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FEATURE

THE ISSUES WITH ESTIMATORS NOT HAVING REPAIR KNOWLEDGE

Welcome to the age of "Millennials meet the Dinosaurs" in the collision repair industry. To be frank, we need to include the auto insurance industry adjusters in this scenario, too. Millennials or Generation Y (sometimes the Trophy Generation) are those born from about 1982 to 2004. The world often refers to this generation by their negative traits, like narcissism, entitlement, laziness, selfishness, rudeness, low work ethic and, of course, wanting everything to be easy. Now, the dinosaurs, or Baby Boomers, are those who refuse to acknowledge new technology and repair procedures. They say things like:

- "I have been doing this for years and never had an issue;"
- "Real techs can fix that;" and
- (my all-time favorite) "When I was a tech, I could fix that."

The old dinosaurs don't want to learn or change, and the new puppies think they know it all.

With our work at P&L Consultants, we see about 200 estimators or "damage assessors" (as we feel they should be called) a year, and our observations are that more than a few have become data entry slaves with poor time management skills. They get inundated with writing vehicles instead of analyzing them. For many, there is little time (and, in some cases, maybe a lack of will) to excel and improve their conditions. In their defense, most have not been trained in time management and damage analysis, and they have been subjected to increasingly unrealistic demands from their superiors. In this article, we will try to give standard operating procedures (SOPs) to help these professionals eliminate the waste and gain more time by doing it once correctly.

There are some in the damage appraisal industry who have become number counters, who pay little or no attention to detail and just point and click when writing an estimate. We believe that in order to fully blueprint or triage a vehicle, you must include pre-measure and a check of the OEM procedures. I cannot tell you how many times we walk into a shop and see antiquated frame or measuring equipment (or no electronic measuring at all), but see a big estimating cart. Many know I am affiliated with shops that are very successful, and there are common denominators between them all. These facilities:

- are heavily OEM-certified with aluminum;
- have electronic measuring;
- perform full triage and pre-measuring;
- ensure OEM repair information is referenced;
- conduct a group meeting prior to moving the vehicle to the holding area; and
- send inquiries to the Database Enhancement Gateway (DEGWeb.org).

There is no denominator that requires you to have an estimating cart.

The following are key SOPs that these shops use to help eliminate waste, know what needs to be done, know what is required and gain more time by being efficient:

1. Wash the vehicle. This will remove any dirt, grease, grim, waxes and foreign substances. Additionally, this will make the sustained damage more visible.
2. Take photos. The basics should be public VIN plate, VIN label, mileage, license plate, four corners, the front, rear, damaged area overall and damaged area close-ups.
3. Scan the vehicle through the data link connector (DLC). Most diagnostic trouble codes (DTCs) will not illuminate a malfunction indicator lamp (MIL). The only way to ensure the vehicle systems are operating correctly is to scan the system. Additionally, you will need to check the supplement restraint system (SRS) for faults and see if the occupant weight classification system (OWCS) is out of parameters.
4. Disassemble the vehicle to prepare for pre-measuring and take more photos of the vehicle and disassembly.
5. Wrap and store all non-damaged removed components in bubble wrap.
6. Measure the vehicle three-dimensionally to determine the extent of the sustained damage to the structure and suspension components. Examine the data readings to determine the repair plan and which components are repairable or require replacement.
7. Begin the damage report with analysis followed by writing (estimating). You can't write the car until you've determined what must be done and how to do it.
8. *Now here is the key*. Have two screens (minimum); three screens are better. Open the estimating system on one screen and the OEM technician collision repair information site (second choice is ALLDATA) on another. On the last screen, open your document folder with the position statements. First, on the OEM repair information site, check the construction materials information to determine what the substrates are (steel, aluminum, carbon, composite) and their strength classification (mild steel [MS], high-strength steel [HSS], high-strength low alloy steel [HSLA], dual phase [DP] or ultra/advanced high-strength steel [martensitic, boron-alloy]). Review the required replacement procedures for the replacement components and the additional materials required (rivets, adhesives, foams, chip guard,

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one-time-use components and hardware and so on). Once you are done with your research, go to the estimating database and start writing your damage report. Remember to keep with the family component that you are writing in, and add all the required materials and "not included" procedures in that section. Then, move to the next family component section. Add all your additional required procedures and operations under the "Miscellaneous" section. Additionally, determine the required labor time for set up on the structural repair bench, structural repair time (if allowed by the OEM), pre-measuring, measuring and anchor damage repair/primer/refinishing. During the damage report writing, check with the OEM procedures. If, during the damage report writing, there is any labor time missing (or if the labor times listed are insufficient during the repair process), make an inquiry to DEGWeb.org.

9. After the damage report is completed, review the report with the foreman, structural repair technician and parts manager and make any changes as necessary on the spot.

10. Once the group meeting has concluded, print or eFax your parts list to the OEM dealer for parts price verification. When the parts prices are verified, make any changes necessary and then your damage report can be completed. Studies have shown that this ultimately will become your final invoice. If written accurately, it should not change much at all.

11. The vehicle can now be placed into the holding area waiting for the parts to arrive and inspection by the insurer, if necessary. After the parts arrive, the foreman then can move forward with the repairs.

12. Morning meetings on progress will keep the customer service representatives (CSRs) up to date to better inform the vehicle owners. Additionally, the morning meetings will determine if any unforeseen issues have occurred during the repair. Remember that if the vehicle was properly blueprinted, there should be no unknown damage, unknown damaged components or need for a supplement. Also, there should be no parts delays, because you should not have started repairs until all the parts arrived. The only issues that could arise are damage to a component during the repair (mistake), a "sunsetted" component, an additional component being required for the opposite side or a failure in shop equipment.

Now we know this sounds easy (and it is), but change is hard. The personnel must want to change, and the management in the facility must lead the way. How can you start change? The best advice we can give you is to follow the SOPs in this feature. You also need to TRAIN, READ (and READ again), PRACTICE and, when necessary, COMPLAIN.

- TRAIN by taking classes on automotive repair (I-CAR, P&L Consultants workshops, Collision Advice courses, videos by Repair University). Take the equipment manufacturer's class for electronic measuring, wheel alignments, etc. Even if you do not or cannot actually repair the vehicles or perform wheel alignments, you will be able to read and understand the printout of the data.
- READ the OEM procedures over and over if you're a damage assessor. Understand the processes and protocols, and never assume. If you have any questions, ask the technician. Read the technical articles in *Hammer & Dolly*. Subscribe to and read *Repairer Driven News* by SCRS (repairerdrivennews.org).
- READ the equipment manufacturers' manuals, the Procedural Pages (P-Pages) for all three systems and the laws for insurance and repair facilities for your state.
- PRACTICE like when you first learned the estimating database system you currently use. You may have hated it, but you kept doing it and eventually learned the system. Now, you will need to practice measuring vehicles, scanning vehicles

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and reading wheel alignment readouts, measuring data and scan codes.

■ COMPLAIN when you review your damage reports and management systems, speak with your technicians and find inadequate labor charges, efficiencies and/or no labor time at all on procedures. This is when you will need to make an inquiry to DEGWeb.org to have them assist in correcting the mistake.

We hope this article helps you set up SOPs and make the necessary changes to become a more successful, efficient and knowledgeable damage assessor. **H&D**

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Executive Director's Thoughts

The article, while sometimes harsh, is our harsh reality. Larry and Jeff see this on a daily basis. What's worse, shops that need help the most probably have no idea how much better they could be.

- Jordan Hendler