

Changing the industry starts with our own shop practices

Get involved and try new recruitment tactics to fight against the tech shortage

You might not have yet had the pleasure of trying to hire a millennial technician, but someday you are going to have to. As the proud grandfather of 16 grandkids, I have had the privilege of watching a few of them thinking about careers. I was listening to a former shop owner and now ATI coach, Kim Hickey, tell a funny story, and I thought her suggestions might help you.

Here's Kim's story: I had the pleasure of being driven home from the airport by a man named Vinnie. Vinnie was a pleasant young man. He had been attending community college for quite a while (for much longer than it takes to get a degree) and working part-time. We were stuck in traffic for an hour and during that time the subject of politics came up.

Without getting too much into detail or getting on my political soapbox, I will just share with you that Vinnie thought Bernie Sanders was "the man." Vinnie thought all of Bernie's programs were the answer to everything, and it downright upset him that a "kid"

should have to pay for his or her own education. Vinnie didn't know who or what would pay for these "free" programs, but he still thought it was a good idea. I asked him if he thought that people put as much commitment and care into things they did not work for as they did when it was something they earned. He didn't know. I asked him if any degree should be free, say for example Puppet Arts (yes, that really is a major). He said of course not — that would be stupid. I asked him who would get to pick what majors would be considered for "free" tuition. Again he didn't know, but still thought it was a good idea. I asked him what was taking him so long to get his degree, and he was quite honest with me. He said he is very lazy, gets bored and partied a lot.

I couldn't help myself but to point out to Vinnie that even without Bernie Sanders and his college program, there are opportunities right now that allow for students to go to college for "free" or at least get a portion of their tuition paid for. If you work hard and have great

grades, there are many scholarships available. He said he knew that, but didn't want to put the work in during high school. I asked him if he knew that most colleges had programs where you could work there and that could help subsidize tuition. He said he did, but he didn't like that idea. I then brought up how there are companies out there that will pay for college for their employees, like Starbucks for example. He scoffed at that and said "Yeah, no way would I work in a Starbucks."

What does my conversation with Vinnie have to do with you and the automotive business? It reminded me of a song by 10 Years After. The chorus goes like this:

I'd love to change the world
But I don't know what to do
So I'll leave it up to you

Can't find technicians?

I often hear shop owners tell me they can't find good techs. That the number of available good techs is dwindling. I hear all sorts of reasons why this is occurring, and I agree with almost all of the ones I have heard. One popular school of thought is that the money involved in learning to be a tech scares potential techs away. With the major tech schools costing anywhere from \$40,000 to more than \$60,000 and then an investment right off the bat of more than \$10,000 to start for tools, this is seen as an expensive trade to get into (we won't even get into that the tech schools don't give their students a realistic starting pay range).

And just where can kids go to get the automotive bug these days? I don't

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Chris "Chubby" Frederick, CEO

know about you, but where and when I grew up, somebody was always working on or “souping up” a car. Everyone had a dad, an uncle, a big brother or someone who was hunched over a car in their backyard during every family picnic and barbeque. If you wanted to speak with that person, you approached them knowing you would be handing them tools and would also be getting a lesson on what each tool did, and how to set timing, and what the points and plugs did and getting grease on both you and your hamburger bun.

We have known a shortage was coming for years. We have known it is getting harder and harder for years. We have had discussions about the cost of tech school, the cost of tools they must buy, the stigma that techs are still “grease monkeys,” and so on. But guess what, no one that I know of (with the exception of a very limited few) is doing anything about it. Everyone talks about the problem, but few are willing to put in the work to create a solution. Many want to change their pay plans so they can offer a tech — that they say they can’t find anyway — more money than they can afford.

If we want to change the world, the technician shortage or the perception of the automotive industry, we can’t leave it up to everyone else. Guess what — everyone else is leaving it up to us. The tech shortage situation is not going to change until we do. I want to leave you with a few questions to think about.

Have you tried all these ideas?

How many shop owners who are desperate to find a good tech go by dealerships and other shops that are open in the evenings and weekends and give out their cards?

How many park outside the better shops and dealerships right before lunch hour and see where the techs head to for lunch and give out their cards?

How many have contacted their local

community colleges and inquired about their automotive program and then:

- Volunteered to teach?
- Volunteered to be on the board?
- Asked if they could come in and talk to the class?
- Asked if they could offer a mentoring program where students can come to their shop X number of times and see what a real shop is like?
- Asked to speak to the students directly to find out what they are looking for in an employer when they graduate?
- Offered themselves and their shop for mock interviews for the students?

How many are sharing the idea of becoming a tech with kids at an early age?

What about contacting local preschools, grade schools and middle schools to come in and speak with the students about a career in the automotive industry?

What about going to the schools on a high school level for career days and setting up a booth to let students know just how much money techs can make today and how much computers are involved?

How about taking the time to visit the local community colleges nearby and finding out just how affordable it is for technician training? You would be shocked to know that you can attend a school like Glendale Community College and earn an associate degree via their General Automotive Degree Program for around \$7,500.

What about contacting the schools nearby and offering to help pay for school for students that show mechanical aptitude?

What about having an apprentice or mentor program for someone wanting to be a tech?

How about contacting guidance counselors at the high schools and colleges and asking for any stats or demographic information on the kids that are considering becoming a tech so you know where to market to?

What can you do to change your ads and hiring approach to grab the attention of millennials?

Do you have an amazing shop with innovative systems and processes, benefits, the latest equipment and tools, great online reviews and strong leadership that will attract the best technicians?

There are many more questions I have, but I think I’ve made my point. People want the world to change, but they want someone else to do it. I have one client right now who is not waiting for someone else to do it. He is having air-conditioning installed in his shop for the techs. Do you think that might increase productivity during the summer and also attract technicians?

In case you were wondering, Vinnie is not going to get his degree any time soon. And his more than four years of community college tuition has been paid for by his dad. He thinks he may join the Coast Guard because he likes to swim. Vinnie would love the world to change, but he’ll leave it up to you.

If you would like a training checklist to use for new entry-level employees, please visit the link below. Every shop is different, so feel free to add anything to the list that you feel is important. It will help you get a new millennial tech on board so he or she doesn’t quit after you have found him or her. You can download the form at www.ationlinetraining.com/2017-02 for a limited time. So, you might want to get it before you need it! 



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