



SOLVING THE TECHNICIAN SHORTAGE





PART I: THE GROWING EPIDEMIC

PART II: TIMES ARE CHANGING

PART III: RECRUITING & RETAINING TECHNICIANS

- Engage Established Techs
- Investing in Young Techs
- Utilizing Retiring Technicians

CONCLUSION: CONSISTENCY IS KEY



PART I: THE GROWING EPIDEMIC



THE GROWING EPIDEMIC

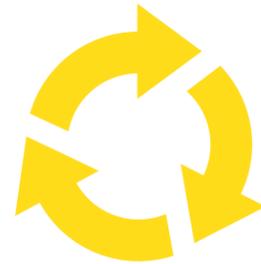
In recent years, the automotive industry has become increasingly aware of the technician shortage. Currently “automotive tech shortage” returns nearly 9 million results when entered into Google. While the problem has been evident for years, only now are shops starting to do something about it. But is it too little, too late? It’s time to stop debating the causes of the tech shortage and begin taking actionable steps to undo current trends and attitudes.

In its 2018 study, TechForce Foundation reported only 38,829 postsecondary completions of auto tech programs in 2016, the lowest the industry has seen since its peak enrollment in 2010. According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016 program completions barely reached the projected demand of 75,900 new technicians needed each year to replace those retiring or leaving the industry.

It’s time to face facts, the culture has changed in recent decades and the automotive industry is left having to pick up the pieces and figure out how to move forward.



PART 2: TIMES ARE CHANGING



TIMES ARE CHANGING

The job isn't what it used to be, plain and simple. Technology has advanced significantly in the last few decades, which means technicians need to be on a whole other level as well. Existing technicians that have adapted alongside the changing industry are in high demand. However, as it stands, many training programs simply aren't equipping up-and-coming students with the skills they need to be successful. It could be time to position techs-in-training programs in more of a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) setting — an idea that has been circulating recently among industry experts. Every year a more technologically advanced and complex vehicle model rolls off the line, causing the scope of work for an automotive service technician to widen. With the needed skill set rapidly expanding, more must be required of the educational institutions. However, schools are having trouble retaining students just like shop owners are having issues retaining technicians. This is an industry-wide problem. The counter

argument is that attempting to convince students to invest even more dollars in their education when they already expect to be in debt upon graduation will create even more resistance for the auto repair industry. Combined with a lack of abundant and enticing pay incentives and desirable entry-level positions, young technicians are seeking out career options in other trades. For example, joining the steamfitter's union as an apprentice will pay more than a person might otherwise earn as an entry-level technician. With the added bonus of better benefits, as well as not having to invest thousands of dollars into tools, it's not a surprise that many techs are abandoning the industry.

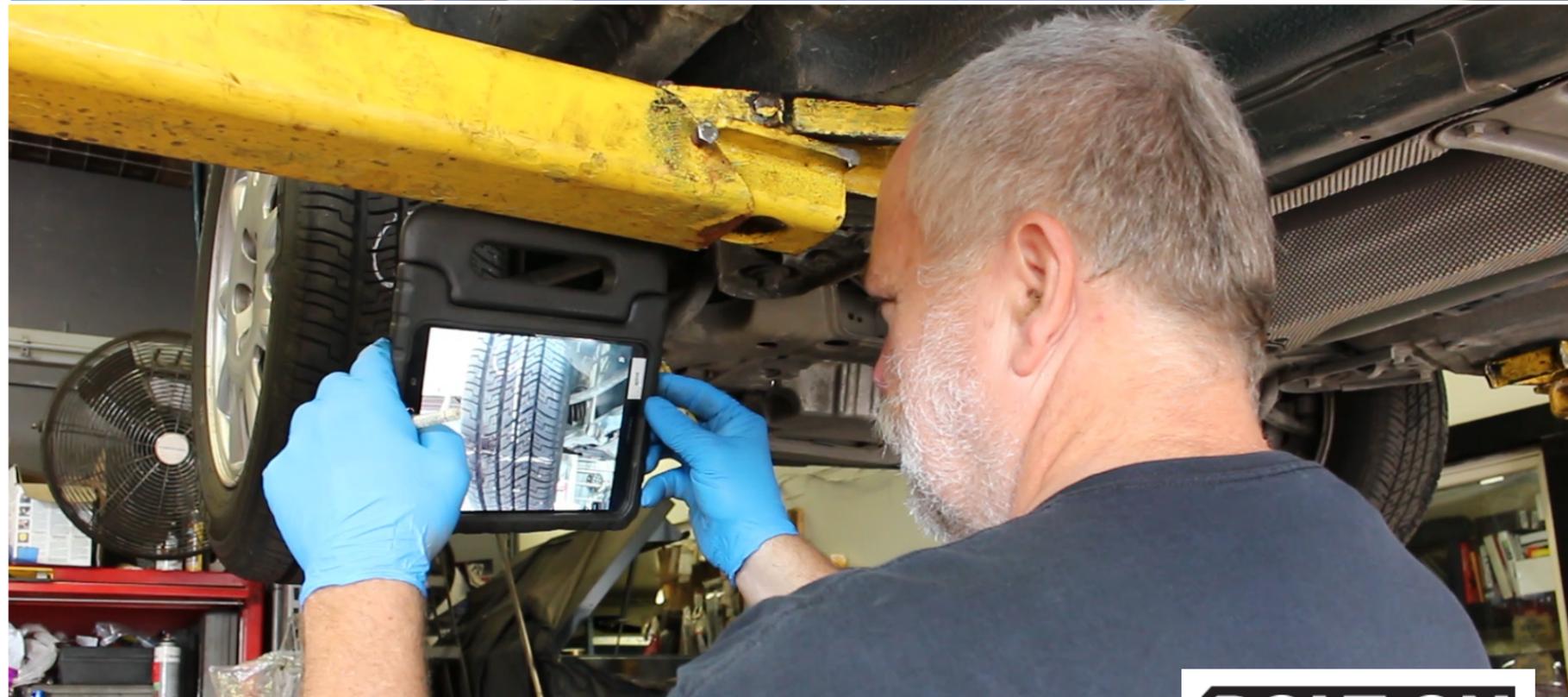
As we move forward as an industry, the fix to the shortage problem will require a multifaceted approach by shops everywhere. Shop owners will need to make some major changes, step outside their comfort zone, and get creative.

