

# Help Wanted!

Lack of Knowledge About Automotive Career Opportunities Fuels Technician Shortage

So, here we are a few months into 2017 and topping the list of the many challenges we face is the technician shortage problem that looms heavier than ever. I am 43 years old and considered a youngster in the industry. However, I can still remember the days when it was just a matter of putting an ad in the paper and a host of interviews would be forthcoming. That guarantee has obviously changed, but fear not all you bleary-eyed shop owners — it's not as bad as you think. There is hope!

There are several factors at play when it comes to the tech shortage. Let's be honest, the level of sophistication that vehicles have achieved is astounding when compared to the '80s and '90s. The knowledge required of today's technicians rivals that of engineers. We are expected to be masters of mechanical, electrical and integration systems. That doesn't seem very encouraging, does it? Well, that depends on how you look at it. This advancement in technology, coupled with declining DIY enthusiasm, creates an interesting opportunity for those of us who persevere and push forward.

When it comes to the technician shortage, we have other issues in my opinion besides just the number of available technicians. There is also a troubling lack of interest/guidance as it pertains to what it is we really do and how lucrative this profession can be for the right candidate. The latter issue is where we need to concentrate to address the former. We'll get to that in a minute.

*In the meantime, following are a few suggested steps to help find a new technician if you are in need of one at your shop.*



### 1. Constantly Be Recruiting:

There is no magic bullet here. You need to see what works best in your area to get techs interested in your shop. At this point in time, print ads don't perform well in my opinion. Recruitment dollars are much better spent in the online arena. Besides the fact that it has become the new standard in a job seeker's journey to employment and we are looking for technical people who behave in a technical manner. So, posting ads in this way gives us a small insight into how a candidate handles basic technology. I recommend using the popular job sites as well as some of your local job search sites. Try to put up two or three ads and see which one gets the most response. From there, you'll be able to better dial in your ad in the future to match your needs.

### 2. Constantly Be Networking:

Networking is a skill that takes some time to perfect. No one can sell your shop better than you can. This is true with customers, business associates and prospective employees. I'm sure we all have technicians working for us who came to us through a very convoluted series of events that culminated with finding a new employee. You'll find that the more you network, the more this happens.

But, don't rule out talking to vendors, parts suppliers and the like. Everyone knows somebody who's looking for a job, and you never know when you'll come across someone in the industry who knows of a person looking for an opportunity. The bottom line here is to always assume that everyone you come into contact with has the potential of opening another door. Don't be afraid to



think outside of the box when it comes to finding and keeping employees.

### 3. Grow Your Own Technicians:

I have found this to be extremely successful if you find the right candidate. Look around your shop; you could have a potential tech working for you right now in another area of your business and not even know it. I have had some great techs come from seemingly random positions at my shop (i.e. detailer, tow truck driver, etc). The key here is to be able to identify basic mechanical capability and, of course, the most important component — a willingness to learn.

The upside here is that you are starting with someone who has no learned bad habits as it pertains to vehicle repair and can be trained on your specific policies and procedures. While it requires a good amount of time and patience to get new techs up to speed, it can be very successful if you have a good candidate from which to start.

### Industry Outreach

In keeping with the "thinking outside the box" mantra, I tried something in February that was a "first" for me. I belong to a NAPA Business Development Group and our president (John Iacovetti of Point Service Center) had a contact with the North Montco Technical Career Center board. He floated the idea of talking to them from our perspective as current shop owners to emphasize the need for talented students in today's repair landscape.

I thought it was a great idea and

volunteered immediately. NAPA was also kind enough to participate to give its perspective on the issue. We were very happy to see that they listened and were very receptive to our ideas. This initial discussion will hopefully open the door to future conversations and bring us closer to the mutual goal of employing "the next generation of technician."

When you think about it, how are any of the automotive voc-tech schools going to understand what we are looking for if we don't tell them? It was encouraging to hear that they were seeing an uptick in attendance. These schools provide the building blocks needed to start students on the path to success. So, why not be a part of influencing what the message to the next generation is?

### Spell Out Opportunities

Given the average age of today's technician, it is imperative that we all get involved to ensure the younger generation sees the tremendous opportunities available to qualified technicians in our industry. We need to also reach out to school counselors and have a conversation about the varied automotive career opportunities among middle school and high school students — as well as with students' parents — shifting any outdated misperceptions and making our industry more appealing.

The bottom line is this — times have changed and so have we. The numbers don't lie. There are fewer techs available than there were before. It has become a necessity to figure out new, creative ways of attracting techs to your shop. But, equally important is laying the foundation for future technicians so we have access to the help we need to be able to service our customers well into the future. ✖