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COMMITMENT TO TRAINING  
EMBRACE CHANGE AS  
POSITIVE — DON'T FEAR  
THE UNKNOWN

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UBM

NOVEMBER 2016

VOL. 55, NO. 11 // [ABRN.COM](http://ABRN.COM)

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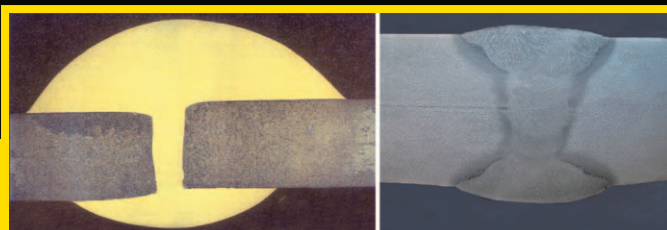
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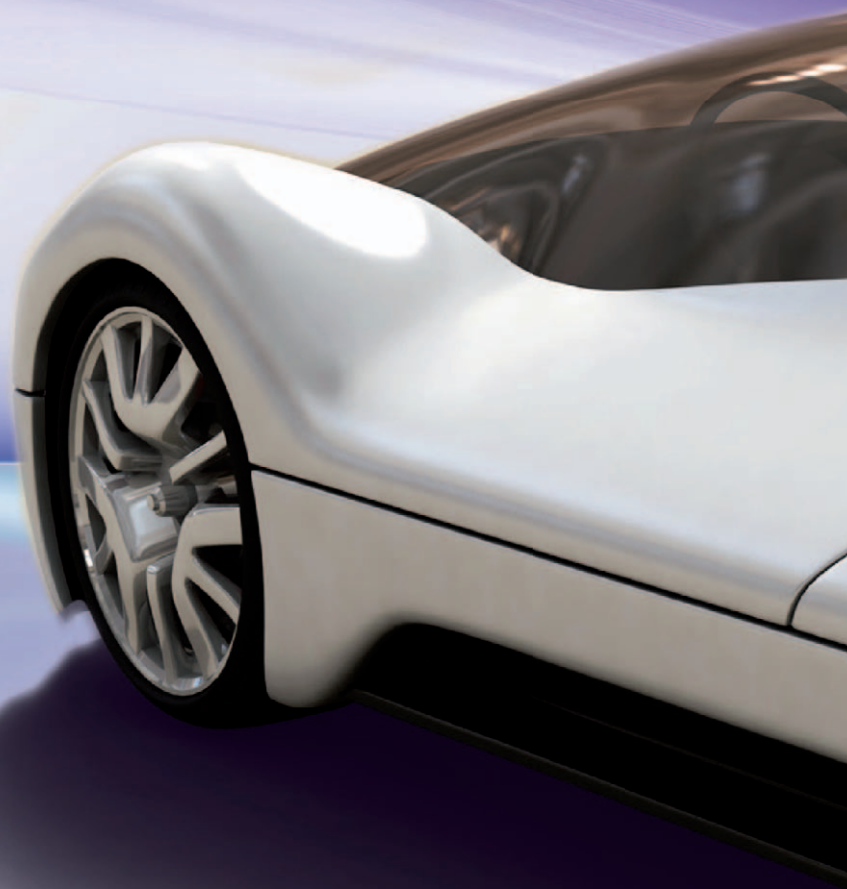
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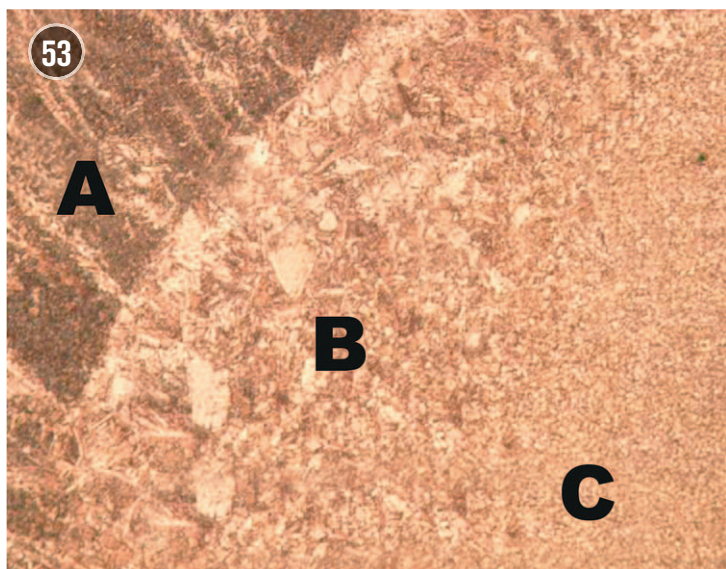
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INDUSTRY TRAINING

## SECOND FREE TRAINING EVENT BRINGS LEARNING TO THE PROS

**TSCHANEN BRANDYBERRY //**  
Special Projects Editor

APPLETON, Wis. – When David Crosby received a Commitment to Training email this fall, he took some time reading it and evaluating the trainers and courses listed. It wasn't long before he came to one conclusion: This was a great opportunity for his entire crew.

They agreed and were among the 75 technicians, welders, owners and managers who participated in the second one-day Commitment to Training event of 2016, produced by Automechanika

Chicago. The training, provided at no cost to attendees through manufacturer support, was conducted at Fox Valley Technical College in Appleton, Wis.

"There's something for everyone and there's diversity in the class, so everyone can get something out of the classes," said Crosby, who owns Crosby Automotive in Elkhorn, Wis. "And I always believe I'm put in a spot for a reason. Currently, we are rewriting our accounting program, and (Financial Best Practices by Mike Anderson of Collision Advice) was a great class."

>> TRAINING CONTINUES ON PAGE 10

### BREAKING NEWS

#### STAFFING

## NEW BASF VP TALKS COMPANY STRATEGY, INDUSTRY TRENDS

BASF recently named Marvin Gillfillan as the vice president of Automotive Refinish business for North America. Gillfillan sat down with *ABRN* to discuss his priorities in the role and some key industry trends impacting the direction of BASF.

**ABRN: What will be your main focuses as the new VP of BASF's Automotive Refinish business?**

My two main focuses are to continue to build on BASF Automotive Refinish's successes and to simplify our processes by empowering our teams so it's easier to do business with us. BASF has very strong brands, products and services. We have world-class finishes with best-in-class color match and the most OEM approvals in the industry. Coupled with this we offer industry-leading Advanced Process Solutions that maximize our customers' efficiency and

>> BASF CONTINUES ON PAGE 12

### TRENDING

#### FINAL 'WHO PAYS FOR WHAT' SURVEY OF 2016 IS NOW UNDERWAY

Industry research is focusing on asking shops about their aluminum repair labor rates and which of more than 20 shop supplies they bill and are paid for by insurers.

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#### SWAF APPROVED FOR AMERICAN HONDA, ACURA REPAIRS

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## &gt;&gt; TRAINING CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

Classes covered financial topics, customer service, advanced vehicle technology, electrical and scope techniques, diagnostics, estimating and welding. Attendees also were invited to tour the Fox Valley Transportation Center.

"Fox Valley Technical College pro-

vided us a fantastic location for our second Commitment to Training Event," said Pete Meier, Director of Training for UBM Automotive Group. "Our attendees had great opportunities to learn more about the processes they need to be able to use in the shop today to solve a variety of problems and were even able to gain

hands-on experience."

That hands-on experience really shone in Aluminum and Attachment Welding, taught by Fox Valley Instructor Jerry Goodson, which provided attendees lucky enough to reserve a spot in the small class the chance to learn new techniques and sharpen their welding skills.

"The class was mostly hands-on, which is what I loved," said Rafael Godinez, a collision technician from Chicago. "I came today because I have to get better at what I do."

Helping techs like Godinez is the goal of Commitment to Training, which is hosting three no-cost training events around the Midwest this year. The third event will be Nov. 19 at Joliet Junior College in Joliet, Ill., while the first event was at Washtenaw Community College in Ann Arbor, Mich., in May.

Several Fox Valley attendees also attended the event in Ann Arbor and say they plan to attend the November event as well. Mike Felicioni, owner of Great Lakes Auto Body in Nunica, Mich., made the trip to his second Commitment to Training event because he recognized the value in getting training from top educators. "I came because with the new technology on vehicles, you have to get all of the information you can. And if it's free, even better," he said.

Along with Anderson, Meier and Goodson, the slate of instructors included G. Jerry Truglia of TST, Greg Marchand of CARQUEST Technical Institute, Mel Schampers of Fox Valley and Jason Baratanen of I-CAR. With each three-hour session they taught, students learned hands-on experiences, practical applications and went home with books full of examples they can work to improve upon.

The Commitment to Training is made possible by support from manufacturer sponsors Carquest Technical Institute, Delphi, Abaris Training, Mitchell 1, PPG, Polyvance, Pico Technology, Schaeffler Automotive Aftermarket, Mitchell International, Motor Age Training, Axalta, Garmat USA and GFS. 



