

Olson, M. 2018, May 8. *Quality collision repairs or not – management decides*. Retrieved from https://www.searchautoparts.com/abrn/shop-management-operations-collision-repair/quality-collision-repairs-or-not-%E2%80%94-management-decid?page=0.0&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-9JOvQZGgBIMVIDVpBWL57Ws_AWQbT7Bsd9OLcaB5Tg8UGTQ43QyYC3bEf99H_GM-Gqhd-3ZZCOekYchlIT7zhGliddKA&_hsmi=62857759

Quality collision repairs or not — management decides

By: [Mark Olson](#)

Tuesday, May 8, 2018 - 07:00

In last month's [column](#), I argued that quality control issues in this industry are more related to estimators and shop management than technicians. In that column, for example, I argued that most shops today have a quality control system in place; management just isn't ensuring that it's being followed.

I can point to shops that I've worked with where the owners or managers keep a close eye on how vehicles are being repaired. In those shops, it doesn't matter which body technician is assigned to any job; there's a pretty consistent product reaching the paint shop.

Technicians in those shops tell me that in previous shops where they've worked, one technician may be gluing everything, another one is welding, while another is MIG brazing everything — no matter what repair method is actually appropriate for a given job. In those shops, I can almost guarantee the estimators are inexperienced or poorly trained, or the management is focused only on certain numbers — CSI and gross profit, perhaps — and not on quality control.

I've tracked quality levels over time for both individuals and shops as a whole, and I can pretty much assure you what you will experience when you hire a new technician — or acquire a new shop of them. Initially, the quality will be fantastic. You'll be convinced it was a great hire or great acquisition.

But shortly thereafter, quality will drop a bit. Technicians will think, "I wonder if I can cut this small corner to save some time? I'll make more money, and I bet no one will probably notice."

That downward spiral, if not immediately halted, will only continue, until finally someone says, "Whoa, what is going on?" It's not until that moment that the technician (or team) knows the lowest acceptable quality level. They know

that all they have to do is keep it one notch above that. That's become your quality standard.

It's human nature, folks.

Conversely, if quality gets addressed as soon as it starts to decline just a bit, it will rebound and stay more consistently high over time. That proves it's a management issue, not a technician issue. I can point to example after example of the same crew at the same shop having widely differing quality levels over time based solely on the current management at that shop.

At one shop I worked with, for example, I saw consistently good quality over time, but then a 60-90-day decline. I called the location manager and learned it was her last day there, that she had decided to leave the company. I asked her confidentially when she'd made that decision, and she said about two months ago.

The quality decline wasn't because of any change in the production staff. It was because the location manager had stopped making it a priority. A new manager came in, and the quality rebounded to its previous high level.

In a similar instance when I saw a decline in quality at one MSO shop location, I called and learned the manager, Frank, had been moved to another location. Comparing the graphs of quality over time at the two locations, I could pinpoint right when that personnel change had been made; without any change in the production team, the quality at the shop Frank left declined while the quality at the shop he moved to improved.

At another MSO, two locations within the same market area consistently outperformed the MSO's other shops in that market in terms of quality. I did some research and learned those two locations were overseen by the same general manager — one who clearly was focused on quality.

Twenty years ago, quality control was a technician issue. But the industry has, out of necessity, increasingly come to rely on estimators and managers who have never fixed a car and who are being told — explicitly or implicitly — what's important and what numbers they need to succeed. If one of those numbers isn't quality, what incentive do they have to focus on it?

I also believe most technicians and production teams can and want to do quality work. Owners and managers just need to set the bar for that — and consistently maintain it.