When it comes to hiring and retaining talent, there are three distinctive groups:

- Established technicians
- Young technicians
- Retiring technicians

Each requires the use of varying techniques to make sure a shop keeps them happy, productive, and loyal.

Start with your established technicians since they're in the prime of their careers, experienced, educated, and require the least amount of effort and resources on the behalf of the owner to do their job. With reliable technicians on staff, shop owners are able to invest time and energy into the newly-established cohort, those technicians fresh out of school, ready to be molded. While doing so may seem labor-intensive and daunting, that effort will ultimately result in a worthwhile return on investment. Finally, be mindful not to ignore retiring techs—just because they're entering retirement doesn't mean a shop necessarily has to lose them and their wisdom.



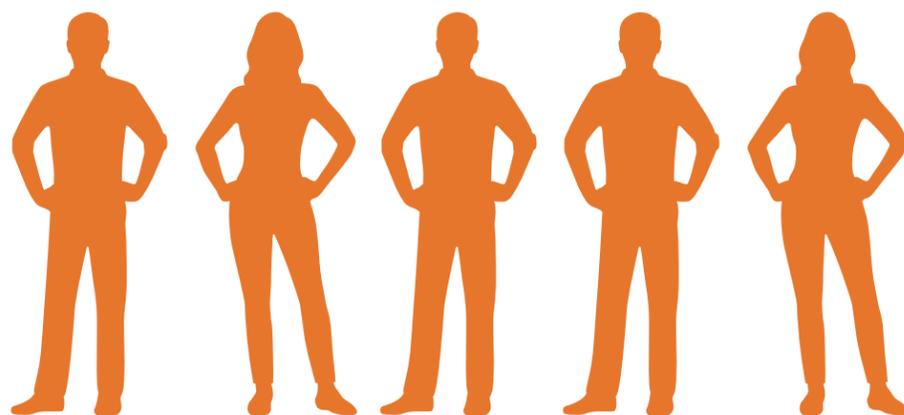


PART 3: RECRUITING & RETAINING TECHNICIANS

GETTING CREATIVE AT ANY STAGE

Regardless of the stage of expertise, there are opportunities to nurture relationships with technicians and capitalize on their skill sets in order to grow a shop. Each level of experience and knowledge will require a different strategy to keep the technicians happy, but don't be afraid to be bold. In order to change the current trends, some out-of-the-box thinking will be necessary.





ENGAGE ESTABLISHED TECHS

Prioritize those technicians in the prime of their career. These individuals are experienced and educated with their best years still ahead of them. They require little-to-no training on the part of the shop owner and can be trusted to perform well. With this group, it's important to create an enticing position. It's known that acquiring customers for a shop costs more than retaining them, and the same can be said for the technicians a shop employs. It's important to retain top employees, but we don't always think about the monetary hit that will happen when they require replacement.

Investing in technicians will show them just how much they're worth to a shop. They are the backbone of what a shop does and how they do it, after all. Keeping the top technicians happy should be priority number one. But when we say 'investing', we're not just referring to dollar signs. Make sure their roles aren't becoming stagnant; provide them with new challenges and new opportunities to grow within the business. Failure to do so may cause technicians' eyes to wander, and shops are no longer only competing with other shops when it comes to losing their best technicians.

