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The Academy teaches you to teach new techs

By Mark Johnson

New training program sets up school in your shop

Bringing an entry-level employee into your shop generally means making a lot of compromises. For example, in the ideal world you could spend a lot of time finding the right person, but in the real world you have to accept whoever walks through the door. Chances are you also have to compromise on the kind of training that person has and with his or her work ethic as well.

Jeff Koykar thinks he's found a way to avoid those compromises and a way to deal with the technician shortage facing the collision repair industry. The program Koykar has developed — dubbed "the Academy" — is aimed at helping collision repair shop owners deal with recruiting and training, which Koykar believes are the two biggest issues surrounding the search for qualified technicians.

While Autobody Collision Training (A.C.T.) as the Academy is also known, can be described as an on-the-job training program, it has several crucial differences. The primary variation is that students pay the shop for their training. "The shop charges tuition and that's the beauty of the program," says Koykar. "The person has to have a vested interest in it."

Another distinction is that students have to participate in the A.C.T. tool program to remain in A.C.T. "A student has to have his tools," says Koykar explaining that in order to learn by doing the student has to be properly equipped.

Koykar also works with A.C.T. shops to find the experienced technician in the shop who will become the teacher and then trains that technician in A.C.T.'s methods. Those methods are pretty simple and flexible. The shop decides what it would like the student to learn — what job the student will be taking when he completes the program — and puts the student to work with the teaching technician to learn how to do that job. "The majority of the Academy is hands-on work on cars that come in the door that day. That's the realness of the program," says Koykar.

How the student does that hands-on work and what kind of jobs they undertake are decisions the shop makes, according to Koykar. A.C.T. does not provide a typical curriculum, but instead helps shops to identify their needs and to train students accordingly. "I teach the techs how to run the program. They learn how to put all the similarities and all the commonalities of body work into focus. It's like learning how to do a puzzle — once you learn what an edge piece looks like you can start putting together the puzzle," he says.

Koykar also helps the shop recruit students and gives them a set of criteria to look for in prospective trainees, which he says helps shops find students who will benefit from the training and who will be good employees. Koykar has also figured out how to keep the student working in the shop after training. "Part of the agreement is that if he decides to walk away then he owes

the shop X amount of dollars for his training," says Koykar. "You want to create your own employees. Get them accustomed to the way you do business, treat them right and have them for life."


Shops are free to set tuition rates as they see fit, says Koykar who adds that he thinks top level shops will probably be able to charge higher tuitions than shops that don't do high quality work.

He also points out that there can be advantages in billing for the work done in the training facility. Because the student is not an employee, book labor rates can't be used, so shops can charge flat rates for repairs or drop labor charges entirely on repairs done in the training facility, Koykar says.

"The idea is getting techs out there in the trade so that at the end of their training they are profitable and paying you to do that so you are profitable while you are training them," says Koykar.



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