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OLDEN DAYS

They're gone, but the rates hang around.

By Sam Piercey

Well, the year is already three quarters of the way through while I write this, so I'm not expecting anything big to change in between now and January 1, 2016. Now is as good a time as any to take a look at what we don't get, and just as important, who exactly doesn't get it. That's the big money question.

nice too), it's about putting more money into our collision repair facilities. We've always had to improve our equipment on a fairly regular basis or risk falling way behind, but this seems even more important than before, and the equipment is even more expensive.

The equipment guys aren't gouging. I'm sure they're selling it to us for as little as they can. Research and development,

THEY'VE GOT TO MAKE ENOUGH TO PAY BACK THE INVESTMENT.

We haven't seen a lot of new education programs come down the pike that will help us fill the labour hole that we've had for ... is it forever? Yeah, it's forever.

It seems obvious to me that we need new incentives, and maybe a new way to structure apprenticeships, if we want a lot of students approaching our doors and wanting to be a part of our industry.

There has been no increase in any of the programs that would allow us to pay our people more money. "Hey kids! Go to school and put in the time, effort and money to learn technical skills! We'll reward you with a lifetime of continuous training and hard work!" Money, not so much. When you look at it that way, why wouldn't a young person just pick a different trade? They might love cars and bodywork, but they could get a job as a tool and die maker and work on cars on the weekends at home. They'd probably enjoy it just as much and have more cash on hand to indulge that hobby.

It's not just our techs that could use a cash bump. Those of us on the ownership side know that we need more money too. This isn't about putting more money in our pockets (although that would be

testing, manufacturing ... all of these cost and they've got to make enough to pay back the investment or go out of business. It's exactly the same with us.

Frankly, as an industry, we need some help in making sure we can make these investments. This can come either from our insurance partners or government programs designed to keep industry moving. Or it could be a combination of both.

We've seen more and more shops close down over the last few years. I don't think we've hit the bottom yet. Sure, the industry was overcapacity. Is it still overcapacity? Or are otherwise good shops being forced to shut because they can't afford new equipment? It's hard to tell, and I worry that we'll reduce capacity to the point where we won't have enough to satisfy our customers.

The business has changed. Equipment has changed. Standards have changed. Why is it our rates are the same as way back then? CRM



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