

CHAPTER 15 The Industry's Concept Of "Entry Level"

A. Sources Of Information



Students completing a Collision Repair Technology program must meet certain standards to be employable within the Collision Industry. These standards:

- may vary somewhat by region or market area.
- change as technology and the Industry changes.

In order for a training program to successfully serve its students and the Industry, the program must understand what skills the Industry requires "quality entry-level" technicians to have.

An entry-level technician generally is defined as one who has not earned wages in the Industry on a full-time basis. Those who have worked in the Industry part-time, such as students involved in co-op programs, generally are still considered as entry-level.

An entry-level technician, however, has been exposed to collision repair or refinishing training. Information on what skills the Industry expects an entry-level technician to possess following this training is available in a number of ways:

- A number of national surveys, sponsored by the I-CAR Education Foundation, Texas State Technical College-Waco and the Collision Industry Conference (CIC), have focused on entry-level requirements. The surveys first created a list of skills required, then asked those surveyed to prioritize the skills. Both technical and employability (SCANS) skills were covered in the surveys. A copy of the survey results starts on page 15-5.
- Many training programs conduct formal or informal surveys of employers in their area. These surveys ask employers to list the skills required of entry-level technicians, or to rank in order of importance a provided list of skills.

Not all training programs can provide students with adequate exposure to all skills required by the Industry. These programs should focus on the skills given the highest priority by employers.

B. On-Going Review

Industry needs will continue to change. Regular contact with the Industry is necessary to determine if the training program continues to produce entry-level technicians with the skills needed.

This contact may include:

- formal or informal surveys of employers.
- discussion of entry-level skill requirements during Advisory Committee meetings.
- review of new or updated survey results.
- formal or informal surveys of program graduates regarding their early experiences in the Industry.

C. Employer Surveys

Surveys of employers regarding entry-level technician skills can be conducted in a number of ways.

- Phone surveys can be used if they are brief. They will be most effective if callers have the name of the person they wish to speak to.
- Written surveys returned by mail or fax are the most common. They offer confidentiality, and provide employers with more time to consider their responses. Prepare the survey carefully. Test it by asking several employers to complete it. Ask them for suggestions for changes. A 1 or 2-page survey is likely to get better response than a longer survey.
- A more informal but often effective survey method is to visit employers. Again, these personal surveys must be brief unless an appointment is made in advance. Spending a day riding with an Industry sales representative can be an effective way to conduct this type of survey.



All surveys should be focused. Do not try to gather too much information from one survey. Only ask for information for which there is an immediate need. A sample School Survey starts on page 15-9.

Choose the survey group carefully. Not all employers in an area need to be surveyed. Concentrate on the type of collision repair facilities that would likely hire your students.

Lists of shops may be available at little or no charge through:

- insurance claims offices.
- telephone directories.
- trade associations or publications.
- Industry suppliers.

Industry Skills Survey

Executive Summary
of the
2nd COLLISION REPAIR INDUSTRY SKILLS SURVEY
1992

Sponsored by ■ I-CAR Education Foundation ■ TSTC-Waco, TX ■ Collision Industry Conference

BACKGROUND

The field of automotive collision repair has become increasingly high-tech. In the past five years, paint, electronic, and safety systems have all undergone rapid changes. There is every indication that this rapid pace of change will continue well into the future.

These technological changes also mean that technicians, and the training they receive, must also change. The technical schools, at both the secondary and post-secondary level, are expected to provide the training for entry-level personnel. However, it is the responsibility of the employers in the industry to tell the schools what to teach. In order to identify industry requirements, the I-CAR Education Foundation, TSTC - Waco, Texas and the Collision Industry Conference (CIC) Education Committee together have conducted two surveys.

The first survey, conducted in 1991, served to identify and prioritize a large group of skills. However, it did not categorize these skills by job function; and it only identified three levels of priority. This second survey further refined the first survey by forcing prioritization and categorizing by job function. It also introduced the concept of employability skills.

SAMPLE

The survey was distributed in June, 1992 to collision repair facilities which had some contact with I-CAR within the past twelve months. These tend to be slightly larger, more progressive, better equipped and better managed than the total population of facilities. Therefore, this sample does not represent a true cross-section of the industry. However, it is believed that it does represent a true cross-section of future employers.