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>> **BASF CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8**

profitability. APS is a complete focus on the shop's repair process. The shop goes through intensive classroom training and then we bring a team into the shop to help them implement APS. Working together as partners, the top 25 percent of our APS shops have increased their sales and profits more than 25 percent and their touch time has increased 100 percent.

Our customer base is extremely loyal and we want to continue to partner with our shops and distributors to help them grow their market share. By focusing on these two areas, BASF will continue to grow with our partners.

**ABRN: What key trends are impacting the direction and products of BASF?**

Consolidation at the shop and distributor level continues to drive efficiency. In addition to consolidation, we see trends around innovation, sustainability and productivity. Some of the products and services we provide, such as R-M Onyx HD, which can be used as a solventborne or waterborne product; Advanced Process Solutions; and the new Glasurit color boosters, enable our shops to be more profitable.

**ABRN: What can customers expect from BASF over the next year? The next 5 years?**

We will continue to focus on being a market leader with the best products and services. We are also growing our distribution

across the U.S. Just in the last few months our single-line ColorSource distributors have opened 8 new locations. And we see this expansion continuing with the majority of our distributors. In addition, BASF is focusing on much more than just paint. As the number one chemical supplier to the automotive industry we have the largest R&D spend in the global chemical industry and we will continue to innovate and provide solutions for our partners to help them grow their sales and profits.

**ABRN: What were your key areas of focus/messages during the SEMA Show?**

For the first time we announced a Color of the Year during SEMA that incorporates the Parallax color trends we announced in May and shows its practicality for the OEM and refinish markets. In addition, we unveiled new special effect colors for R-M and the Best Paint Award for Glasurit. Chip Foose unveiled a 1939 Cadillac Coupe painted with Glasurit 90 Line and signed autographs, and we had Richard Petty in our booth. Another exciting introduction at SEMA was our new Color Tool Tracking application. With all that said, BASF continues to be number one in color and we want to continue to grow with our customers and help them become more productive and profitable.

**ABRN: How do you see the painting business changing in the near future?**

As I mentioned earlier, we see continued consolidation in distribution and shops. And our partners want to continue to drive costs out of the repair process. We're very focused on helping our partners become more productive by offering our Advanced Process Solutions, VisionPLUS, Performance Groups and training. We will continue to be the innovation leader for products that are better for the environment and improve our customers' profits.

**ABRN: Is training a priority for BASF and how do you help your customers to stay trained and prepared?**

Training is a key driver in all we do at BASF. The collision repair industry consistently identifies training as an enabler of business success. BASF sees this as an opportunity to differentiate itself in the industry by pursuing state-of-the-art digital training solutions, expansion of training centers and staff as well as an expanded instructor-led course offering that offers I-CAR credits. The objective is to make meaningful training more available in general and to offer it through smart devices, serving those that need "on demand" support.

We opened a new, state-of-the-art training center in Houston this year. We had exclusive training for Bentley this summer and we're adding online training. Our trainers and technical team, along with our distribution partners, provide classroom training, OEM certification and in-shop training and support year round. We're very involved with I-CAR, CREF and SCRS. In fact, BASF was the first company to commit to the Repairer Driven Education Series at SEMA in 2010. Again this year, we were a Masters + OEM Summit level sponsor of the RDE series at SEMA. 📺

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# RAISING THE BAR

Finding ways to ramp up customer service is a key way to distinguish your shop

JOHN YOSWICK // Contributing Editor

**A**sk 10 collision repair shops what sets them apart, and likely at least nine of them — and quite possibly all 10 — will tout their “customer service.” Shops tend to think that what they are doing is unique, or at least that no other shop could possibly care about its customers to the same degree.

So based on the assumption that every shop has the basics of good customer service nailed down, here’s a compilation of ideas that can help a shop take it to the next level and actually stand out, in terms of service, from the shop up the street.

### ‘Customer care’ rather than ‘estimator’

Brad Zara said it’s been almost four years since his shop, Zara’s Collision Center in Springfield, Ill., created the position of “customer care specialist.”

“We realized we weren’t serving our customers’ true needs with our traditional process of writing an estimate and leaving our customer to handle all the other aspects of the claims process,” Zara said.

The shop had already switched to repair planning — writing a complete estimate when the vehicle is in the shop and torn-down whenever possible, rather than writing a preliminary estimate. So the customer care specialist doesn’t have to be an estimator; he or she can focus solely on customer service.

Zara said the person in that role at his shop proactively reaches out to prospective contacts as soon as their direct repair assignment is received. They interview the customer to get all the necessary information to determine the most efficient process given their particular situation.

“This saves the customer an additional trip to the shop for a preliminary estimate, and instead we can move right to scheduling,” Zara said. “About 60 percent of our repairs are handled this way.”

The customer care specialist gauges the job size, sometimes having the customer text or email some photos of the damage, and contacts the insurer as necessary to get an assignment or a copy of the insurer’s estimate. The customer is given a drop-off date and told what to expect during the process.

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"When the customer drops off the vehicle, the customer care specialist walks around the vehicle with the customer to verify the damage, since this is often our first opportunity to see the vehicle," Zara said.

The customer is then kept updated by phone, text or email, whichever they would prefer.

Zara said the system allows the shop to process \$6 million in annual sales with one estimator, one customer care

specialist and two repair planners. The change allows his repair planners, he said, to focus solely on creating accurate repair orders, without the interruptions of having to interact with customers or write preliminary estimates.

"Most importantly, our CSI scores and feedback affirm that our customers find great value in what our customer care specialist has done for them," Zara said. "In fact, our primary customer care specialist is frequently mentioned by name by our customers in their positive feedback."

### Take a personal approach

For more than 20 years, A&R Body Specialty in Wallingford, Conn., has been sending every one of its customers a Christmas card. Shop owner Tony Ferriolo said this past year, that meant mailing out 4,000 cards.

"Now, we don't use a mailing service,"

## THREE MORE WINNING CUSTOMER SERVICE IDEAS



First, create an account in your annual budget that your office staff can use "to smooth things over with customers." A minor gaffe in customer service might warrant a couple of movie passes or a coffee shop gift certificate; for a larger inconvenience, perhaps a restaurant gift certificate.

Second, write all customer special requests on the driver's side door glass, so that everyone getting in or out of that vehicle can't avoid seeing them. The writing should not be removed until it's been confirmed the

requested items have been handled.

Lastly, make sure you know what languages each of your employees speak to help you serve those with difficulties communicating solely in English. "That's a strength, because when people come in and you speak their language, they feel more comfortable," one California shop owner said. Another shop with a manager who knows sign language has even made sure local insurance agents and local deaf schools know the shop is equipped to help that segment of the community.

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Ferraiolo said. "We want to thank them personally for their patronage. So my wife and kids actually address and stamp the envelopes. It takes about three weeks to complete, and from the end of October until Thanksgiving, our house is filled with boxes of Christmas cards. But all year long, customers come in and comment on those cards. When they come back in, they say they like that we take the time to personally send them a holiday card. That personal touch is missing in business today. It's been well worth the extra effort my family puts into this every year."

### Speed up turn-around time

A number of shops have set up same-day or even "while-you-wait" repair systems for small jobs. For a bumper replacement, for example, the part can be painted before the customer arrives; remove the vehicle's fuel door when the vehicle is first at the shop for an estimate, and that,

along with the paint code, can ensure a good paint match.

"So literally the customer arrives, sits down in our waiting room, and we exchange the bumper in a matter of minutes," said a California shop owner who offered the service for several years before recently selling his shop. "In a matter of 30 or 45 minutes, we bring the car back all washed and clean with the new bumper. The customer is extremely happy, and the insurance company is happy."

### A rose by any other name

Old Dominion Collision Repair in Eugene, Ore., leaves a rose on the dashboard of every repaired vehicle it returns to a customer, "a representation of the quality of repair and quality of customer service that each one of our customers deserves," the shop posted on its Facebook page. "And, frankly, it makes us feel good to see you smile!"

### More than just washing the vehicle

Customers walking into the newest and third location of Michael J's Collision Centers in the San Jose, Calif., will find a plush waiting area that includes a coffee bar.

Shop owner Jeff Ryan calls his estimators "project managers" because he expects them to follow jobs throughout the process as part of the shop's quality control system. The final inspection comes as part of a much-more-than-standard detailing of every vehicle, which customers rave about in the company's online reviews.

"Even a vehicle in for just a bumper job gets clay barred and hand waxed," Ryan said.

### Knowing when not to charge

Customers at Cupertino Body Shop in Campbell, Calif., often spend their time scanning the walls of the shop office.

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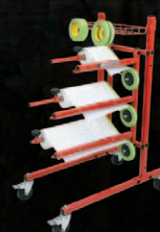


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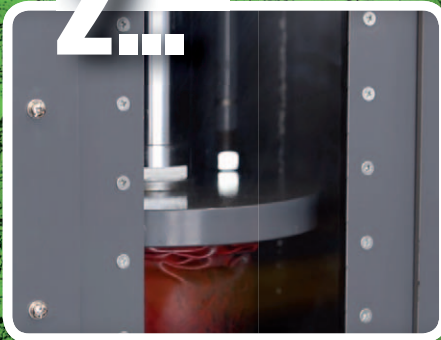
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**R Ranger**



There, they find photos of the dozens of Little League teams the shop has sponsored in the community since the 1970s when second generation shop owner Russ Cooper himself was playing.

