

Tips to Keep Your Best Techs Happy

August 12, 2021 *Megan Gosch* [One Comment](#)



SHOP STATS: Apex Auto Care Location: **Michigan City, Ind.** Owner: **George Xidias** Average Monthly Car Count: **300-400** Total Staff Size: **12** Shop Size: **1,800 square feet** Number of Bays: **7** Annual Revenue: **\$600,00**

SHOP STATS: R&D Automotive Location: **Asheboro, N.C.** Owner: **Rudy Jenkins and Angela Garner** Average Monthly Car Count: **400** Total Staff Size: **5** Number of Bays: **4** Annual Revenue: **\$475,00**

Today's shop owner is no stranger to the shortage of skilled technicians facing the industry, and they certainly don't need any reminders. Those not actively working to fill an open bay are most likely scouting to build a deeper bench in preparation for the inevitable.

But hiring is just part of the puzzle. With retention becoming an increasingly vital part of the shop staffing equation, those with all-star talent are feeling the pressure to keep their teams happy—not just for shop morale or productivity, but to combat poaching and prevent their techs from looking elsewhere.

So, how exactly are shop owners keeping their best techs engaged and committed to staying put? Pete Xidias, general manager of Apex Auto Care in Michigan City, Indiana and Angela Garner, co-owner of R&D Automotive in Asheboro, N.C., weighed in with the measures that have made the biggest difference in staving off technician turnover.

Consider new payment plans.

For years the R&D Automotive team was paid on flat rate commission, but those days have changed.

While the younger techs Garner has hired were looking for a salary and time off, one of her best techs prefers the commission model, so Garner's opted to be flexible in offering the payment structures that will work best for each tech, rather than pick one set path.

"He's old-school and he likes working 40 hours and getting paid for 50 while the younger guys prefer the stability of a salary," says Garner.

She admits that accommodating multiple payment structures has made payroll and the shop's taxes a larger chore, but finds the effort is well worth it knowing she's able to keep her talent happy.

"He's been with us for years and he's one of the best front-end men in three counties," she says. "We've had to learn to be flexible with our techs in order to keep them and we want to make sure we're accommodating him too as we make changes for the new guys."

Schedule for flexibility.

Garner's found that offering flexibility in scheduling has helped her keep her team intact as well.

With one of her strongest techs often needed as an aid for his mother who has severe health issues, "If it's looking like we might have a busy week, we'll check in on him to see how things are going or if there might be any appointments he needs to help get her to," she says. Another skilled tech she hopes to hire also has a child with physical disabilities and would require flexible scheduling as well.

"We're just not in a position where we have many techs to choose from in general, let alone truly skilled, talented techs, so we try to work with them as much as we can to meet their needs where they are," says Garner. "Even just showing we're open to being flexible makes them feel like they're more than a number and that we want to take care of them and their families has gone such a long way in making them feel like they're valued and respected with us."

Rethink your bonus program.

At Apex Auto, the shop's bonus structure is in transition, with the team's quarterly bonuses shifting to a monthly, weekly and sometimes daily opportunity. The reason? Xidias finds his older techs are still motivated by longer-term incentives, his younger techs are looking for shorter benchmarks.

"We've noticed that the larger the gap between bonuses, you start to lose the attention span of the younger tech," Xidias says. "Migrating those bonuses is helping keep that drive up on a more consistent basis and the team is seeing that we're adaptable to making changes where it makes sense, which is something that matters to those techs and stands out when you're looking to stay somewhere long-term."

Invest in a brighter future.

Both Xidias and Garner are also quick to help with training on an individual level.

Xidias works to hone in on each employee's needs and potential weaknesses to take a custom approach. And with a shop culture built on continuous learning—four past techs have gone on to launch their own successful shops after learning the business inside and out at R&D—Garner provides access to new training classes as they become available. She also sponsors any individual classes her team is interested in, whether it be

welding, electrical diagnostics, or customer service strategies. One of her techs is in the process of becoming a Master-level tech and Garner will cover any classes within the shop's budget, but with the most costly classes Garner does require employees reimburse the shop for classes not passed.

"We try to give them as much experience and opportunity to learn as they're looking for," Garner says. "It's vital for them to know we're going to continue to invest in their growth and they're not getting stuck, or left behind, or missing out on anything by staying in one place with us."

Think outside the box.

When faced with the question "What can we do to keep you here?" Xidias and his team have gone above and beyond traditional perks, including assistance with home financing, to keep the team's best on staff.

"It sounds extreme, but we're not extending something like that to just anybody," he says. "They need to have proven themselves over the years but a gesture that big shows we're serious about their future and solidifies to them that there's a family here to support them," he says.

The shop's leadership also regularly strategizes much smaller-scale, sustainable perks and Xidias is always on the lookout for new tangible ways he can lighten the load for his best techs. The Apex Auto team sets aside a portion of its yearly profits to fund everything from automotive loans to help with everyday expenses like phone plan bills and Hulu, Netflix or Apple TV accounts.

"The thinking is if we can help cut down on some of those recurring bills they're putting on their credit cards and probably paying interest on, we can take some of the stress off of their home budget," Xidias says. "It's taking some of that pressure off their hourly rate and helping them stretch that \$16 or \$19 per hour even further in a way they can immediately see and feel."