



AUTOMOTIVE TRAINING INTERNATIONAL

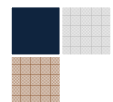
A New Kind of Fireman

by Jim Shaw

I was in a dealership Collision Center recently, and the Director said something that I've heard a thousand times before, "I'm just a Fireman, some days I feel like all I do is put out fires!". Now, anyone who has sat in that chair for more than 3 minutes knows exactly what he means. There is a seemingly endless supply of "fires" on any given day; from two Tech's calling in sick on the last day of the month, to the shop compressor going down and the parts have to be ordered in from Tumbleweed Junction in Wyoming and, the stagecoach only runs once a week (it left yesterday), or the Tech standing in your office at 3:45pm today who says "This new headlight assembly is broken and the car has to go today". Sound familiar?

Well Collision Center Directors and Managers, guess what? You **are** a Fireman, deal with it. There will always be something that will derail your plans on any given day, but the truth is we have more control over these disasters than we want to admit. Don't get me wrong, there will always be times when the fire is truly beyond your control and you'll have to make the tough decisions necessary to put it out, but what about the other times?

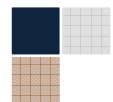
Maybe it's time we became Super Firemen (and women). Maybe, instead of waiting for someone to call in to the station (your office) to report a fire that is already burning out of control, you could pro-actively look for situations that will erupt if left alone. Maybe, we can put a few systems in place to prevent the fire even starting. Now, I know what you're thinking, "I'm too busy to do that". But we all know, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. The ten minutes you invest now to inspect the parts when they come in, or to write a complete and thorough supplement, will save you hours of scrambling on Friday afternoon when Joey says "This headlight assembly is broken and the car has to go today", or "I just realized we never ordered a grille". Again, sound familiar?





By now you're probably wondering what exactly *can* we do, and where do we begin? In reality, the list of ways for a fire to break out is endless so we can't include them all, but we can start with what are likely your most recent fires, and a few ideas to stimulate your thoughts. I know the first thing that will come to your mind will be parts delays, but let me caution you that most parts problems are self-inflicted. Let's put our Fireman's hat on and trace the fires back to where they started, drilling down to the real causes, so we can prevent them from happening again.

Were the recent fires caused by "parts issues"? If the answer is "Yes", here's where the "drilling down" comes in; Were the delays created because the Parts guy (or gal) forgot to order that bumper cover, or, was the part mis-packaged, damaged, lost by the Tech, or, (here's where the smoke comes in to play) were needed parts overlooked on the estimate (or supplement)? A poorly written estimate (or supplement) can masquerade as a parts problem, or, it can morph into other delays, such as waiting for re-inspections (which will be blamed on the insurance company) or creating scheduling conflicts with other work coming in, making it all late! Determining the correct answers to these questions will start you toward fire prevention, saving you time in the long run. Continuing down the "parts delay" path, are supplements in your shop completed and submitted in a timely fashion? Even if you answered "Yes", are the parts ordered right away, or do you wait for an approval (again, creating the illusion of a parts problem)? Next, and yes, we're still on parts issues, how many times have you seen an estimate (yours or an insurance company's) for damage down the right side, but the estimator inadvertently clicked on the "Left Front Strut" instead of the "Right Front Strut"? Do your Estimators "proof read" the estimates before ordering their parts? What about decals or emblems needed for a new fender? If the estimate includes a new "Right Fender" but no decals or emblems, isn't that something that should be caught (fire prevention) before placing the order? Remember what I said about "self-inflicted"? Now, let's finally talk about the Parts Department. Do you get good support from your Parts Department? A savvy Parts guy (or gal) would pick up on errors like this. Do you have a dedicated Parts Person? Parts get back-ordered, cross-shipped, discontinued, and orders cancelled, every day. Do you get updates during the day on parts you are expecting? Do you check them in when they arrive to make sure you get what you ordered, that they are in good condition, and, that they are for the correct side? As I said earlier, we don't have the room to include all of the ways that fires can develop if left unattended, in fact we've only scratched the surface on parts issues alone.





I think you are starting to get the picture, but let's look at another idea that will help fix some of the issues already covered, and pave the way for even more fire prevention. Any honest Collision Center Manager or Director will tell you they have more trouble getting cars out of the shop, than getting them in. In the interest of fire prevention, do you keep a Production-Log and have daily Production Meetings? You *should* review the progress and status of every vehicle in your shop at least twice a day, more if the vehicle has to go that day. If you are already doing this, you are well on your way to being a Super Fireman. If not, you're missing the boat. Would the Fireman in you rather find out about a broken headlight at 9:00 in the morning when there's still a chance to prevent a four-alarm fire, or, at 4:30pm when Mrs. Jones along with her four screaming brats are in the customer lounge, impatiently waiting to take delivery of her minivan so she can pick up the in-laws who landed at the airport half an hour ago? (Go ahead, tell me that's never happened!)

As usual, I've raised more questions than I've provided answers for. That's your job, and why you get the big bucks. If you want to make your life easier, you'll become a Super Fireman and actively look for where fires can break out and prevent them before they even get started. If not, you're doomed to having the same fires over and over, always wondering how they erupt. The choice is yours.



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