"People often come in and point to the photos and say, 'That's my cousin,' or 'That's me,'" said Lori Militante, one of Cooper's two siblings (along with Nancy Yeager) with whom he co-owns the business started by their father in 1968.

But one of the main ways the three have continued to build the business is by following the example of their father by often doing more for less. They regularly help those on a budget find a way to afford the repair work they need, even doing simple, while-you-wait fixes at no charge.

"We try to help people as much as possible," Yeager said. "There are some people who obviously can't afford to get their cars done completely. We work with

a lot of elderly people. When I see them, I picture my mom and dad, so we're going to help them as much as possible. That's how my dad ran the business. That's how he got customers. People remember that. We've had multiple generations of customers now. They still tell us things they remember that my dad did for them."

Joel Michelsen, body shop manager for Lithia Body & Paint of Bend in Oregon has a similar philosophy.

"We basically always say 'yes' and then figure out a way to get it done," Michelsen said of customer requests. "As we've done that over the past five years, I'm starting to see more repeat customers. I give credit to my crew. They all work together and they all go the extra mile. The painters will touch stuff up or polish stuff for people, and I have a technician who will do quick adjustments or repairs on vehicles for people at no charge. Those little things go so far. Any other

shop I was at, it wasn't done that way."

### Offer information, not just repairs

Jesse Thatcher of Pro Finish in Kent, Wash., said he's skipped participating in insurer direct repair programs because he sees them as a conflict of interest in terms of always putting his customers' best interests first.

"Our view is making sure the customer is taken care of completely," he said.

By "completely," Thatcher said it's more than just taking care of their car.

"It's about making the customer 100 percent whole again," he said. "So we do refer people to chiropractors. We do refer people to an injury attorney. There's no obligation for them to use any of these people, but it's just to get them educated."

He cites one example of a customer who demonstrated the importance of



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providing this assistance to those who have been in an accident. A woman came to the shop after a minor accident in her car, yet she clearly was having trouble as she walked into the shop office. Thatcher said he asked if she'd been hurt in the accident. She told him no, that

her health challenges actually stemmed from an accident a decade earlier when she accepted a \$400 cash settlement from the insurer rather than getting the medical help she needed then.

"Over the years, seeing people take the money and not making sure their

body is 100 percent has made us want to look out for the customer not just now but for the future," he said.

### Look for ideas – and customer-focused people – outside the industry

More and more collision repair businesses are looking for those with good customer service skills from other types of businesses — retail or hospitality, for example — to bring those talents into the shop as customer service reps or estimators.

### Complete concierge service

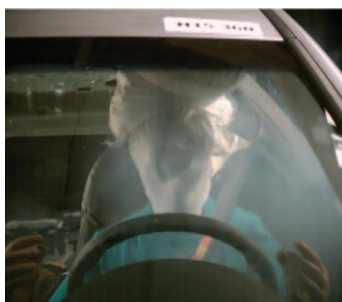
White's Collision Service, which operates four shops in smaller communities in Oregon, offers customers what it calls "concierge service," promising to make the process "as hassle-free as possible."

Customers can fill out a short form at the company's website, and an estimator will travel to the customer's home or work to take photos and get the process started with the customer's insurer. The shop will deliver a rental car to the customer, bring the wrecked vehicle to the shop and reverse that process when the vehicle is repaired. The customer never has to visit the shop or even leave their home.

April White said the small portion of customers who take advantage of the service very much appreciate it. Most customers, she said, don't mind stopping by the shop for the estimate, so it's just a matter of delivering the rental car to them and getting their car back to the shop.

"But I'm seeing the pace [of customers using the service] picking up a little bit," White said. "It's something I would definitely appreciate as a customer. I think as it becomes more known, as we advertise it more, it will be more widely used." ■

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## Is it time to reconsider your place in the collision repair landscape?

**TIM SRAMCIK** // Contributing Editor

**A**s 2016 closes out, two industry trends promise to continue making a significant impact on most repair businesses well into next year. One is the uptick in the number of US shops (effectively ending a 20-year decline), and the other is the continuing growth of MSOs. No doubt the latter trend is a major driver of the first. The near-explosive expansion of the largest consolidators is an especially critical factor.

Today, 81 MSOs that each generate over \$20 million in annual revenues process one fifth of the industry's work load (for insurance and customer pay work) and account for more than \$6.2 billion in annual revenue. On average, these MSOs process \$3.3 million annually per location, over three times the average of \$964,179 for all US repairers. They're also gobbling up other shops to take advantage of their transplanted profit-rich operations and to better compete with each other. Not content acquiring loca-

tions one at a time, national consolidators such as the Boyd Group, Caliber and Service King have concentrated heavily on purchasing other MSOs, particularly large ones with 10 or more shops.

These are heady times in an industry once beset with stagnating revenues and predictions of gloom — that is, unless you're competing with a consolidator or simply struggling to stay afloat in a market being redefined by MSOs. More than ever the collision repair industry is one where the rich get richer while others

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look for answers or a fresh start. The silver lining is that MSOs provide a solution for these repairers as well — acquisition. Your business too could be a beneficiary.

Selling to an MSO is no easy task. Even in a hot market, consolidators are cautious buyers. There are effective steps you can take to help draw MSO attention

to your shop and make the acquisition as beneficial as possible for you and your employees. Navigate your new industry path with these five steps.

### Step 1: Make the first move

Target the MSOs most likely to be interested in your business.

Just posting an ad in the local press or floating your interest in selling through a shop organization won't do. MSOs are looking for new sites, but locating a potential acquisition is still a challenge. Consolidators first need to identify a market they wish to penetrate and then find a shop that both fits their operational specifications and that is open to purchase.

Be aware that getting a bead on exactly what an MSO wants can be trying. ABRN contacted several, requesting general information on their purchasing philosophies. The majority declined typically because they regard this information as confidential. Even getting information from former owners can be difficult since they often sign confidentiality agreements.

As you begin talks with an MSO, you'll probably find yourself answering more questions about your business than you receive about the potential buyer. That can be disconcerting, but it's also a normal part of a process where buyer and seller gradually exchange information. If you do pique the interest of an MSO, be prepared to open your books and go through a full business evaluation.

### Step 2: Assess your assets

To best facilitate answers about your business, you'll need to take a full assessment. Keep vital numbers and data on hand, such as:

- Shop dimensions and building upgrades
- Training records and certifications
- Equipment purchases (including version numbers and purchase dates)
- Expenses, profits and liabilities for each operating year
- Growth and profit projections

Also include any information you have on the shop property. Not only will having this information help speed a purchase, it will assist you in determining the fair market value of your business. When it comes to establishing that value, always turn to a business professional who can provide an accurate calculation. Better still, contact

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### Step 3: Remember that market is everything

While your revenue numbers will be significant, MSOs also heavily weigh market potential. The fact that your shop makes a nice profit and has seen regular annual increases might not mean a lot if you're working in an area that isn't growing or that's heavily saturated with successful competitors. When an MSO buys a shop, it's also purchased a long-term debt that it will be looking to pay off as soon as possible. An area with challenging business prospects can extend the potential payoff well beyond what an MSO is willing to risk.

The MSO will perform an analysis of your market, and so should you. Consult again with a business transition specialist with experience in this area. The results



PHOTO: CENTRAL COLLISION

**EVEN SUCCESSFUL FAMILY-OWNED** MSOs like Chicago-based Central Collision have passed on ownership to larger MSOs.

should be a key part in your decision to sell or do something else with your operation. Also, there's always a chance your numbers may conflict with those produced by the MSO or provide a clearer outlook of your market. That can be signif-

icant in swaying any decisions they make.

### Step 4: Time the sales announcement

One of the most sensitive areas you'll need to address is deciding when to in-



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form your employees of your intentions to sell. Some owners are comfortable telling workers early on in the process that they want to pass the business on to someone else. This can be a big mistake if employees decide to resign, especially in significant numbers, and a purchasing deal falls through.

Some shops sign confidentially contracts with buyers to prevent word leaking out until they're ready to make the announcement on their own schedule. This can be tricky since an interested MSO is going to want to tour a shop and, in some cases, interview employees.

Kyle Breedlow, a business facilitator who has helped transition ownership of auto service businesses, says the best course here is to inform employees when a purchase is close to being completed. Doing so helps protect any deal and provides vital information to employees on their future while giving them time to decide if they wish to remain with the shop.

"It's a matter of respect. You want to demonstrate that the existing and incoming ownership are concerned about and have a plan for them," explains Breedlow. "Set aside time for a group meeting to answer questions and lay out as much as possible what will be happening with the business."