Other industries are facing a similar shortage of technical applicants and are also competing for the same individuals. Of course, compensation is important, but it isn't the only thing a shop should reconsider when looking to retain top talent. Technicians, especially great technicians, are looking for the whole package. This means better working hours, vacation, benefits, and more. Make sure their quality of life while working at your shop is the absolute best you can offer. Happy techs equal happy shops, which result in a thriving industry.



CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:

1. Eliminate flat rates, and establish a salary.
2. Introduce a bonus program based on productivity. Receiving rewards that are equal to the amount of effort and work invested helps technicians feel like they're more in control. Never underestimate the positive impact of an employee seeing the fruits of their labor.
3. Change the workweek structure. One example might be four-day workweeks, 10 hours per day. This allows technicians to have ample time to reboot and decompress in order to put maximum focus into their work while they're there. A change in schedule could mean that the time in the shop will be used more efficiently as well, boosting morale all around.
4. Evaluate the number of vacation days and paid time off. An appropriate amount of time for employees to have a break from their work is important.
5. Invest in training. The better trained a team is, the more efficient a team will be.
6. Equip your shop with the technologies needed to handle today's vehicles. These are worthwhile investments for a shop.

A photograph of three men in a workshop. On the left, an older man with grey hair is looking towards the center. In the middle, a man with dark hair is looking towards the right. On the right, a younger man with light brown hair is looking towards the center. They are all wearing dark blue short-sleeved shirts. In the background, the hood of a car is open, and an engine is visible. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting an indoor workshop environment.

INVESTING IN YOUNG TECHS

It's not enough to only keep an eye on the current pool of new techs out there anymore. Young up-and-coming technical school students are an untapped resource. Ultimately, in order to make an impact on the current cultural climate when it comes to the automotive industry, this is where shop owners should start. The root cause of this shortage stems from the fact that young technicians aren't entering the field like they used to. Nurturing those who are will hopefully have an impact on other young people looking to share our passion for vehicles. This is going to be a tough road to travel, though. Statistically, fewer students are considering careers in a technical field compared to a few decades ago. According to the U.S. Department of Education, 1 in 5 students are interested in skilled trades today compared to 1 in 4 in 1990. Most young people today were brought up in a system where the idea of a 4-year college degree was drilled into them. It's up to us, as an industry, to restructure, regroup, and change some minds.



INVESTING IN YOUNG TECHS

Technical schools require certification of their programs, so each program is required to have a committee - the automotive program committee is made up of individuals that are currently in the automotive field. These committees oversee many of the aspects of these automotive programs, such as what is taught, the purchase of equipment, and the continued certification of the school by the ASE Education Foundation (formerly The National Automotive Technicians Education Foundation or NATEF). Keeping up attendance by industry professionals is always a challenge for schools, which is why participation and commitment by local shop owners is crucial. ASE Education Foundation President Trish Serratore urges owners to participate, stating that if they do not become involved and support local programs by participating on advisory committees, as well as other activities, school administrators will close programs when instructors retire or enrollment drops. By joining the committee, owners can help guide the program so that it produces good candidates for future jobs—and ensure that programs aren't becoming outdated. Like many other fields that have a close relationship with technology, things are changing on an accelerated and consistent basis, so it's the duty of the committee to stay on top of trends and recent developments.

Take involvement a step further and create an apprenticeship in your shop for students from these programs. Lessen the disconnect between the classroom and the real world by allowing them to gain hands-on experience to better understand the industry's inner-workings. If all goes well, this effort could result in a loyal technician joining your team upon graduation and staying with your shop for years to come. In addition to an apprenticeship, consider offering some type of tool-based incentive to help ease the financial burden for new technicians.

UTILIZING RETIRED TECHNICIANS

Finally, let us not forget about the retiring technicians, those loyal employees who are looking forward to their last day of work. Just because they're retiring doesn't mean you have to part ways completely. There might be a few who would consider a modified, part-time work schedule.

Before they retire, approach them with the option of working fewer hours on their terms. If they agree to a few four-hour days or some other combination that works for both the shop and the technician, you can continue to utilize an experienced employee's wealth of information and expertise. If the technician is a great diagnostician, for example, then bring them in to diagnose while other techs handle the actual repairs.

Also, don't be afraid to reach out to retired technicians even after they've been gone a little while. There's a chance they might be going stir-crazy and would welcome the chance to dive back into one of their passions on a part-time or as-needed basis.





CONSISTENCY IS KEY

The technician shortage is here to stay for the foreseeable future, but hopefully, the light at the end of the tunnel is within sight. In the meantime, we hope that you can utilize some of these solutions to better equip your shop with top talent. We also encourage you to come up with your own creative ideas. You are in the perfect position to help change the current climate. Each shop has the potential to offer something unique and attractive to both new and current technicians. Don't be afraid to collaborate with other shop owners to think of community initiatives to drive young technicians into the field or to improve automotive educational institutions.

CONCLUSION: CONSISTENCY IS KEY





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