

# TRAINING YOUR TECHS REDUCES TURNOVER

And Will Help Take Our Industry To The Next Level

Turnover is a problem that affects every business. It is frustrating to spend time investing in employees, learning what makes them tick, and setting up an environment that is conducive to success, only to have them leave once you have taken them to the next level. While inconvenient, we have all been there and have had those sink or swim moments.



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The real question is, how do we train our employees, increase their capabilities and retain them after we have invested our precious resources? In order to do that, we need to understand why we train and define how to make it work for us for the long-term.

## Defining Why We Train

It is staggering to think how much this industry has changed in the last 15 years. Technology advances at an exponential rate and we have to stay on top of it all. The only way we can succeed is by constantly educating ourselves. This industry has become more of a practice and less of a trade. It is imperative that we approach our training strategies with this mentality. If we show our techs that this is

more than a just a job, but a practice, a professional camaraderie can be established.

Success here will help take our industry to the next level, changing our customers' perceptions of what we do and how we do it. Not every technician will buy into this mentality, but the majority will. Remember, we all got into this profession for the same reason — we live to solve problems and conquer challenges.

There are many options today for training. Online training is very powerful and extremely convenient. I like to use this type of training to help technicians brush up on a topic or get initial exposure to new subject matter. Webinars can be helpful as well. The nice part about live webinars is that

there can be some Q&A breakouts, depending on who is running the training.

Traditional classroom training is undoubtedly the most popular, and there is a good reason for that. If executed right by the instructor and embraced by students, it is highly effective. The ability to have an in-person Q&A and present real-world problems to the group on hand really emphasizes the collaborative exchange we want. In addition, the ability to network with industry peers is indispensable. Hands-on training is the most effective but also difficult to do in large groups and it is usually expensive. However, it gives us the ability to use our natural talents to learn by actually putting our hands on the subject

matter. I honestly believe that we learn more effectively by “doing.”

## Mentoring

Our industry has some interesting challenges facing it. There are more vehicles on the road and fewer people to service them. Couple that with a less-than-stellar “refresh rate” of qualified technicians entering the workforce and we end up in a situation where we need to think outside of the box.

Oddly enough, the method of training that was used for most of us is starting to regain traction, and that is the mentoring/apprenticeship model. To me, with the right candidate, this is the most effective form of training and educating. There is an added bonus to it as well. The relationships you can create during



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this process can be lasting and very fruitful. Most of us operate in a “family business” atmosphere, which means when you train someone as a mentor you are bringing that person into the “family.”

Never underestimate the power of loyalty that comes from that bond. When the “mentoring” process is complete, you end up with someone who knows exactly what your business needs and recognizes the path to get there. In addition, they feel like they have a home so it becomes more of passion rather than just another job. From there, continuing education as described above will only strengthen that bond. Yes, it takes more time. Yes, you have to have the right candidate. However, if done correctly, it can be a game changer.

### Team Spirit

You cannot expect your techs to be the only ones who are participating in training. As a shop owner, you need to participate in the training you require for your technicians, whether you pick up a wrench or not. By training with your techs, you will be setting the example of leading from the front.

This will help to eliminate the “us against them” mentality that seems to be pervasive in our industry between technicians and management. Use training as a team-building opportunity to help get everyone on the same page and moving in the same direction. When I train with my techs, I make sure to relate the subject matter back to the vehicles we have seen recently that may have given us some trouble. Remember, a shop that trains together, stays together.

### Sense of Ownership

Most of today’s training organizations welcome input directly from the shops they train. This is a perfect opportunity to get your techs involved in choosing the training they would like to see. When you involve them in the process of choosing, you are giving them a sense of ownership in their own improvement. Subliminally, they are also getting the message that you care about them and what they think. This may seem like a simple concept, but do not underestimate its power when it comes to loyalty. You would be surprised how many techs will step out of their comfort zone to learn

something new when it is *their* idea rather than it being forced upon them.

More than ever, training is and will always be a critical part of our success. We as an industry need to be proactive. The advancement of technology and the constant change in this business require immediate action, but one size does not fit all.

No matter how hard you try, turnover is an unpleasant reality in our business. However, if you take a proactive approach and apply some basic people skills to the problem you can expand the capabilities of your people, make them feel like an integral part of your team and increase your shop’s bottom line in the process. ✘

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*Tom's father, Joe Palermo, continues to serve as president. Tom is actively involved in the industry and keeps his vehicle repair skills up-to-date through regular training. He was named the NAPA/ASE Technician of the Year in 2015.*