Don't panic if some employees decide not to stay. MSOs expect to have to replace a few employees who prefer to move on. Breedlow adds, "Your goal is to build a bridge for those who stay. Stress that this isn't an ending but a beginning."

### Step 5: Prepare for a journey

Your decisions following the acquisition also need to be carefully considered. There's a possibility you'll need to remain in contact with the new MSO ownership to answer questions that might pop up regarding any vendor contracts or other issues. From there, where do you want to go? Is it time to open a new business elsewhere? Or create a fresh repair concept?

"Transition planning doesn't end the moment you sign over your business," says Breedlow. "People who retire need a plan on how they'll spend those years. Shop owners also should have a new career path ready."

"Counting your money is only going to make you feel content for so long. A new goal will help," he adds.

One point to keep in mind before, during and after an acquisition is that selling a shop isn't a sign of surrender or failure. Indeed, it's often just the opposite.

Not long after ABRN named three highly-profitable businesses — Auto Body World in Mesa, Ariz.; Central Collision of Chicago; and Car West Autobody in San Francisco — as Top Shops, their owners sold them to Service King. Other Top Shop operators have confided that they would consider selling to a consolidator if the opportunity was right. If the offer was sufficiently lucrative and the deal provided a secure future and additional opportunities for their employees, these owners gladly would move on to the next stage in their professional lives.

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**NEDAL KHATIB**, co-owner of 2015 Top Shop Chantilly Autobody, like other MSO owners regularly seeks existing locations he can add to his growing regional MSO.


### Final lessons

The trends shaping the repair market don't mean MSOs are on their way to taking over the collision market completely.

The majority of the industry still is comprised of standalone shops, with many of them being quite successful and not looking to sell. Other factors too are at play. For

example, MSOs aren't going to find every market lucrative enough to move into.

There are also predictions that as vehicle technology becomes more advanced the existing shop model — one where all collision repairs are performed under one roof — will be replaced by multiple specialty shops dedicated to certain types or areas of repairs.

Regardless of where the collision market is headed, look for successful members to maintain a strategy that has served them well for the past several decades. Always be ready to change, adopt new thinking and reset your plans to survive in a repair industry that continues to evolve and grow. 



**TIM SRAMCIK** has written for *ABRN* and sister publications *Motor Age* and *Aftermarket Business World* for more than a decade.  
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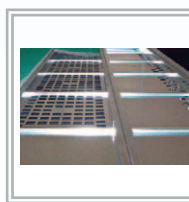
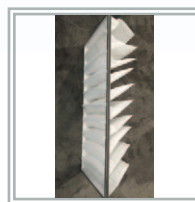
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# THE HUNT FOR EMPLOYEE TALENT

Consider four elements to ensure you are creating and sustaining an engaged workforce

**DAREN FRISTOE** // Contributing Editor

**L**et's get the obvious out of the way first — the workplace has changed dramatically over the past 20 years. Period. With the expanded usage and sophistication of technology, rapidly changing workforce generational demographics and intensifying marketplace pressures, business owners and operators are faced with challenges unlike those they have seen before.

Each of these challenges have varying levels of impact on the organization, dependent upon so many other variables. That said, one constant is and will continue to be the demand to find, retain and develop talented employees.

In his assessment of measuring a successful organization, Jack Welch, former CEO of GE, said it best regarding the role of employees in the overall equation:

“There are only three measurements that tell you nearly everything you need to know about your organization's overall performance: employee engagement, customer satisfaction and cash flow. It goes without saying that no company, small or large, can win over the long run without energized employees who believe in the mission and understand how to achieve it.”





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So if we focus on achieving an engaged and energized workforce, how do we get there and how do we know if we've arrived? There are really four elements to consider when creating and sustaining the engaged workforce you want.

### Organizational culture

The value of a defined organizational culture cannot be overstated, not only for the day-to-day operational processes, but more importantly for the “feel” of the company and the interconnectedness of the team. Your culture, intentionally or not, dictates so many things including the level of support from each employee to one another; the forms and effectiveness of communication used; overall customer and employee satisfaction; and what type of employee you attract, retain and develop.

To be effective and sustainable, the organizational culture cannot be created and implemented in a vacuum, devoid of the employee base. Nothing ensures mixed results (or failure) quite like top-down directives without employee input. In a collaborative workplace, all voices are recognized and noted, maximizing not only expanded communication, but also the encouragement of new ideas. Your business has a culture, but it may not be clearly defined in such a way as to be repeated to customers easily. To do so, focus on what your business stands for (such as quality, professionalism, employee development,

integrity, customer service) and what you value in your employees (such as character, supportive of others, intelligence, desire to learn, selflessness). Take input, gather data, define and communicate; repeat.

### Staffing needs assessment

Another element for creating an engaged workforce is in the basics — clearly defining and openly communicating throughout the organization the staffing needs for the business, both immediate and long term. The emphasis must be on more than simply filling an open position in a reactive manner. This is a proactive, collaborative effort with the employee base and management, understanding and defining the needs of the business going forward, including creating and communicating realistic job descriptions. Items to consider include the likely changes in staffing based on turnover, training and development opportunities, technology enhancements, process modifications and customer or business partner demands. By promoting input from the existing employees, communication is open and organizational buy-in is more likely to occur from top to bottom.

### Finding and identifying talent

Engagement also occurs when we set our sights on finding and identifying our future employees. With the changing dynamic in today's workforce, this is not simply recruiting anymore; in fact, we are marketing our business, our brand and our reputation in the community as the best place to work. Staffing is a continuous endeavor, even without job openings, as we always want a pipeline of talent for those unexpected changes in our workforce. Strategically, to be cost effective, increase efficiency and ensure successful outcomes. Business owners can do any or all of the following: create and expand their relationships with local technical/trade school placement offices and instructors; maximize consistent usage of social media tools such as Facebook and LinkedIn; place low-cost/high-impact virtual ads with industry publications, associations and placement services; communicate via email blasts to vendor partners, customers and local community affiliates; and post hard-copy ads where available in high candidate traffic locales. You never know what will work, so use as many tools as you can manage!

Now that you've found candidates, targeted selection is critical to your overall process. What this means is, to a certain extent, a resume is a resume is a resume. We need to find the differentiator between candidates A, B and C. In the workforce of tomorrow, the business owner should identify those qualities or characteristics they want in an employee including intelligence, adaptability, communication skills, being team-oriented and eager to learn. Regarding pure experience, if we are seeking someone with experience, does their background reveal progression of roles or leadership or cross-training experience? Is that important to us? Are there gaps in the resume, begging questions of consistency or

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commitment? Is there any evidence of expanded skills or certifications or education beyond simply doing the job, such as participating as a mentor in the workplace? If we are seeking new candidates to the workplace, what professional experience, if any, do they have in addition to training? Have they served as an apprentice in their past? It takes work, but it is worth it to go beyond typical recruiting and identify the right people for your organization.

### Onboarding

So many times we hear about, read about or discuss among ourselves the value of effectively onboarding a new employee. This is your first impression (owners/operators, I'm talking to you) to a new hire. You made the commitment of time and expense to identify talent, and you made the commitment to change the dynamic of your business to add a new employee to the mix.

Why can't you make the commitment to document and implement a plan for integrating new staff rather than praying they learn, stay and fit within your organization? Day one is the first of many critical days in the life cycle of an employee. This is your opportunity to not only engage the new employee, but tap into the excitement of a new hire. Beyond the necessary but mind-numbing business of employment paperwork, the early stages of the new employee's days in your business can dictate not only their attitude, but ultimately their tenure with you. By seeking input from existing employees and taking the time to define a plan for new employee onboarding, with timeframes and deliverables, both parties ultimately will benefit. Prepare the organization to receive and develop new employees, track and measure results, and create an engaged workforce beginning on day one.

In today's workplace, it's not enough to do business as usual, same as you always have, when it comes to your employees. To create a sustainable energy and passion for the job, the team and the business, focus on involving and engaging each member of the staff. From your culture to understanding your staffing needs to identifying talent to effectively onboarding new employees, each element matters and when done right, will lead to higher employee satisfaction and higher customer satisfaction and, ultimately higher profits. ■



**DAREN FRISTOE** is president of TFG — The People Side of Business, an outsourced human resource organization serving small to mid-sized companies. He is

also an instructor and content provider for Automotive Management Institute.

