

AUTOMOTIVE TRAINING INTERNATIONAL

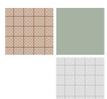
THE GREAT “So-Called” TECHNICIAN SHORTAGE!! By: Tyler Robbins

Virtually every single place I travel around North America, the topic inevitably comes up. In fact, it doesn't matter if I am delivering a seminar to Service Managers, Service Advisors, training at a dealership, or simply walking the floor of a convention – I am asked about the Technician shortage.

Dealers, Fixed Operations Directors, Service Managers and advisors always ask if I know of any technicians that are looking to make a move. As if there were some “magical land” where exceptionally well trained technicians are sitting around twiddling their thumbs just waiting for a job. Obviously, this group just sitting around, has obviously been sitting under a rock as they have not been made aware of the fact that most dealerships and service facilities in North America are on the hunt. Come on!!

But let's take a different look at the “so-called shortage”. Now, I won't deny that there are fewer “new” technicians coming into the industry voluntarily, the statistics alone prove that, so if that is the criteria alone, then, definitely there is a shortage.

However, think about years ago, think about when you started in the industry, where did you start?

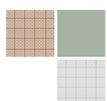




Although, I've never been a technician, I started in the industry washing cars at a rental car company. I worked hard and moved up, but I am not so disenchanted to believe that is how everyone starts and moves up, but years ago it was certainly a lot more common. Think of most owners, managers and experienced individuals in the entire retail automotive industry; most started at the bottom and worked their way up. So what's my point? For those of us who started at the bottom, someone, higher up the ranks than us recognized that we had "something". Whether that "something" was initiative, talent, a good attitude, a genuine interest in learning and growing – whatever it was – they recognized it and did something about it. They "groomed" us. I still, 21 years later vividly remember the day that my "car-wash" position evolved into a career. At that time, we simply worked hard and then one day, our boss or Manager came to us and said, "I'd like you to take on some additional responsibilities" and a development responsibility on the part of that supervisor began again with another "hopeful". I like to think that the time and effort put into developing and growing me paid off, not just for me, but for the car rental company, then the dealership, and so on.

The big difference then, was that developing and growing "hopefuls" was just part-of the role of the Managers and Dealers. When I became a young Service Manager myself, I remember distinctly, sitting with the Fixed Operations Director and the Dealer on a regular basis as we discussed the abilities and future expectation of all of the personnel, prioritized where future personnel needs would be and outlined and began execution of the plan to develop those personnel so that all future needs would be met and exceeded!

This plan always included potential technicians too. Sure, we went to the vocational schools, community colleges, high schools, etc and recruited new technicians from there, but for the most part, we looked inward. Like myself, and thousands of others before and after me, the wash bay is where many younger "car-guy-wanna-be's" find their way into the industry. What a great source to find potential future technicians, as well as Salesmen, parts people, etc. The advantage of recruiting from your own operation of course is that you have the opportunity to learn whether or not that individual has the aptitude as well as the attitude that you want in a new "technician".





One of the other advantages is, they recognize and have an appreciation for the time, money and effort you are investing in them, and a genuine loyalty factor grows within that individual too.

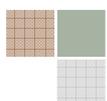
But, back to the so-called shortage: the shortage today, more than anything else, is not in the lack of available potential technicians, but in the lack of skill, initiative and foresight into today's Managers, dealers, etc.

Now, I will admit, there is a declining level of "A" Level Technicians out in the workforce today, but realistically, is that what most dealerships need?

The reality is, today, no one wants to, or doesn't have the skill or willingness to develop a technician from scratch. Today, Managers want to "skip" the development years (also lower cost years) and find "A" Level or Master Technicians ready to produce 60+ hours per week on day one.

Think about it: Vehicles are being built better and better, so the amount of "repairs" has been reduced considerably over the last number of years. Does that decrease or increase the amount of "Repairing-skilled" technicians? Exactly, it decreases it.

Maintenance work, although, intervals are getting farther apart, and the manufacturer required maintenance is becoming less and less, still represents a larger percentage of a shop's work today than ever before. Maintenance work certainly doesn't require "A" Level technicians does it? If maintenance represents 60% percent of a shop's workload, then logically, shouldn't 60% of the shops' workforce be maintenance-techs?





These maintenance technicians are those “entry-level” technicians we are really talking about, aren’t they?

These entry-level technicians are the ones YOU need to grow from scratch, and don’t whine about the amount of money per hour you have to pay these guys. Sure, the entry level rate today for any position is higher than it was 20 years ago. Just because you may have started washing cars, or changing oil and \$3.00 per hour 20 years ago, does not mean that it what it will cost you today. A bag of chips used to cost 25 cents too – deal with it! Rates of pay are always increasing, even for the entry-level, and you can either accept it and pay it (supply and demand) or you can whine about it (Oh poor me, there is a technician shortage), either way, the reality is that there are technicians and/or future technicians out there to be developed.

Do you have the talent and skill to recognize and develop them?



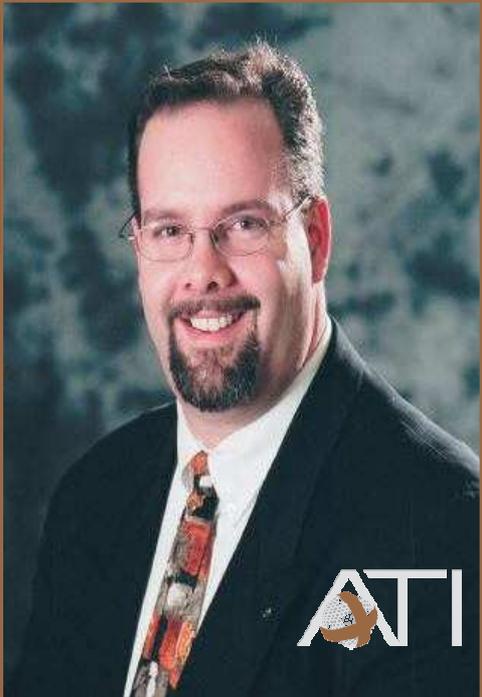
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Tyler Robbins

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Tyler@ATi360.com | 902.880.3360 | www.ATi360.com



A professional headshot of Tyler Robbins, a man with glasses and a goatee, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and patterned tie. The ATI logo is visible in the bottom right corner of the photo.

