

# Quality, Service, and Value: The Keys to Collision Repair Success

**Quality, Service, and Value.** These three words have been said over and over by thousands—or maybe tens of thousands—of business books and articles for over 25 years. They have long been the cornerstone for almost every management system or quality initiative ever devised or implemented as well. Have they lost the meaning of what these three words represent when said together because of overuse, or are they being taken for granted?

As any industry evolves, competition drives the businesses within the industry to be able to do more than the competition, or they may fail. This often drives the entrepreneurial spirit. For many industries, including ours, this has translated to doing it *cheaper, faster, and better*. This has brought challenges to many. For in the past, one could only be expected to do at the most two of the three—not all three! But like many other industries in the past, it was discovered that they can all be achieved. But will all be able to make the change of focus? Absolutely not.

## The Entrepreneurial Spirit vs. The Status Quo

Today I talk with many shop owners and technicians weekly, and I find many are not up to the new challenges, the new rules, or even the new technology. They just hope that things will stay the same long enough to just get out once they get ahead again, or times will change and get back to how they remember them to be during the "great times." It sometimes sounds as if they are hoping to hit the lottery, or that ten hail storms hit within the next three months, Oldsmobile begins to make the Cutlass again with full frames and mild steel panels, and when you open the hood you can actually see ground! Not going to happen.

How does one inspire these good-natured owners, managers, and technicians to rekindle their drive and entrepreneurial spirit? Why are so many wanting to get out when so many are wanting to get in? Today, the expansion of shops in both size and numbers of new locations by those that are excited about our industry is really staggering. You can look at almost any top 100 (or more) metropolitan city and see expansion by many, while downsizing and distress is the norm by others. Again, why?

If you have ever successfully competed in any sport or game in your life, you must have realized that the mental portion of the engagement far outweighs the physical requirements. You must believe you can, or you have failed before you begin. When one gets into the mindset that all is lost—it most likely will be lost.

Today many in our industry see only insurmountable problems when others see vast opportunities. Do they have a secret formula? Is Lean Manufacturing, ISO, TQM, TPS, TOC, Six Sigma, or Kaizen the solution?

These systems do provide some clear direction in where to begin to improve your business, but they aren't a magic pill that can be taken so that all will fix itself. Don't get me wrong, I have implemented concepts of many of these systems with clients and believe they can provide a great deal of benefit to those that want to listen.

## **The Accountability Gap**

Having worked with hundreds of clients worldwide has allowed me to see one fatal flaw in many owners' world of business practices. This is not limited to just our industry, but most of our clients are from our industry, so this is from direct experience: **Business owners are normally not accountable to anyone but themselves and... they like it that way!**

Each day they have the flexibility to change the rules, the deadlines, the plan. They often do not hold themselves accountable for their own actions or deadlines as they do their own employees or even family members. They often do not understand the power of leading by example, and do not spend the time to advance themselves to be better owners, managers, or just be better prepared.

I realize there are those that do the right things for their business future, but this group is quickly differentiating themselves from the rest of the industry. Some in their own market area believe that the only way to accomplish this is to do it illegally or by compromising the sacred three: quality, service, or value. That, for the most part, is not how it is done.

## **Investing in Education**

To succeed today requires the owners, managers, and technicians to believe in providing the proper quality and service at a good value. In the realm of Cheaper, Faster, and Better, it represents Cheaper (Value), Faster (Service), and Better (Quality). But how can any improvement be made if no one knows the information or has received the training needed to accomplish it?

I challenge you to look at your training costs for the last three years. Did it reach 2% of your sales? How about 1%? I seriously doubt it did, as most shops I have analyzed financials for over the years do not reach 1%. But it should be a reflective cost (investment) of your commitment to keep you and your staff better prepared to compete in today's and future business climates. Technical training is critical for your technicians, just as management, financial, and even sales training is to yourself, managers, and office staff. Many of these key areas are often overlooked, and the staff—as well as yourself—competes daily with the same knowledge and skills they have had for 20 years. However, when a new vehicle design or system requires a new tool, you or your technician purchases the tool to be able to perform the work necessary. But when it comes to education, it is simply considered an expense that often is deemed unnecessary in both time and cost.

## **The Moving Target of Excellence**

To grow within this industry today, you must be able to compete in a professional manner and provide consistent quality, service, and value. To provide better quality, service, and value than your competition requires constant improvement and the desire to be better tomorrow than you are today.

Constant improvement requires changing the way you are thinking and doing it currently. Without changing input—output will not change for the better. Without seeking the needed information or training, you will most likely not allow yourself to change input. Without holding yourself accountable, you will never allow yourself to improve.

**Quality, Service, and Value is a constantly moving target—but it can be an exciting game to play if you desire to continue.**