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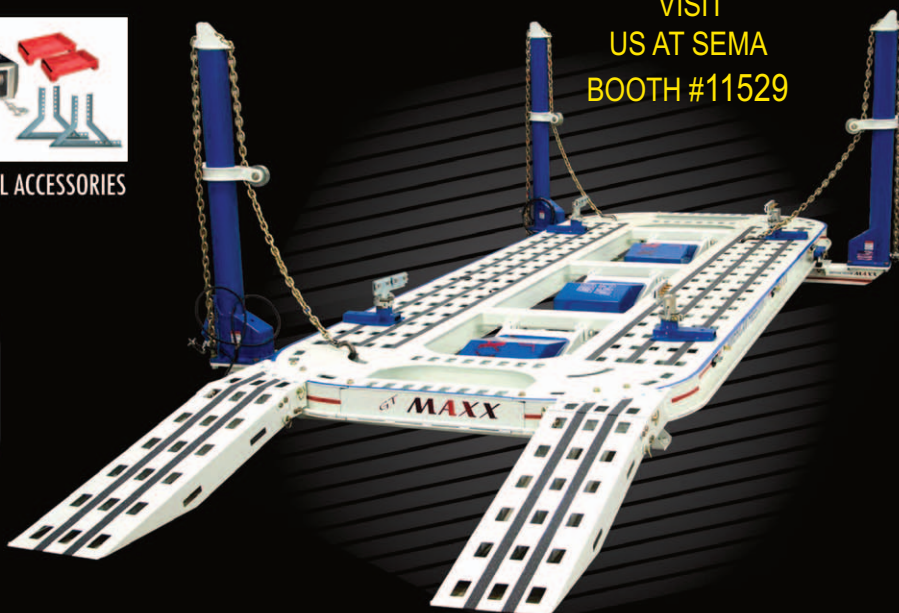
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# Knowing your numbers alone isn't enough

Employees, like athletes, can best change outcomes if they know the score

**S**hop owners who have been in the business much longer than I have said they remember that one of the mantras in the late 1980s, just as the first computerized shop management systems were rolling out was, “You have to know your numbers.” With direct repair programs (DRPs) being introduced and insurers beginning to much more actively “manage” their own numbers, shops were realizing they had to become more sophisticated in tracking and improving their own business performance.

For me, however, it's not enough for us as shop owners to know our numbers. For a long time, I've been a big proponent in also sharing our numbers. There's only so much I as the owner can do to impact our numbers. If those numbers are ever going to improve, my entire team needs to know them as well.

Think about it from a sports perspective. Players in almost any sport can adjust their performance based on what they see happening with the score. I've always heard that one of the reasons boxing struggled as a sport for several decades is that it's one of the very few sports where no one knows the score until the bout is over. I don't know if that's true, but it makes sense. It's always knowing the score that makes a sport more compelling for fans, and that can absolutely influence the players' performance as well.

That's the same in our industry, too. If your company participates in any DRPs, you've probably experienced the frustration of being handed a scorecard from an insurer long after you can do anything to influence those numbers. A score has to be much more “live” to really be helpful. We'd sometimes get our April numbers from a DRP partner in June — long after we could adjust to improve our numbers, even for May.

If we're not giving our employees as close to a live score as we can, they can't know how they're doing and thus adjust to improve. It's an employee satisfaction issue as well; anyone



**IF WE AREN'T GIVING OUR EMPLOYEES A RELATIVELY LIVE SCORE, THEN THEY CAN'T KNOW HOW THEY ARE DOING AND THUS ADJUST TO IMPROVE.**

who doesn't know how they are doing feels lost. So the more you can let your team know how they are doing — in essence, what the score is — the better able they're going to be able to improve to help themselves and your team reach whatever goals that have been set.

Having everyone know the score is also important because whenever you start to measure a number, it almost always improves, simply because all of a sudden you're paying attention to it.

So what does “knowing the score” look like in our company? It's pretty simple: Every morning, we post and email to every employee our current scorecard, which include the previous day's numbers. It's not quite 100 percent live. I'd like to get my shops to the point that when a tech flags a labor hour, it's instantly reflected on a scoreboard up on the wall. We're not there yet, but we've found daily reporting to be amazingly effective.

I'll talk more in a future column about exactly what we're reporting. But maybe you're thinking, “I'm not sure this is going to be something

anyone on my staff cares about.” Years ago as I was just starting to share the numbers, that's exactly what I thought might be the case. And I'll be honest, there are some on my staff who don't care. They're not numbers people, and they're here just to work, and that's fine.

But I can also tell you that there is a surprising number who do care. If I get busy or am on a call or traveling and I haven't posted our scorecard numbers by 10 a.m. on any given work day, my phone lights up with texts and emails from employees — including some of those who I never thought would care — asking me, “Where are we at? How did we do yesterday?”

That was shocking to me. And it has convinced me of the power of sharing your numbers. ■

**RYAN CROPPER** owns Able Body Shops, with two locations in Anchorage, Alaska, as well as Total Truck Accessory Center. [rcropper@ablebodyshop.com](mailto:rcropper@ablebodyshop.com)



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## Embrace change as positive — don't fear the unknown

CHANGE IS INEVITABLE, BUT GROWTH IS OPTIONAL; IT IS ALL IN YOUR ATTITUDE

**MIKE JONES** // Contributing Editor

**T**he No. 1 reason people resist change is because they are more concerned about what they have to give up, rather than committed to what they will gain.

Change is inevitable; however, growth is optional. I have observed so many people working very hard to maintain the way things have always been done. I have watched people destroy professional and personal relationships because they refused to change. I have often heard people say, "This is who I am." That is not the truth; this is who you choose to be. You did not come into the world with a hardwire that says, "this is all I am capable of achieving."

If who you have chosen to be up until now is not going to allow you to be successful in who you are choosing to become, then you will have to change. If what is possible for you is being boxed in and limited by your belief system (BS), then you will need to change your BS to get where you want to go. It does not matter what you believe; in order to best your best and get to your next level, some measure of change will be needed. The same

mind that got you to where you are will not propel you to higher heights.

If you still use antiquated processes to do business; if you still assess the value of people based on their gender, race or formal education; if you still choose to stay inside your comfort zone; you will likely never reach your full potential. Everything has a life cycle, and when it reaches the end of its life cycle it begins to die. You may be holding on to some dead stuff, such as behaviors, processes and relationships at work and home — BS — that will not benefit you in getting to your next level of professional or personal growth.

Many of you think 'change' is a bad word. I submit that it is inevitable and there is nothing you can do to prevent it. So why not embrace change? Here are five ways I recommend that you embrace change.

### 1. Eliminate your expectations of others.

I encourage you to have high expectations of yourself; however, if you have high expectations of your staff, family or marriage, I'm sure you have experienced a lot of disappointment in your life. You are not all playing by the same rules, even

though in many cases you think you are. Unless you have an agreement to deliver something specific, then you are managing your expectations and will experience loss, disappointment and pain.

### 2. Welcome change.

I was just having a conversation with my wife, Susan, a few days ago about how drastically an event can completely change the course of our lives. These are often things we have no control over — people flying airplanes into buildings and killing hundreds of people; a down economy that eliminates thousands of jobs; a friend or family member suddenly lost in an accident; a divorce. When we accept that change is inevitable, we will welcome and embrace change and release our attachment that something should have turned out in a particular way.

### 3. Accept change.

Everything that you resist persists. The sooner you stop attempting to hold on to those business practices or somebody in a relationship that has long expired, the sooner you can get on with living your life.

>> CONTINUES ON PAGE 42

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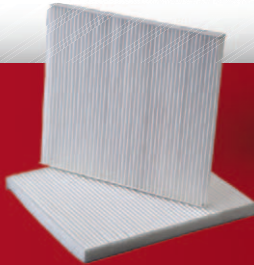


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>> CONTINUES FROM PAGE 40

### 4. Learn from the experience.

If you accept and embrace change, you will start looking for and finding the lessons in it. The more you resist it, you will continue to have the disappointing, hurtful, painful experiences until you learn from them. Change becomes your greatest teacher, but only if and when you give yourself permission to learn from it.

### 5. Recognize you are growing stronger.

When you accept, embrace and learn from change, you inevitably grow stronger. The ability to continuously accept change allows you to become as solid as a rock in the midst of violent storms all around you — even if you feel afraid.

So remember, change is inevitable; however, growth is optional. When you choose to grow, you will likely find that what you gain is worth much more than what you gave up. 

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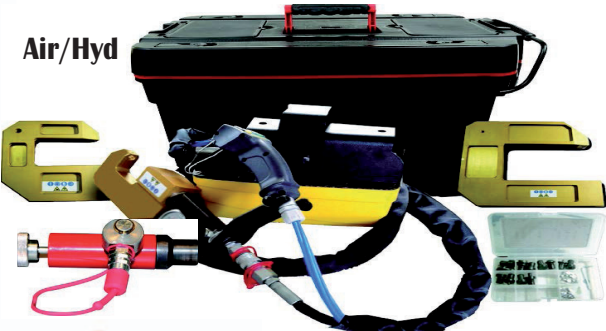
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**A SET OF BRAND NEW TIRES**

can be the perfect way to top off a collision repair, providing repairers with some much needed revenue and customers a necessary purchase that can keep their vehicles safer.

## THE TIRE DEALER MARKET OFFERS SOME VALUABLE LESSONS TO REPAIRERS

**TIM SRAMCIK** // Contributing Editor

**R**ecall for a moment the last time you bought a suit. Odds are you gave up a big chunk of time to hang around an upscale store and wait patiently while employees measured your arms, waist, legs and inseam. You tried on jackets and pants, selected a color and a week later picked up a beautifully tailored new piece of clothing. Probably the final thing you considered was buying new shoes. Un-

less you had a fairly new pair, there's a good chance you made one more purchase. What's another \$80 investment after you've already spent \$800, right?

