Shop owners need to create career paths for their employees. It's not enough to hire someone and put them out on the floor to perform. Help your employees with their personal and career development.

Create a plan that will help map their future. Part of that means offering benefits such as health insurance, retirement planning, paid training, financial planning and mentorship programs that have real take-home value. All this will help to anchor your employees to your shop, and keep them looking over the fence at the so-called "greener" grass. We talk so much about hiring employees, what about keeping them once they are hired?

Payroll needs a boost as well, even for entry-level employees. Employees need a wage that makes them feel proud and allows them to attain the things they want from life. To attract the best of the best, shops must be willing to pay higher wages and create pay plans that show employees how they can earn more through increased training, improved efficiency and with commitment to their profession. I know, this takes money. As stated earlier, I will address that last.

After spending a lot of time, money and effort, some employees may venture out on their own. If we did our jobs right, we should be OK with this. After all, how did we start out? The people we hire today are our future shop owners, trainers, educators, and industry leaders.

Now, let's address the elephant in the room. Money. There is no simple way to put this. We need to raise shop profits and owner salaries across the board. If not, the typical independent repair shop will not have the financial horsepower to build for the future. I urge all shop owners to spend more time in the office and study their current business model. Big changes are coming to our industry and you must be ready. There has never been a more critical time to understand the numbers of your business. Work on improving efficiency, gross profit, and net profit. Labor profit dollars will be a key deciding factor between success and failure.

The responsibility is ours. Our future is literally in our hands. Let's all work together and build an industry that will attract top talent. And once hired, we need to coach and mentor them. We, the independent shop owners, have a lot to offer. We should be proud of what we do each and every day. Together, let's ensure that our legacies, and future legacies, live on.



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