



Mentoring New Technicians

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Attracting new technicians to the collision repair industry and developing their skills is an ongoing challenge. Vocational – technical programs, even the best ones, are not sufficient to develop all of the skills and experience that are required today. They need the experience that can only be learned in an actual working collision repair facility.

The most effective programs are modelled after the apprenticeship programs in other industries where the apprentice works hand in hand with an experienced Master (mentor) in order to master those skills themselves. This is a long term process, depending on the individual's role description; so patience as well as accountability is required by all involved.

Successfully mentoring a new collision repair technician (Body, Mechanical, Prep, or Paint) requires an organized program with various elements including:

The Mentor

Identifying and developing mentors is arguably the most critical aspect of any mentoring program. They must be both able and willing. Characteristics of a good mentor will include:

- Mastery of correct repair procedures
- Communication skills
- I-CAR qualification
- Willingness (eagerness) to teach and share skills
- Patience

The Apprentice Tech

Apprentice candidates must have:

- Mechanical ability (relevant to the role)
- Good verbal and math skills
- The ability to take direction
- Motivation to learn and grow

Skill Level Criteria

There must be some form of documentation of a skill level progression for each role being developed. There should be objective criteria established for an individual to progress from one level to the next, and a step process for accountability and compensation.

Here is a [LINK](#) to the skill level criteria that was developed many years ago for the Collision Industry Conference (CIC).



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Tools

Techs typically own their own tools. For body techs, building a set of tools takes years and is extremely costly. Even paint techs require multiple guns, DA's, etc. It is extraordinarily useful for the shop to fully or partially fund an initial set of tools that may be gifted to the tech after meeting specified criteria for success or tenure.

Pay Plan

Depending on the role, it takes time for a new technician to become productive. They must be paid a market wage for their time that will increase with their skill level. When appropriate, the ability to earn an incentive for production may be useful to reward productivity.

In the short run, a new tech may slow down the Mentor, and cause them to work more hours to make up any lost production. This makes it advisable to create a pay plan that incorporates the following elements

- An initial base wage that increases with demonstrated skill level
- Company contribution to apprentice pay starting at 100% and reducing over time as the new technician becomes productive.
- Ultimate incorporation to flat rate or a team pay plan

Accountability

A final key to success in any mentoring program is accountability:

- Management accountability to a commitment to the program, to the new technician, to the mentor, and to the ultimate objective of developing a skilled, long-term employee.
- The mentor must be accountable to developing the skills of the new technician; not simply taking advantage of their labor
- The apprentice must be accountable to showing up, to learning, to outside study, and to share in the responsibility for their growth and development.



Tip to Consider

Assess your workforce. Do you have the right mix of skills to manage the work that will come your way over the next 5 years or so? Do you have experienced techs who may retire soon? Do you have younger, capable employees that could become production technicians with the right guidance and development? Now is the time to consider creating a technician mentoring program within your facility.