

To Be or Not to Be: Facing Fundamental Changes in Collision Repair

"To Be or Not to Be"

That question has been a famous line for hundreds of years now, and today it can't be any more applicable.

- **To be...** proactive with the changes that are taking place in our Industry today?
- **To be...** involved in your business to improve and remain competitive?
- **To be...** looking for opportunities to strengthen your position in your market?
- **To be...** willing to change and adapt to your new changing business needs?
- **To be...** ready to get the training that is necessary to make all these possible?

Certainly, there are a great number of possible *"To Be's"*, but time will soon tell for those that are **Not to Be**.

Looking Back to Move Forward

Looking back, this type of transition also took place in the early 80s when new unibody entered our industry. The vehicles changed and so did the needs of the business, the equipment required, and also the training. It took a long time for many to catch up if they didn't decide to get out.

Today, however, it is just not limited to technical changes taking place, even though they also are a factor creeping up on us from many directions. There are so many special vehicles entering the marketplace today with very special requirements. How a similar-looking vehicle just a couple of years ago was to be repaired may very well not be the same as today. But today, the changes include some fundamental business changes and will require some hard business decisions that will need to be made.

The Need for Industry Involvement

Having worked with many shop owners worldwide, these changes are extremely painful for those that are currently on the disadvantaged side. What is disappointing is that most of what is and will continue to happen is not a surprise to those that stay involved in the Industry and participate on a State, Regional, and even National Level. Are they trying to stop these changes? No, for the most part, because these changes will happen with or without us. They, however, do stay tuned for the subtle areas that will affect their business direction and future, and make their decisions accordingly while many of the competitors are not even aware of the changes until it may be far past the easy point.

It is unfortunate that so few in our industry join their own industry trade associations, let alone participate regularly in State, Regional, or National Events. This resource can go a long way in keeping you abreast of the changes to come.

Today, you can't seem to pick up any industry publication without seeing articles and commentaries about State Farm's New Select Service Program. Believe it or not, it too was foretold and suggested a few years ago, but was anyone listening? Now that it is here or soon to

come to your area, it is the talk of the town (no pun intended). *Will it be this, will it be that... will I be on it or not?*

Certainly, it will evolve and certainly it will someday be understood, but today it is an unknown to many even though State Farm (mostly thanks to George Avery) has provided in numerous forums their current vision for the program in an open and honest discussion. It certainly looks as if it will require many to make a hard business decision in regards to pricing and value-added services to be provided. To some, this will not be easy.

To some, it will be *Not to Be*.

Accountability and Technology

But is this it? Certainly not. There is no doubt in my opinion the level of accountability, and the need to become self-managed through technology, is also going to become a difficult change to many. I can still remember thinking about how in the world would a fax machine ever be a valuable tool, then how a management system could be valuable (not to mention the \$30,000 computer)!

Today it is all about having information—instantly and precise. This is a great thing for those that know how to leverage the information; for others, it is like handing a repair manual to fix a NASA spacecraft written in Chinese. Where do we start?

New technology software tools that will be available to see where you are for every accountable ratio you will be reviewed on are just entering our industry. Self-auditing tools to ensure your estimate is precise have been here for a few years now, but are now becoming better understood and utilized. Training programs on the web with online learning centers are here and being utilized by your fellow market competitors to provide them an edge for today and in the future. But what is the majority of our Industry doing?

Often wondering what they are going to do today, or not realizing anything is changing—just business seems a little down from years before.

I have been in shops that the newest news they have received is "Nixon has left the Presidency." Read an Industry Publication? Subscribe to the E-Pillar? They don't even work on limousines! In my I-CAR days, I actually had an individual come up to me at a trade show booth and tell me when I asked him if he was familiar with I-CAR he replied, *"Yep... we had one of those ICARs in the shop last week!"*

So what is going to happen? For those that continue to do the right things for their business and stay abreast of what is happening while looking for the opportunities to increase their market share with sound business decisions—you certainly are doing what it takes **To Be**.

Those that are not—and probably are not reading this article or the hundreds of other informational articles available daily—well sorry... **NTB (Not To Be)**.