Compare that experience to collision repairs. After returning a vehicle to pre-accident condition, applying a fresh coat of paint and adding a top-notch detailing job, a new set of tires to replace some aging rubber can make pretty good sense. There are plenty of other reasons to ramp up or add tire sales and services. Tires are often damaged in collisions (poor tread may in fact have been the reason for the

accident). There's a convenience factor — the vehicle already is being repaired so it's the best possible time to add one more service. It's an opportunity for the customer to save money; if an alignment is part of the collision repair, it need not be added to a tire bill.

Despite these reasons, collision repairers have shown little interest in adding tire sales. *ABRN* queried six owners, and all gave the same explanation for not entering this business as they would for avoiding other niche services. There just isn't enough money to be made. "The markup

PHOTOS: GOODYEAR

just isn't worth it," says Shawn Moody, founder of Moody's Collision Centers, a growing MSO in Gorham, Maine.

Still, a discussion about tires can be valuable, especially since there are shops operating in markets where this business could be quite profitable. For the rest of the industry, reviewing an auto service they may have been overlooking is a terrific opportunity to reassess and rethink their own businesses.

### Considerations

A first look at the tire dealer business shows a healthy, growing market with a number of possibilities. Numbers from IBISWorld record the U.S. retail tire market generating \$40 billion annually with just over 26,300 storefronts and a predicted 1 percent annual growth over the next few years. Currently driving sales is a rise in consumer disposable income and the

increase in yearly vehicle miles, which has significantly bumped up demand for maintenance and tire replacement. Other driving forces include the growing demand — fueled by federal mandates on improved fuel efficiency — for niche products such as low-rolling resistance tires, which require more frequent replacement and carry larger price tags.

Making the dealer market even more attractive is the low level of market share concentration. The top three industry companies account for just over 24 percent of revenue with the next two largest each contributing less than 2 percent. But much like the collision industry, concentration is increasing as the market's major players continue growing by opening new stores and through acquisitions. During the past five years, the three largest companies increased their market share and continue seeking expansion.



**A KEY TO SELLING TIRES** is educating customers on the safety and longevity benefits of specific models.

Still, fully 65 percent of the tire dealer market remains comprised by relatively small "mom and pop" businesses. Unlike the collision repairers, these businesses have more freedom to alter their revenue models to cope with a changing market. They also don't have the overhead in training, equipment and other expenses that could push them out of the market or convince them to sell to a consolidator. That can make them formidable competitors for anyone entering a territory looking to gain market share, especially those without significant financial reserves or a business model offering a significant competitive advantage.

### Cautionary tale

Dennis Slucoch, former manager of Keller's Auto Coach in Kansas City, Mo., learned this lesson the hard way when his shop decided to go into the tire business to raise some much needed revenue in 2009. Slucoch felt prepared for the new enterprise since he began his automotive service career at a tire shop. His shop had a number of business factors working in its favor. Keller's possessed the necessary extra space to house a good supply of popular tire sizes (something many shops don't). It had a dedicated bay for tire service,

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invested in the necessary equipment and hired an experienced technician to handle the work.

Just as important, Keller's sat in a suburban location along a busy major route and near a number of homes, businesses and offices. Slucoch's closest big competitors were over five miles away, and the

smaller ones were mostly hidden down side streets and under old signage. Slucoch assumed start-up might be slow, but the readily available market would embrace his business.

The shop ran into some unexpected problems right away because it lacked any brand or name advantage. Potential

customers couldn't see past the body shop name.

"When people need tires they want to go to a National Tire and Battery, Pep Boys and Sears — places they assume have the best prices. Or they go to an independent who's been around for a while," says Slucoch. "We had to drop a lot of money into advertising just to get our name out there."

The shop also saw very little revenue at first since it had to offer increasingly steep promotional discounts to bring customers in. When business did pick up, the single tire technician was quickly overwhelmed. The shop tried to move over other employees to help, but that practice began affecting collision repair schedules, so it was suspended.

Eventually, employees stopped buying in. They couldn't accept the responsibilities added by a new business they saw as a distraction that sapped more important resources away from body repairs. Even upselling to collision customers eventually seemed not worth the effort.

"We just couldn't make it work. Either we had too much business, which we struggled to handle or so little it seemed like a big waste," says Slucoch.

"We eventually found that if we wanted to even have a chance to succeed we had to go all in and try to build a dedicated tire shop with a new team of employees. That wasn't happening."

After 18 months, Keller's shut down the tire business to concentrate solely on collision. Slucoch stands by the decision but still believes collision and tires can work hand in hand under the right circumstances. Namely, competition needs to be manageable, and the shop has to have a firm business plan that allows it to give sufficient attention to both businesses and, when possible, use each to promote the other.

### A day in the life

The business plan Slucoch speaks of will need to encompass many areas, but the key, he says, is constant focus on selling.



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The technical side of repairing/replacing tires is minor in the face of the larger challenge of sales. All shops service tires the same way. Earning customer business is the great variable.

There are steps shops can take if they move into the tire market to grab and grow business:

**Step 1:** Market heavily. Invest in advertising and signage that brings attention to the business. Change the "face" of your business. Put up displays of stock tires in front of your business and in customer areas. Visit a tire dealer and note their displays. Create brochures and sales pieces you can send home with collision customers to keep your shop in mind when they need tires.

**Step 2:** Educate customers. Consider again how collision work gives new life to a vehicle. Customers can extend that life further with safer tires that also benefit fuel efficiency. Better tires also last longer



**EXAMINING TIRES** for wear and damage is relatively easy and a necessary part of any estimate. Results can be shared with customers for upselling tire sales.

and over time can offer significant savings.

**Step 3:** Maintain a wide inventory. This probably will be one of the toughest hurdles for repairers to leap since avail-

able shop space is often at a premium and might be better used to expand collision operations. If customers have to wait for you to order a specific tires size,

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**PUT TIRES ON DISPLAY** in front of your building and in customer areas to help remind customers that you also perform tire services.

there's a good chance they'll walk out your doors and directly to a competitor. Do your homework with your vendor and keep a large supply of popular tires for your area, along with some hard-to-find sizes to give customers options.

**Step 4:** Offer the best value. You'll want to be prepared to price match and/or offer deals that include savings on balancing, alignments and installation. Keep in mind that many customers will call around for quick quotes or receive quotes from dealer websites. They're going to have a good idea of what their final expense will be. In these cases, being cost competitive while also offering terrific customer service and other extras — warranties and road hazard protection — can make the difference.

**Step 5:** Keep your employees motivated. Slucoch found that workers balk at new businesses if they don't see any benefits right away. Consider getting your staff on board with incentives and bonus programs. Get everyone involved, not just estimators. Your techs, painters, helpers, detailers and admin staff can all receive bonuses for referring or capturing tire sales.

Since carving out a place in the tire market is difficult and the rewards are not terribly enticing, it's easy to dismiss this



**PASS ALONG** informative brochures and marketing materials to collision customers to keep your shop's name in mind when they need to invest in new treads.

work. Keep in mind the same thing could have been said about collision repair over the past decade when shops were closing their doors and many owners couldn't interest their children in some day taking over their businesses. This industry came roaring back with new business structures and operational models.

The same kind of shop that made that happen could take a new view of tires and create a portable model that blends the two markets. It just takes one repairer with the right idea. ■



**TIM SRAMCIK** has written for *ABRN* and sister publications *Motor Age* and *Aftermarket Business World* for more than a decade.  
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# THE BENEFITS OF SILICON BRONZE

KNOW THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE WELDING AND MIG BRAZING PROCESSES

JEFF COPPES // Contributing Editor

**T**he practice of MIG brazing has been in use for a long time. Developed in the late 1960s, it immediately found applications in the automotive industry, primarily cosmetic at first. With this long history, why is there so much discussion about it now?

Like aluminum, the renewed interest is due to new applications and increased usage. Manufacturers like Honda, Chrysler, JLR, Toyota and Mercedes-Benz all have repair procedures calling for MIG brazing. As the use of silicon bronze increases, it is important for technicians to be aware of the differences between welding and MIG brazing regarding materials, process, equipment and technique.

