

TECHNOLOGY CAN'T FIX EVERYTHING

DON'T EXPECT ELECTRONIC COURTESY CHECKS TO SOLVE THE HUMAN PROBLEM

BY CHRIS "CHUBBY" FREDERICK | CONTRIBUTOR

WE ALL have witnessed the benefits and sometimes disadvantages of new technology in our careers as shop owners. I spent almost 35 years helping shop owners invest in new technology, so I believe I know a thing or two about it. I was in one of our classrooms last month and overheard our coaching team leader, George Zeeks, teach a class on how to get the most out of electronic tablets currently used in the shops. I was thinking, "I wish I had had George when I was in the automotive equipment business." Here is George's story:

It was dark by the time I arrived at Columbus, Ga., otherwise known as Fort Benning, the home of the infantry. My grandson had been training there, and after working a full day, I had caught a late flight. Everything is going smooth. All I want to do at this point is get to my hotel. I collect my keys. I go to the car. I load my luggage. I sit in the driver's seat. I can't start the car. I drive a car that has keys, and they go into an ignition. I couldn't find a place to put the key.

Keep in mind that I have spent a large part of my life in the automotive field. I know that the new cars don't have ignition switches, but my older truck does. The problem is that at 10 o'clock at night, tired after a very long day, I just plain forgot. I felt silly 15 minutes later when I saw the button that said "Push to Start." Technology is a great thing, and it exists to help make our lives easier. We have a ton of new technology coming out to help us run our shops better. The real ques-



tion is, are we ready enough for it to help us?

Electronic courtesy checks done right

Electronic courtesy checks are all the rage with the new technology available to us. The problem is, are we doing a good job with the courtesy checks now? First, you have to have two different checks: one for waiters and one for the drop offs. The biggest issue for a waiting customer is time. If it takes you longer than 15 minutes to start your presentation, you're probably out of luck. I want you to keep in

mind that this customer has not been seen by anyone for at least three to five thousand miles. It is our job to let them know what they need for current, pending or maintenance issues. If we take so long that we can't or don't let them know what the car will need, in a clear and logical fashion, then we are not doing a proper service. The fact that you now have a tablet system to help expedite the process doesn't fix a broken process. A crew that doesn't do good courtesy checks in a timely manner, with a paper checklist, will not do them with a tablet. That is just the reality that we face.

“WHAT ARE THE EASIEST WAYS TO INCREASE PRODUCTIVITY IN A SHOP? WORK ON THE 40 MOST POPULAR PRODUCTIVITY ROBBERS, THEN CROSS OFF THE ONES YOU HAVE ACCOMPLISHED,”

-CHRIS “CHUBBY” FREDERICK [ATI]

Throwing some new gadgets at a problem does not make the problem go away. The one big advantage is that when an owner spends the money to install a tablet system, they usually invest some time in training to make sure it pays some dividends. Time spent training is still time spent training. Whether it's on paper or electronic, both will pay off. The customers, technicians and the owners all end up better off.

A good manual system first

Don't confuse yourself thinking that electronic shop systems will make you more productive. The big claim is that the new system will make your shop more productive and they will, providing that you have solid expectations of your staff in place before the system goes in. Technology can make good producers become better. They cannot, however, replace the need for a solid basis of expectations for each and every person on the staff. It's basic math, but too many owners don't know it or don't pay attention to it. How much are you paying the person? How much do your benefits, holidays, vacations, sick days, training, FICA, FUTA and workman's compensation multiply the wages you are paying your staff? Then how much do you need to make off of that investment in order to make a profit? Once you have done all the math, then you have a solid expectation that you can pass on to the staff member.

Everyone wants to feel like they are doing a good job. Have you defined what that is and made it clear to each staff member? If you don't have this basic foundation in place, then all the technology available cannot save you. At worst, it will give you a false sense that everything will be OK now. It is the worst kind of false promise for you and your staff. They trust you and depend on you to help provide birthdays, vacations, etc., for their family. The technology can certainly take you to the next level, but you must have a solid grounding first.

Work flow productivity system

The last, but not least, thing that you must keep in mind is how your work flows. Managers know that this is one of the most important parts of their job. Productivity and profitability depend on it. The problem is that if we do not have a firm grip on the work flow without the technology, we are doomed with it. Expectations for job completion, handling the courtesy check in a timely manner and the timing of the sale or part delivery are just some of the issues that come up in many shops. These issues can only get worse with a tablet system if you are not prepared for it. One of the main selling points for these systems is the ability to stay on top of issues, but only if you have processes in place to handle them. You should have the solutions in place regardless

of how you handle your information flow. If not, you're going to have problems, no matter what.

One great thing that we have seen is that the investment in a tablet work flow system does help to drive additional training. The training and the effort put into creating systems to make this new technology work the way it is designed can help shops reach a new level of productivity. Some of that increase could have happened if the shop simply worked on the problems they were already having. All shops have “productivity robbers.” Some have a few and some have more. The key is the ability to identify them and develop solutions. This drives more productivity for the technicians, resulting in better customer experience and more money for everyone. Technology is great, but it can't solve the human problems — only you can do that.

Productivity robbers

If you would like a checklist of the productivity robbers most commonly found in shops, please click on the link below. We would be happy to share them with you. Check off the ones that apply to your shop and you will have a starting point to help increase your shop's productivity. Simply go to www.ationlinetraining.com/2016-02 for a limited time. [🔗](#)



Chris “Chubby” Frederick is the CEO and founder of the Automotive Training Institute. ATI's 115 associates train and coach more than 1,400 shop owners every week across North America to drive profits and dreams home to their families. Our associates love helping shop owners who are having the same struggle as many of them have had, and who are looking for the same answers — and in some cases looking for a lifeline. This month's article was written with the help of Coach George Zeeks.

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