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## Investing in your staff

In recent years, car manufacturers have stepped up their marketing push to educate customers that their new vehicle will require less ongoing maintenance than earlier models.

They claim that improved technology and better oils have led to longer intervals between services. On the surface, this may be true, but the marketing push is lulling car owners into a sense of false security. They are inclined to think that today's car will look after itself, and this is having an impact on the regularity of services and in the extreme, the need for servicing at all.

The hidden message in this new world of servicing is that with any lapses in service schedules, the consequences are likely to be more costly than ever before.

The results of this major shift in car maintenance culture are being seen daily in the nation's aftermarket workshops.

There has been a noticeable change in the type of work now coming into the independent workshops. Servicing is still the number one income earner, but what is changing fast is the business of vehicle diagnostics. Problem solving in modern vehicles bristling with computers and sensors is no longer possible with traditional methods.

For the overwhelming majority of workshops this trend is not being taken seriously. Most workshops lack the equipment, knowledge and understanding to tackle modern day diagnostics. They practice what is commonly referred to as dartboard diagnostics. 'Throw another ECU at it' is regrettably becoming the diagnostic attitude. Nobody wins in this game. Not only is it a costly solution to any problem, but it will most likely result in the loss of the customer.

Car owners may not be as knowledgeable as they once were about their cars, but they instinctively know when their service workshop is out of their depth.

The answer to this rather universal workshop issue is so simple, yet seems to be so difficult to achieve. Workshop owners who embrace training are the ones who will be able to stay in the game and through their gained knowledge will be able to build more profitable and successful businesses. Those owners who say they are too busy to invest in training or think that they know it all, have some very interesting years ahead of them.

How can workshops ensure they are ready to tackle modern day diagnostics? Here are some valuable tips.

### **Invest in your staff**

Too many workshop owners feel that training is a waste of time because staff will just leave to find a better job after they have been trained up. There is an element of truth in this, but the answer to this concern is *'The only thing worse than training an employee and having them leave, is not training them and having them stay.'*

Untrained staff translates to poor productivity and that's a serious financial impact on any business –as much as thousands of dollars every month. Surely investing a couple of hundred dollars for a training course is a good investment if some of that lost income can be clawed back.

### **Give staff access to the diagnostic equipment an information they need**

There is no point investing in training courses if the workshop doesn't then invest in the appropriate equipment and data resources to tackle the job. It remains a mystery to TaT Biz trainers that so many workshops believe they can get by without access to data or up-to-date scan tools. At the absolute minimum, all Capricorn members should be using the new Capricorn Service Data – a free member benefit.

Investment in equipment and data resources doesn't have to be an additional workshop overhead either. It is now common for those workshops with demonstrated diagnostic skills to charge data fees to cover the costs of data and specialised equipment. This trend was revealed in detail in the TaT Biz business improvement step of August 2016 – *'Fees for special tools and data are part of the diagnostic future.'* To access the article, visit [www.tatbiz.net.au/resources](http://www.tatbiz.net.au/resources).

### **Make training mandatory**

Professionals like accountants, doctors and lawyers are required to undertake ongoing training to maintain their licenses. This ensures they have the appropriate skills necessary to take care of their patients and clients. The vehicle service industry needs to adopt the same approach.

A good start would be to set a goal that all appropriate staff must attend a minimum of 12 hours training every year. The successful completion of training could be a condition for ongoing employment or receiving an annual bonus.

### **Discuss diagnostics as a team**

Most workshops allocate all the challenging jobs to one staff member and all the easy servicing to lesser trained staffers. This might be great for maximising productivity in the short term but this lack of sharing does nothing towards elevating the team skills of the entire workshop.

Make it a habit to casually discuss diagnostics during tool box meetings and tea breaks. The best system is for the workshop owner or manager to work their way around the room asking for everyone's opinion on what they think should be checked first to resolve an issue with a problem vehicle. Sometimes it's the left-field idea that will lead to the solution.

Conversely, once a diagnostic job is resolved, ask the team to discuss the solution so that the knowledge is shared with all employees.

Here's the challenge – identify your training needs and start investing in your staff and business. It will cost you money but nowhere near as much as the cost of keeping untrained staff on the payroll.

The place to start is [www.tatbiz.net.au/resources](http://www.tatbiz.net.au/resources)

*Just go for it!*