## Material

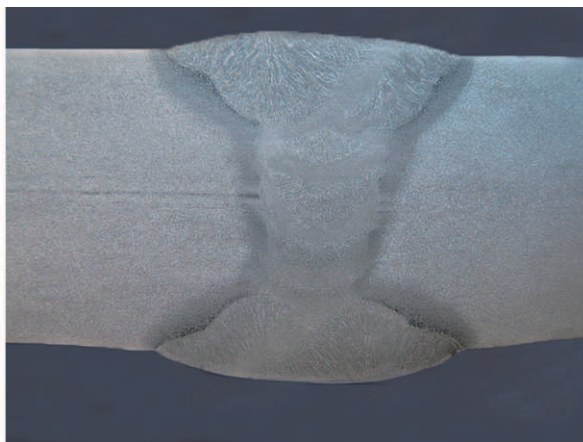
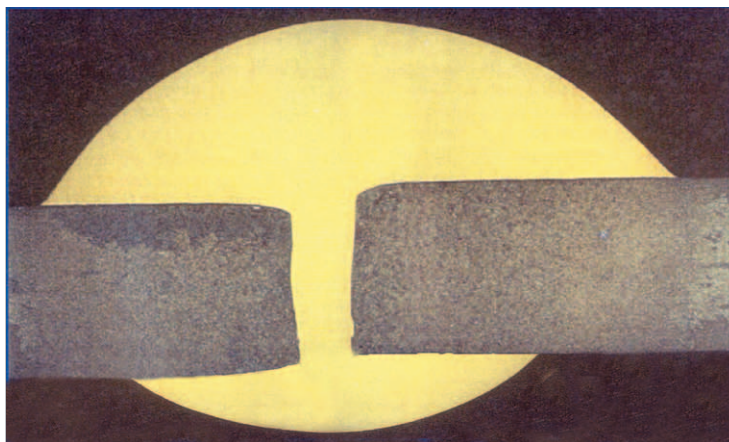
So first let's look at the material. Copper is combined with other elements, such as tin, silicon or aluminum, to create bronze. The added components give the alloy strength, ductility, corrosion resistance, etc. In the automotive industry we primarily use the silicon-based alloy, referred to as silicon bronze. You may also

see it referred to as CuSi3 or the AWS designation of ER CuSi-A.

In North America, we tend to refer to all wire-fed welding as MIG welding, when in actuality most of it is MAG welding. The difference is in the type of shielding gas used — Metal Active Gas (MAG) or Metal Inert Gas (MIG). The CO<sub>2</sub> or CO<sub>2</sub>/argon mix gas used with steel is an active gas. The CO<sub>2</sub> reacts to the arc releasing oxygen. Inert gases do not break down during the weld process. As the name suggests, MIG brazing uses an inert gas — 100 percent argon. Having the correct type of gas and proper flow rate are critical to protecting the weld and the stability of the arc. The typical flow rate is 25 CFH. It is important to verify that the gas regulator (flow gauge) has a separate scale for argon (Ar).

## Process

The main distinction between welding and brazing is that MIG brazing is adhesion, not fusion. By definition, welding is the process of bringing the base pieces to a molten state where they are combined or fused, often with a filler material. In MIG brazing, the base material remains intact; it does not melt. Instead, the silicon bronze melts, flowing around and between the base pieces to create the joint. This is possible because silicon



CROSS SECTION OF A MIG BRAZE (left) and MAG Weld (right) showing adhesion versus fusion.

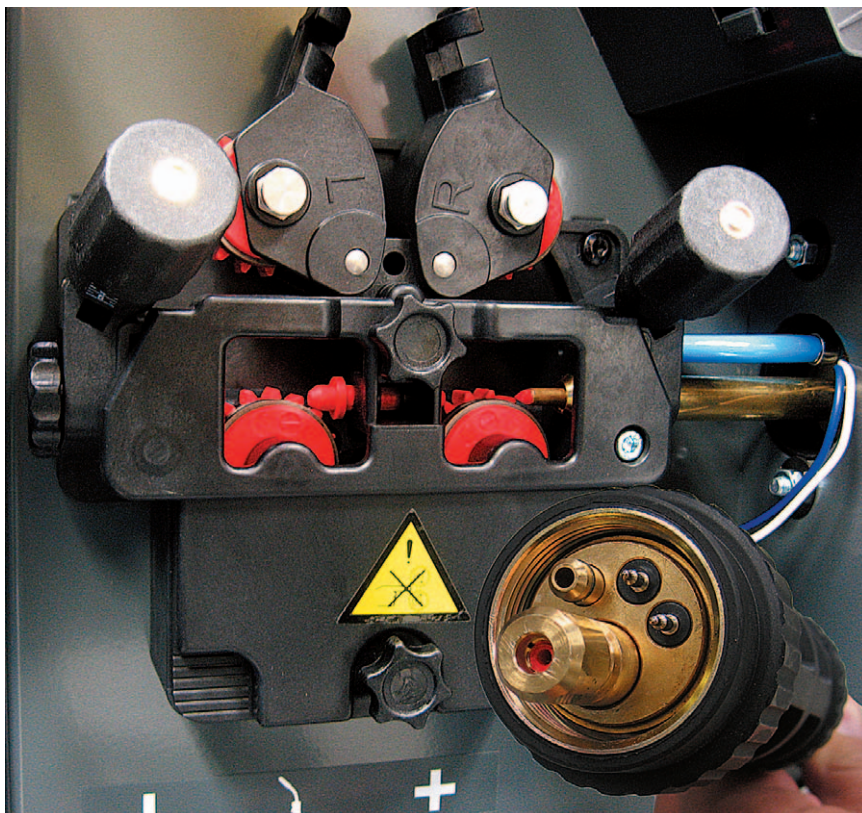
PHOTOS: CAR-O-LINER

bronze melts at approximately 1940° F. By comparison, MIG/MAG welding generates temperatures in excess of 3000° F. This dramatic difference in temperature is one of the biggest benefits of MIG brazing and what makes it ideal for new vehicle construction. Even though bronze is softer than steel, with the proper technique, the repair has a tensile strength very close to that of a steel MAG weld.

## Equipment

Silicon bronze being softer than steel filler wire is a great benefit when dressing the weld. However, it does mean the wire-feed system needs to be set up to handle it. Using a wire-feed system set up for steel causes friction and drag on the wire, which affects the consistency of the arc. Instead, wire liners made of Teflon, plastic or carbon cut down on friction and are therefore ideal for silicon bronze. U-shaped feed wheels offer another benefit. The U-shaped grooves make more contact with the bronze wire and are less likely than standard V-shaped or flat wheels to damage it. As long as the wire diameters are the same, silicon bronze will run with the same wire-feed setup as aluminum. There is no risk of cross contamination, like there is between aluminum and steel.

The biggest difference in equipment lies in the spray pulse capabilities. Normal MAG steel welding uses short-circuit metal transfer, or dip transfer, meaning the wire extends out until it comes in contact with the work piece. The contact, or short circuit, causes the current to peak and the end of the wire melts off in the weld pool. By contrast, spray pulse uses a lower background current to establish and maintain



**EXAMPLE OF** a wire-feed system for silicon bronze.

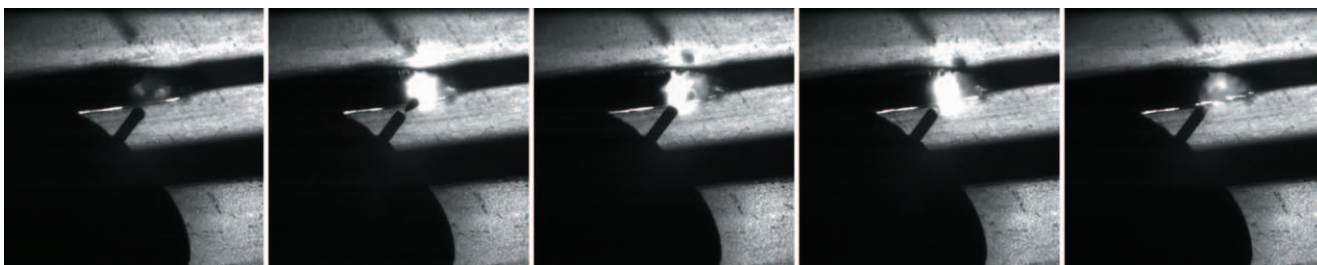
the arc. The amperage is then briefly increased — pulsed — providing enough heat to melt the tip of the wire. The droplet that is formed is then propelled across the arc to the weld. The filler wire and the work piece never touch.

MIG brazing can be done with either short circuit or spray pulse transfer. With spray pulse, the average of the background and pulse currents is less than the current produced when the wire shorts to the work piece. Less current means less heat, less distortion of thin materials and less galvanized coating to burn off. Also, when used to join advanced high-strength steels (AHSS), it prevents damage to the integrity of the

metal. To optimize the spray pulse, and simplify setting the welder, most pulse welders are synergic inverter welders. “Synergic” means that the relationship between all of the parameters are already built into the welder. When the technician sets the material thickness, the machine establishes the starting voltage, amperage and wire speed. The pulse also serves to control the bead characteristics by transferring one droplet per pulse.

