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Making the Most of a Body Shop's Space

Before you add more space to your body shop, ask yourself if you're making the most of what you have. Eliminate waste first and you'll soon find out how large your facility actually is or could be.

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How many of you have walked around your body shop wondering how much better it would be if it just had more space? But the "ideal shop" isn't always feasible. All body shops are unique in certain ways, such as business influx, location, ordinances, etc.

What you really need to ask yourself is, "Am I making the most of what I have?" Don't believe the old saying, "If you build it, they will come." Build the business and then build the shop. Ask yourself:

- What's the mortgage payment or rent if you own, expand or build a larger shop?
- Is your current business operating at 100 percent capacity?
- Are you operating with a second or third shift?

Whether you have a large, square box, a strip mall or a few stalls the size of a large garage, you need to eliminate wasted time before adding more space. It's much easier and much less stressful to pay lower rent for less space and have shifts working 24 hours a day than pay high rent for more space – which sometimes can be really empty.

Unless your technicians are extremely talented and sport long, extendable arms like Inspector Gadget, they can only touch one vehicle at a time. Here's something to ponder that makes a lot more sense: Less space needs to be more efficient! So let's first figure out how to avoid wasted time.

Eliminating Waste

Take a stroll through your facility and ask yourself the following questions:

- Are there shop tools lying around?
- How do your technicians' toolboxes look? Are they cluttered?
- Where are your technicians' tools? Are they on a cart so they can bring them to the car all at once or do they have to run back and forth to retrieve them?
- Where are your nuts and bolts bins, and how long does it take someone to walk to them, find what he or she needs, bring them back to his or her stall and start working again?

Organization is the key to an efficiently run facility. With the high standards our customers are demanding, it's crucial to do the job better and faster than the competition. The biggest win area is in the shop.

The production floor is the first place where we need to eliminate waste. The most crucial part of fixing a problem is to know where it is. Find out what your technicians' efficiency is to know if what you're doing is working. Once you find out this information, the wins will be visible.

Keep in mind the following facts when considering efficiency:

- Ten minutes a day equals 50 minutes a week and 43.33 hours a year. If you know your technicians' efficiency, you know that 10 minutes of wasted time each day costs your technicians and you.
- The right tools for the job are crucial to efficient repairs. A \$100 body hammer won't make much of a difference compared to the old one you have from school. But if you have the right spot welder, it will make a big difference.

"I Don't Have Time"

Regarding supplements, how many estimators have stated, "I just don't have the time to do them"? I can tell you that if they don't have time to do supplements, then they don't have time to call their customers and they most definitely don't have time to be looking up repair procedures.

Try taking a little bit of time out of your day or evening and make a list of everything an estimator has to do in a day. Sit down with him or her and figure out how much time, on average, each of his or her daily duties takes. I bet you'll find that at the end of the day, all the time added up will be more than he or she is actually working. Wouldn't it be great to be able to accomplish more work in the same or less amount of time, eliminate a step and ultimately be more proactive?

Watch what happens to your staff if you take this approach. They get more time in their personal lives as a result of not having to stay later at work and costing you more money. All you did was figure out a way to eliminate or cut back on the time spent doing a certain task. Look for the easy, low-hanging fruit first, then work your way up to a minute here and a couple minutes there.

Breaking Down Walls

No matter what the size or design of the facility, we all have walls that need to be taken down, either literally or figuratively.

Efficiency is measured as the time it takes to perform an action. The focus should be on making sure that vehicles don't stop once they get to the shop. So take the time to look at the walls that are created between your paint and body departments, the one between the office and the shop, and especially the wall that the vehicle hit and, consequently, didn't get completed as efficiently as it could have.

Find a way to eliminate that stopping point or waste of time, and you'll soon find out how large your facility actually is or could be.

Lot's Full

How nice is it to see a parking lot full of cars? Some people may like to see that, but I sure don't! To me, a lot full of vehicles means there are a lot of cars that aren't being worked on. I may have taken too many in at once, or somewhere, a breakdown in the process occurred. I'm sure I'm not the only one who used to think that we should bring all the vehicles in on Monday and, if everything goes as planned, send them out on Friday. Do the following ever happen at your facility?

- Your painter doesn't really need to come in until around lunchtime on Monday because there isn't anything for him to do. Then, he or she is really busy on Tuesday afternoon through Thursday and might as well take Friday off.

- Your body technicians are busy on Monday and Tuesday, slow on Wednesday and, if everything goes well, will be assembling vehicles on Thursday and Friday. If nothing goes wrong on Friday, there will be five to nine vehicles for each technician to assemble. Your detailer then has to wash them all, and your staff now has to deliver them between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. on Friday.

That makes me tired just thinking about it. It's a recipe for disaster and a great way to burn out your people. Here's what ended up happening as a result:

- Parts got missed.
- Paint got scratched.
- Customers waited.
- A lot of vehicles were delivered later than necessary.
- Customers didn't get updated because their vehicles didn't get touched until Tuesday or Wednesday, even though they were only one-day repairs and should have been done on Monday.

None of these things had to happen! Why bring vehicles in when you can't touch them immediately? Look at the time it actually took to repair the vehicle and the amount of time it was actually in the shop. How many extra days do you keep your customers' vehicles?

Once you have the shop organized and running efficiently, you'll have a lot more of your technicians hungry for more work. And if they're hungry, they'll have more available stalls for work.

That's strange...we didn't even add a single stall and now we have room for more work?