



The Perfect Storm of Technology, Materials and Tech Shortage

A perfect storm of changing automobile technology, new materials and a shortage of experienced, quality-minded technicians is brewing.

A perfect storm is brewing in the collision repair industry – a storm combining rapidly changing automobile technology, new materials and a shortage of experienced, quality-minded technicians.

LINES OF CODE

The operation of today's high-end vehicle can depend on 100 million lines of computer code – a number that is expected to grow to 200 to 300 million in

the near future. By comparison, the Boeing 747 uses 14 million lines of code, and the F-22 fighter jet uses a mere 2 million. It's easy to understand why today's automobiles are referred to as computers on wheels.

MATERIALS

The challenge of change doesn't end with computer technology. The materials used to manufacture today's cars and those in the future is changing faster than the last 20 years combined. Today's repair challenges include high-strength, lighter-weight steels, aluminum, carbon fiber, crush zones, and advanced refinish technologies and materials, just to name a few.

For many, the perfect storm in collision repairs represents life-threatening challenges. For others, these same challenges represent extraordinary opportunities for growth. Carubba Collision sees the never-ending challenges of change as extraordinary opportunities to further strengthen our competitive advantage and achieve our business goal of profitable growth.

We used to think of quality repairs in terms of color match, texture and zero visible defects. While this is still important, today and in the future, quality means returning damaged vehicles to their pre-damaged condition and includes scanning of computer modules and sensors, recalibrating electronics and dealing with advanced vehicle designs and repair requirements.

The following are some of the steps we've taken in the past and today to continue down our path of continuous and profitable growth.

TRAINING, TRAINING AND MORE TRAINING

I-CAR is the industry's major source of training and repair information. We invest in I-CAR training to the

point where we pay for our technicians to participate in it.

Additionally, our technicians' pay rate is adjusted based on their I-CAR status. Simply put, I-CAR Platinum technicians are paid more than those not recognized or not maintaining platinum and welding certification.

KNOWLEDGE SHARE

We've created and maintained a centralized post-and-share database accessible to all our staff for posting repair information, lessons learned and direction across our network of shops.

READ, READ, READ

Our leadership and management teams are constantly on the lookout for information. We used to skim through BodyShop Business and other trade journals, rarely sharing any tidbit of information with the rest of the organization. Reading and studying was only done if we had the time. Today, everyone is on the lookout for new and pertinent information and, when they find it, they add it to our Knowledge Share database. As one industry consultant has suggested, we research to learn and continuously learn to research.

DAMAGE ANALYSIS

Our damage analysis process starts with customer and vehicle check-in, pre-scan and meticulous disassembly. The damage analysis team researches and prints OEM information, position statements and repair procedures, adding them to the job folder, updating the Knowledge Share database and adding all necessary documents to the management system as a way

to protect against lawsuits. What goes into the management system documentation? Pre-scan results, pictures, screen snapshots, post-scan results, OEM requirements, position statements – everything needed to protect against exposure.

STAKEHOLDER RESOURCES

We rely on our paint, body and equipment suppliers and manufacturers to provide on-site training workshops and clinics needed to leverage our investments in tooling and equipment. A few simple examples include bumper and plastic welding and repair, specialized tooling for dent repair, body repair and refinish materials.

CULTURE

At the end of the day, developing and maintaining a culture of engagement and continuous learning is critical to continuous improvement.

Every improvement requires change. Improving and maintaining our culture means doing things differently. Research has shown that up to 70 percent of all improvement efforts fail – for predictable reasons. The following are the top three countermeasures we take to continuously improve our culture:

1. Training that strengthens alignment around our vision, core values, processes and performance.
2. Training needed to engage our people in development of process and performance improvement.
3. Engage employees in the planning and execution of process and performance improvement

SUMMARY

When an assistant asked Thomas Edison if he was discouraged by his 10,000 failures to develop the light bulb, he answered, "I have not failed. I have found 10,000 ways that won't work."

I hope this month's article adds to your thought process around the training needed to face the perfect storm hitting the collision repair industry.