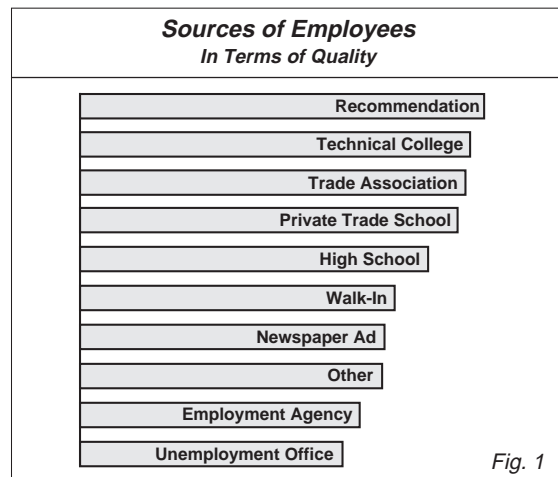
The 160 responses included in the survey are geographically distributed in proportion to the general population and are statistically valid. They also include urban and rural populations, plus independents and car dealers, all in proportion to the population.

"Entry Level," for the purposes of this survey, is defined as a person who has not previously earned wages on a full-time basis in the industry. People who have worked part-time or as co-op students would still be classified as entry-level.

RESULTS

Sources of Employees

The respondents were asked to rate several sources of entry-level employees in terms of the quality of people they produce. A personal recommendation produces the highest quality, while employment agencies and unemployment offices produce the lowest. This is shown in Figure 1.



The survey also asked:

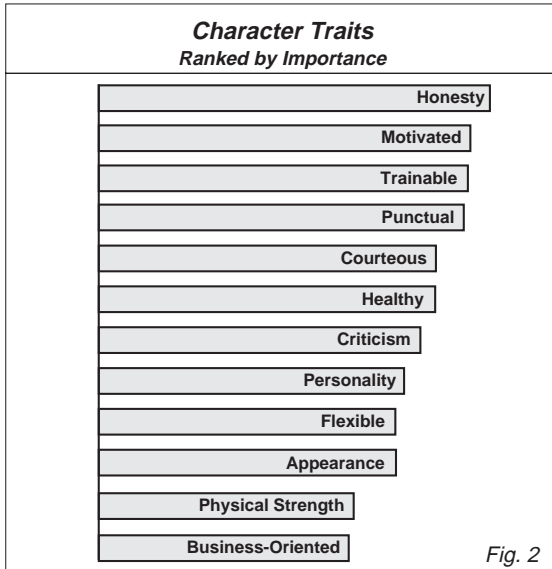
"Do you feel that your local technical school has a meaningful collision repair program?"

Over half the respondents (52%) did not feel that the local high school program was meaningful. The technical colleges scored somewhat better with 65% "yes," yet there appears to be room for substantial improvement.

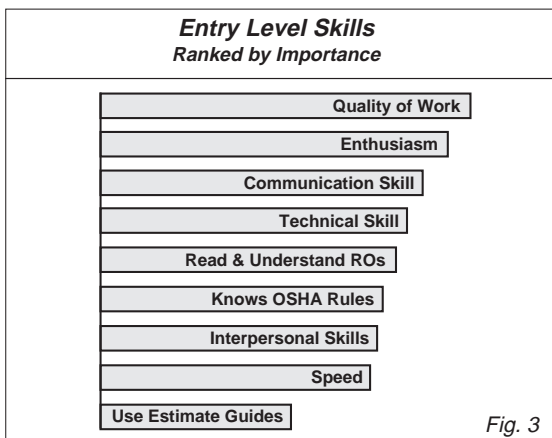
Industry Skills Survey (cont'd)

Employability Skills

The industry has often said that employability skills are at least as important as technical skills. This survey identified and prioritized the most important. In terms of character traits, Honesty and Motivation ranked far higher than Physical Strength or Business Orientation. The top traits are shown in Figure 2.



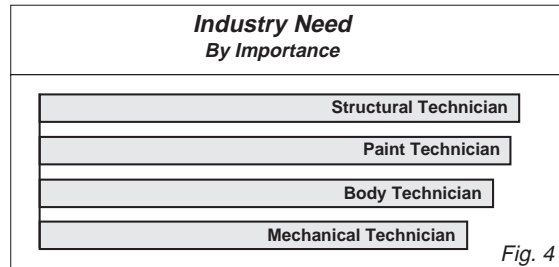
In terms of general skills, Figure 3 ranks the top nine. It should be noted that while Enthusiasm and Communication Skills ranked higher on the list than Technical Skills, the top ranking is an even blend of both employability and technical skills. Therefore, both appear to be important in an entry-level person.



Job Functions

One of the most important aspects of this survey is that for the first time, a distinction was made between job functions. It was becoming more obvious that increased specialization might be an option for the school programs of longer duration. In addition, many programs are too short to cover everything in depth. Therefore, if they could concentrate on only the most important skills, they could produce a more job-ready graduate.

Interestingly, the industry ranks its needs for Structural Technicians, Paint Technicians and Body (non-structural) Technicians almost identically. Surprisingly, the need for Collision Repair Mechanical Technicians was ranked nearly as high as the other three. This is illustrated in Figure 4.



