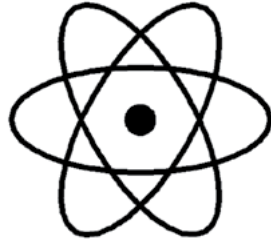


Underselling Automotive Technology

What do automotive students do after they graduate? When I say *do* I'm not referring to their personal activities, but rather what do they do vocationally? How many of them continue on to pursue careers as Automotive Techs? By extension, how many remain in the Auto Industry at all? Is it 10%? 20%? 50%? Certainly these numbers vary significantly between High School Automotive programs and Post-Secondary programs, but what percentage should define success for an automotive program and its graduates?



Perhaps we should first take a step back and ask, "How do we define success?" Is it when a majority of our former students are gainfully employed actively repairing vehicles in either a dealership or an independent shop? Why



is that our standard? Maybe a more pertinent question would be to ask, "How do the students define success for themselves?" The variation in responses between the two perspectives could prove to be interesting since the goals and motivations, and definition of success, are

likely to be quite different between instructors with years of experience and students just starting out. We also might benefit from a look at the expectations we have for our students as compared to their expectations for themselves. There is an old saying that 'If all you have is a hammer, then everything looks like a nail'. The bottom line is, "Are we guilty of seeing students only as potential techs, and therefore creating a disconnect with their perceptions of themselves?" Also, if we do see them through that limited lens, are we hurting our own ability to recruit students to automotive programs in the first place? As foolish as it may sound to ask, are we selling our automotive programs as Automotive Programs?

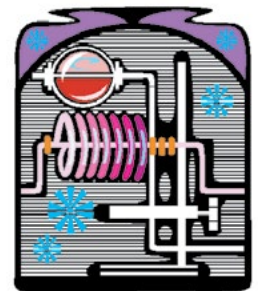
Allow me to elaborate... If an Auto Instructor is asked about their vocation the response might be, "I'm an Automotive Instructor", and if that is true, should it be? What

is automotive training after all? Among other things, it is:

- Electrical/Electronics (more now than ever before),
- Hydraulics such as from Power Steering, Brake, Automatic Transmission and lubrication systems,
- Mechanical systems throughout the entire driveline,
- Chemical reactions in batteries, cylinder combustion, and emissions,
- Thermodynamics in Cooling Systems, Air Conditioning, and electrical grids,
- Mathematics from alignment angles as well as other ratios, diameters, rotational and reciprocal motions (vibration) and
- Numerous other scientific and/or energy related areas.

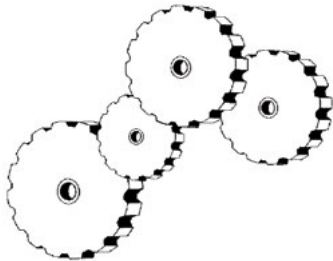
So why do we call it, or present it, as automotive training? Certainly we conduct the training using vehicles, which is logical, since they have all of the above systems, but do we express (intentionally or otherwise) an 'auto tech or nothing' mentality? If so, we may be losing good potential students who would benefit from the training (and fill the classes), but aren't interested in a future of turning wrenches. So what are the students interested in doing? Honestly, most of them haven't a clue. But for us, that is an opportunity big enough to drive a Mack through.

We've all heard over the years about the shortage of qualified technical personnel needed throughout all industries, even while training opportunities for many of those positions are disappearing, or simply don't exist... except for automotive. That exception puts us in an enviable position, if we will make the effort to exploit it. Quite simply, we have the chance to expand the way our programs are viewed from Automotive Training to Industry Training and to retask ourselves more as



Industry Instructors. Now, don't misunderstand, I'm not talking about implementing some useless PC, feel-good name changes to make students and instructors feel better about themselves. I'm talking about an honest pro-

motion of the benefits automotive students derive from learning about the different areas mentioned above, and the opportunities they can provide in most any industry, whether automotive or not. Those benefits are, in a word, Applied Skills...at least an introductory level that students and employers can then develop into Advanced Skills. Those skills are what employers ultimately want and are, in many cases, willing to pay to develop. As such, there is also no need for any automotive student to go deeply into debt for training that many companies will fund in order to get the skill sets they desire.

