

Training and Education, the Investment In Your Future

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The new millennium is here and all I see are the same old problems looking for solutions. Our industry is consolidating rapidly on the supply side and the number of transmission shops continues to shrink. Once upon a time, there were twice the number of transmission shops as there are now. Our industry is suffering competition on many fronts. The trend in leasing has removed a large number of vehicles from our shops as they are almost always under warranty for the life of the lease. All the major car-makers have aggressively pursued the aftermarket with remanufactured transmission programs of their own. A number of central rebuilding operations provide quality units to the aftermarket at reasonable prices. The transmission industry must compete on many levels to find employees to man the shops. Our national culture has changed and most parents feel that their children will not be successful without a college education and that working with your hands is somehow beneath their offspring. There are bidding wars between shops for the qualified rebuilders and installers already in the field, and shops routinely raid each other for employees.

If all of the above isn't enough, the units we work on are becoming more sophisticated and complex,

requiring a massive amount of learning and training on the shop level, and a constant investment in diagnostic tools and equipment. On the bright side the availability of information has never been better. There are numerous tech services to subscribe to and a number of good Web sites.

Various groups hold quality



technical seminars throughout the country and quite a number of technical manuals are available both from the aftermarket and OEM sources. A number of suppliers have invested in their own technical departments to support their customers and the products they sell.

Training

Training is an ongoing commitment to learn. It is a necessary part of shop expense and on the technician level it is a never-ending quest to upgrade your skills and knowledge. Self-improvement never ends. If you do not accept these statements find another

career; you will fail at this one. No one will ever know it all, and with the constant changing of technology we will always be on a perpetual learning curve. The budget of any successful shop must include money for updating technical manuals, scan-tool software and essential tools. It is expensive, it is endless, and it is the life we chose. I still talk to shops on the tech hotline that do not have scan tools, technical reference material or the correct measuring and diagnostic tools. The investment to be technically prepared is expensive, but what does it cost to be ignorant and poorly equipped? Between the inevitable comebacks and the flesh-eating attorneys that every customer seems to have you don't stand a chance. It is absolutely wrong for a shop owner to expect technicians to be able to perform as an expert without the proper tools and reference materials. It also is wrong for the technician to think that working eight hours a day is all it takes to have a quality future. The investment in learning is an investment in yourself.

Manuals and Hotlines

Every manufacturer provides its dealer network with training and service manuals. It is not always easy to obtain these materials at the dealership. In most instances a dealer you are buying parts from will let you borrow a service manual. If they will not, find a dealer who wants your parts

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business badly enough to work with you. By having the year, production date and VIN you should be able to access any TSBs that the dealer network has on computer. For training manuals you will have to access the dealer training network of the various car makers and buy the unit-specific manuals. These branches of the car manufacturers are in business to sell manuals and they are the best source to learn the theory of operation and the fine points of the units you will be working on. It isn't always easy, but it is doable, and it is your professional responsibility. A prime ingredient for disaster is to take on a job that you know little or nothing about and have no ability to find reference material.

Use the hotlines that are available and use them correctly. There are subscription services that are worth every penny of the annual fee or membership. Use suppliers who provide technical hotlines to support their product and their customers. Using a hotline correctly means that you have an obligation to yourself and to the hotline technician to follow certain procedures. Be specific about the problem you are faced with and have notes prepared on all you have done to the point you got on the phone. Automatic or stick, you need to have the type of unit, the year, model, and engine size and a specific description of the problem you can't solve. Document all measurements, pressures, vacuum, noise etc. on the road test and make notes on the road test so you don't waste your time or that of the hotline tech. One rule of thumb to stick with at all times is *never, repeat never pull the transmission unless you are 100% sure the problem is internal.* Once the unit is on the bench you have lost the ability to use the



vehicle as a dyno or to make any further tests. No one can help you diagnose the problem when it is on the bench. More time is wasted pulling units out of the vehicle when the problem will be external or repairable in the vehicle. Don't be in a hurry to do a lot of work for no good purpose.

Recruiting

The next problem we need to solve as an industry is recruiting new people. We need to encourage entry-level people to find careers in our industry. Vocational schools probably are the best source for new hires, and you should try to find students who want to work part-time in the field while they are in school. A fair entry-level wage and a solid commitment to train the new hire are the beginning. Careful review and pay upgrades as skill levels increase are the motivation to improve. Be tolerant of first-time mistakes and demanding on the quality of the work produced. Other shop owners put up with our screw-ups while we learned, and we have to teach the new generation. Remember that the whole country is looking for new employees. Look at the compensation that is being offered in our industry and in others. Do you provide a clean, safe environment to attract people? Do

you offer benefits such as health insurance, profit sharing, pension plans, etc.? Your competition does and they are out there recruiting. Don't think you are going to attract the people you want with minimum wage and no benefits. Fast-food franchises are offering \$10-12 an hour and signing bonuses for people who will stay three months. In recent years there are several employment agencies springing up that look to put shop owners together with technicians of various skill levels. People are your most important asset. Training, education and a commitment to excellence are the only way to succeed in this demanding market. **TD**

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87 Useful information.

88 Not useful information.

89 We need more information.