## Technique

The technique used for MIG brazing is very similar to MIG welding aluminum. You want to push the weld rather than pull it. That way any coatings that are



**MOTION CAPTURE SHOWING** droplet being propelled across the arc during Spray Pulse Transfer.





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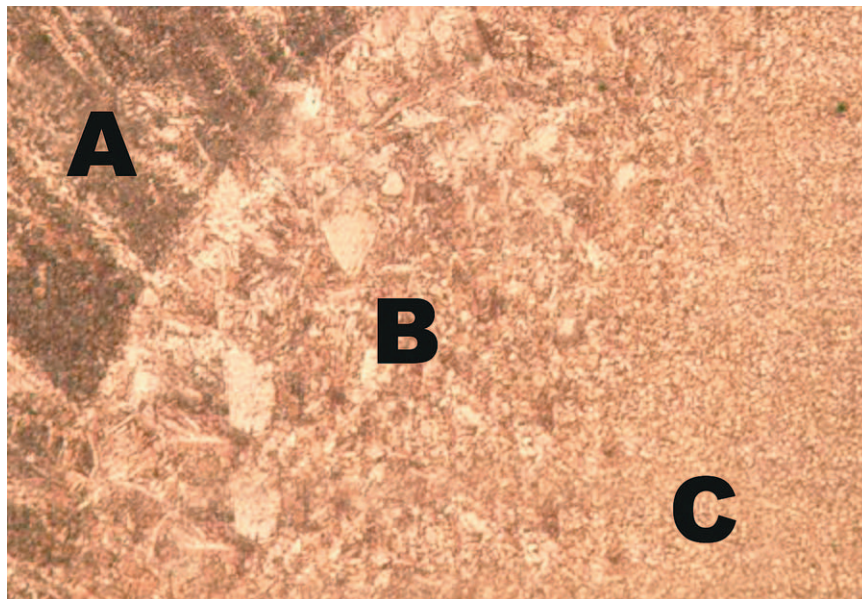


burnt off will be expelled in front of the weld and will not get trapped in the weld pool. This also preheats the metal, encouraging flow. The torch angle is more perpendicular to the work piece than with steel, about 75° - 80°.

As with any repair, preparation is essential. With silicon bronze you have the added concern with the root gap between the pieces. The process uses capillary action to flow between the work pieces. Looking at an open butt joint, it is easy to understand how, with the proper root gap, it allows the bronze to flow through to the backside of the joint and form a bead there. But the same is true in a lap and all of the other joints. Done correctly, the bronze flows between the sheets regardless of weld position. Be aware that excessive clamping can limit the flow. Making sure the work pieces are clean also helps ensure proper flow or "wetting."

## Application

All of that brings us back to the question of what is driving the renewed interest in MIG brazing. OEMs have been using silicon bronze in production for years. Consider the 2008 Cadillac CTS with its laser-brazed roof, or the sail panel on the Dodge Intrepid. While used in production, there were virtually no repair procedures calling for brazing. As the push for fuel economy continues, one of the options is to build vehicles using harder, lighter steels. Creating these ultra-high strength steels involves controlled heating and cooling of the metal, trapping extra carbon in the molecular structure, which results in higher tensile strengths. The challenge is that if these materials are heated, during cooling the carbon can leech out, changing the properties of the steel back to HSS or even mild steel. With squeeze-type resistance spot welding (STRSW), the electrodes hold the nugget under pressure following the weld, which helps draw some of the heat out of the metal. With MIG/MAG welding, there is not that option to quickly cool the steel. Instead, by using silicon bronze at its lower melting point,



**CHANGES TO THE STEEL MICROSTRUCTURE** in a MAG Weld converting the A - Martensite (UHSS), into a combination B - Martensite & Ferrite, and finally to a C - Ferrite (mild steel).

the joint can be made without damaging the integrity of the steel.

The 2016 Honda Pilot is a perfect example of a successful application of MIG brazing. The Pilot's door outer stiffener ring is an assembly made of 1500 MPa steel, which must be replaced as a unit. An approved STRSW welder, manually set to Honda's parameters, can be used to attach panels to the ring. In areas the welder cannot access, the spot welds are replaced with silicon bronze plugs. The repair procedure specifies either a single- or double-bronze plug braze, depending on the strength of the materials. The double-hole braze is made by placing two 8mm holes on 10mm centers. The result leaves a 2mm gap between the holes. The MIG braze must be done in pulse mode to control the heat and using a specific method. Beginning 5mm away from the hole, follow a tight zig-zag pattern across both holes and beyond. This technique encourages capillary action around and between the two holes. Tying the two holes together along with the large surface area provides the silicon bronze joint its strength. Single-hole plugs use the zig-zag method as well.

The Jaguar XF is another example of this application. JLR is requiring MIG

brazing when attaching outer panels to the high-strength (HSS) or ultra-high-strength steel (UHSS) inner structure. They use a combination of 8mm x 20mm slots and open butt joints. Pulse mode is also required.

Another benefit of silicon bronze having a lower melting temperature is in corrosion resistance. The zinc in galvanized coatings melts at 788° F and evaporates at about 1670°. The heat at and extending out from a traditional steel weld (MAG) destroys much of the protection. With silicon bronze, particularly in pulse mode, the zinc remains intact except for a small amount right at the joint. Over time the zinc will flow back, making the entire repair corrosion resistant again.

Just as the use of UHSS continues to increase, so will the need for MIG brazing. As always, refer to the OEM repair procedures and use silicon bronze only where and when instructed. Get the right equipment and training now so you are ready. ■



### JEFF COPPES,

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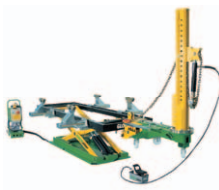


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# Repair shop, police thyself

There's no reason to fear the post-repair inspection if you're policing your procedures

**R**emember back a decade or two when police dramas were all the rage on television? Shows like *Hill Street Blues*, *NYPD Blue* and *The Shield* often showcased rogue cops who sometimes crossed the line to get what they wanted, prompting a visit by the investigator from the dreaded Internal Affairs Department. Cops never liked the "IAD" guy because his job was to rat out the bad operators on the force.

In the collision repair industry, post-repair inspection shops have become the Internal Affairs Department to a degree. Their job is to investigate a repaired vehicle and make a determination of how well the initial shop did based on the quality of the repair.

Post repair inspection shops have the necessary tools to spot any shortcuts that may have been taken in the original job and identify substandard material and equipment that could potentially render the vehicle unsafe to drive.

From that perspective, one might think that the duty of a post-repair inspection service is a noble one. But many collision repair shops fear the post-repair inspection process because it's designed to catch their mistakes, judge the quality of their work or, in some cases, rat out rogue operations.

That often puts post repair in an unfavorable light. But I maintain that the negative perceptions and the fear of post repair can be mitigated if shops would just start policing themselves. How? Here are a few suggestions:

**Challenge the insurer.** Insurers have a ton of control over the repair process, which mainly focuses on the bottom line and the drive to save dollars. The constant push for high volume and unrealistic cycle time numbers leads to hurry-up processes and gaps in quality. You can stand up to the insurer if you're armed with the proper documentation that validates your repair plan, including the manufacturers' guidelines, ALLDATA research and other information to support your argument for performing the repair correctly.

**Know how to correctly repair the vehicle.** If your technicians are adhering to the manufacturers' guidelines and regularly reviewing technical bulletins, then you'll greatly decrease mistakes or defects in the repair. Further, if you're instituting verification steps alongside the entire repair process, you'll en-



**IN THE COLLISION REPAIR INDUSTRY, POST-REPAIR INSPECTION SHOPS HAVE BECOME THE INTERNAL AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT TO A DEGREE.**

sure a high degree of quality in each repair job.

**Do quality control right.** Audit the repair estimate line by line to ensure that you've followed the repair plan and address every item listed. Review every line on your bill to verify that the work has been performed. Inspect the job using technical documentation. Make your technicians responsible for validating each step in the repair process.

**Use OEM parts wherever appropriate.** A dollar saved on a non-OEM part could cost you thousands of dollars in the long run. Most post-repairs cite inferior or substandard parts in the inspection process. Why take that risk when all you have to do is use the proper parts to begin with?

**Keep your techs properly trained.** We all know that cars are becoming increasingly technical, which requires more in-depth tech training and proper certification to repair. Sure, training is expensive and eats up a lot of time, but the investment in your staff will result in higher quality work and reduce the liability later on.

**Scan for fault codes.** It's virtually impossible to fully understand all of the computerized and electronic systems in today's complex vehicle. Scanning for fault codes will identify what systems were affected as a result of the accident or during the disassembly and reassembly process.

**Invest in a borescope.** It may sound like I'm nit-picking here, but a borescope is absolutely critical if you're going to inspect and validate your work before it leaves the shop. Post-repair inspections often uncover mistakes or substandard work with the help of a borescope. You can head that discovery off at the pass by making this validation step a standard part of the audit process.

There's no reason to fear the post-repair inspection if you've incorporated your own inspection into every facet of your repair process. By performing your own post repair inspection you'll be motivated to keep your technicians continually educated, you'll ensure that your customer is safe and satisfied, you'll enhance your shop's reputation in the community and you'll experience a stronger operation and a healthier bottom line. ■

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**MICHAEL GIARRIZZO, JR.** is founder and president of DCR Systems ([www.DCRsystems.net](http://www.DCRsystems.net)) and a pioneer in the utilization of lean production principles on the shop floor.  
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