



Learning to Grow Your Business

It's what you learn after you know it all that counts." - John Wooden

No business is run in a vacuum. Outside forces constantly affect a company. The list of influences is long and diverse: increased competition, changes in customer spending habits, new vehicle technology, a fluctuating economy, changes in insurance company policy or regulations. As a collision repair shop owner, you face an increasingly complex marketplace. You must find ways of dealing with the evolutionary and revolutionary changes this industry is experiencing, while continuing to accurately and profitably repair cars. How do you accomplish this task? Knowledge.

A good businessperson is informed and aware. To stay profitable, you need to understand not only where your business is today, but where it needs to be in the future. You must determine which repair techniques will improve your repair quality, which new products will decrease your repair times and which management operations will increase your bottom line. You need knowledge, knowledge and more knowledge.

Does this mean that only those rare few with an IQ above 150 are qualified to operate a collision repair shop during these complex times? How can anyone be expected to know that much? They can't. Knowledge isn't having a head full of answers. Rather, it's knowing how and where to find the answers, and then putting those answers to good use. The answers you need to run a better business are out there. You just have to make the effort to look for them.

Join trade associations and business groups. Attend seminars and clinics and training programs. Check into what I-CAR and the Automotive Management Institute (AMI) have to offer you and your employees. Talk to your suppliers. Develop a network of shop owners around the country whom you admire and trust. Solicit input from your employees. And read! Read everything and anything that might offer you insight. You'll be surprised by how opening yourself up to these outside influences will help you feel less alone in your business struggles. Often having an influx of new ideas is just the energizer you need to get you moving in the right direction.

And finally, be as informed and prepared as you can be, but don't waste your time worrying about what lies ahead. As Abraham Lincoln said, "The best thing about the future is that it comes only one day at a time."

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