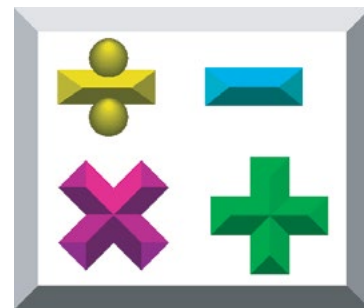


Stepping outside of our immediate automotive world, these are just a few of the abundant opportunities available for 'automotive skilled' individuals:

- Manufacturing – every facility, large and small, needs electrical and mechanical maintenance personnel
- Power Plant Maintenance – Coal, Gas, and Nuclear
- Green Energy – Solar and Wind Power
- Mining – Especially in the new Rare-Earth mines which require special equipment and methods
- Construction – Commercial equipment maintenance
- HVAC – Commercial and Residential technicians for Air Conditioning, Chillers, and Refrigeration units
- Machining – CNC Operators and Maintenance, Tool and Die Makers, and Prototype Builders
- Fabrication – Technicians and Maintenance for building (usually large) custom equipment for manufacturing facilities
- Aviation MRO – Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul of Aircraft and Aircraft Engines according to mandated schedules
- Agriculture – Design, Manufacture, and Maintain commercial equipment
- Performance Motorsports – Fabricate, Build, and Re-build chassis and engines on performance vehicles in

all types of racing

- Robotics – Maintain and Program Automated Robotic Systems in all manner of Industrial/Manufacturing environments
- Engineering – Automotive Skills will serve students well while pursuing an Electrical, Mechanical, Chemical, Structural, Materials, or other type of engineering degree
- Education – The next generation of Instructors in the sciences need good foundational technical backgrounds



Certainly all of these, and many others, are viable alternative occupational paths for students with automotive training. Of course, these are in addition to the opportunities inside the auto repair industry itself such as:

- Dealership/Independent Shop Tech
- Fleet Tech
- Mobile Tech
- Municipal Fleet Tech – Many municipalities are outsourcing vehicle maintenance and these contracts can be quite lucrative
- Service Writer
- Shop Owner
- All aspects of Parts Sales and Distribution
- Individual Tech – Many technicians make good money working in one-man operations
- ETC.

I suppose the bottom line is this...If we in the Automotive Training industry will realize the breadth and value of the skills that our students have, and that employers seek, then it should be easier (not easy, just easier) to sell administrators and potential students on the value of automotive programs. Hopefully, that will lead to both increased enrollment and funding. That's my two cents worth...Til next time.

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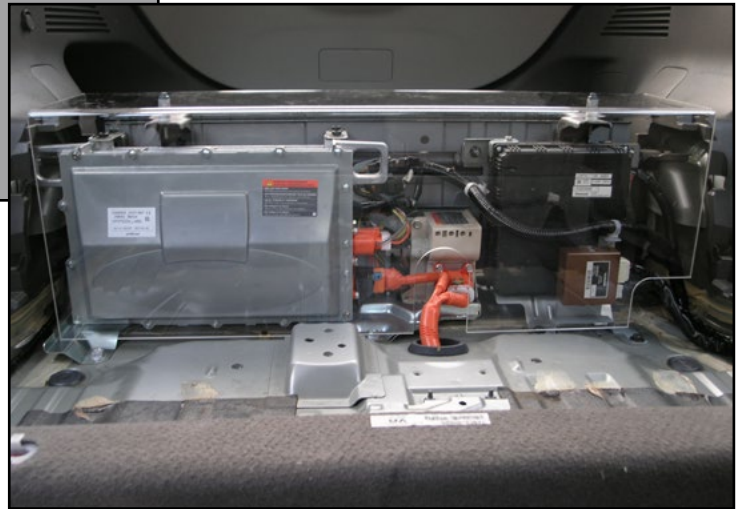
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