Figures 5,6,7 & 8 illustrate the top ten most important technical skills for each of the four job functions. It is believed that if a school were to concentrate on these top-ranked skills, and encourage the candidate to develop ability, quality and speed, a very employable graduate would result.

Training & Experience vs. Wages

Until this group began studying the entry-level training process, the industry had been classifying all entry-level people in a single category, regardless of training and experience. I-CAR had proposed that there should be some distinctions made, and that there should be various levels of wages that recognized various levels of productivity and skill. It was also believed that a co-op experience could help improve an entry-level person's productivity and therefore increase the starting wage. This was outlined in the "I-CAR Collision Repair Training Model." (see Figure 10 on page 4)

Industry Skills Survey (cont'd)

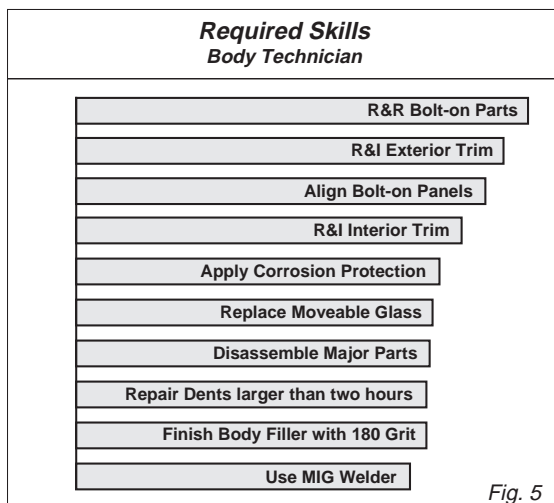


Fig. 5

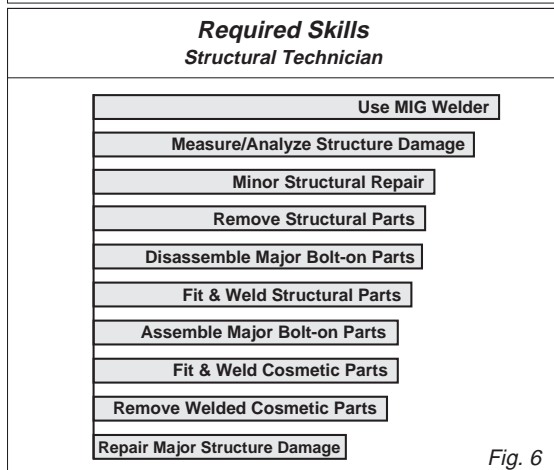


Fig. 6

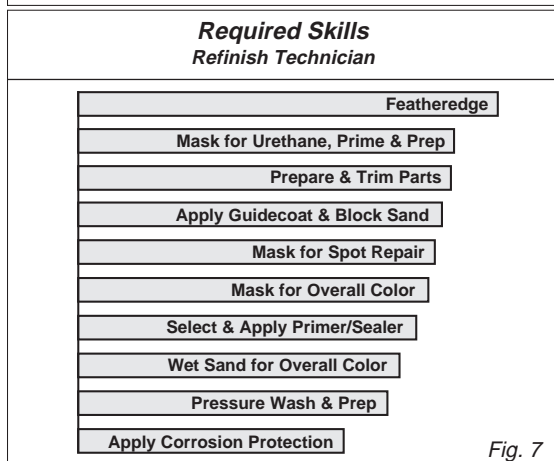


Fig. 7

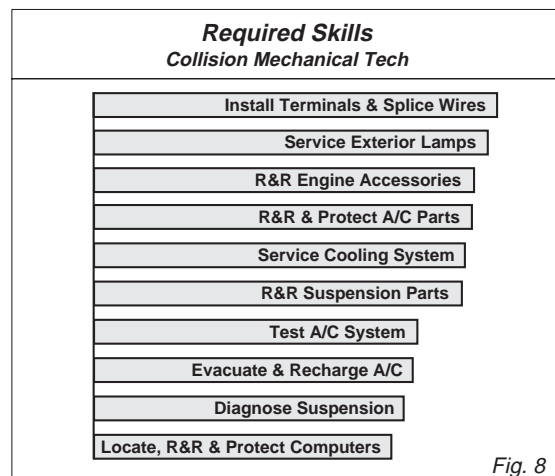


Fig. 8

Training & Experience vs. Wages (cont'd)

Various other industries' apprenticeship programs also indicated that this concept might be utilized in the collision repair industry to improve the differentiation in starting wages.

To test this concept, the survey asked:

"Do you agree that different levels of training and work experience might qualify for different starting wages?"

Overwhelmingly, 94% of the respondents said "yes." They were then asked to assign a "Percentage of Journeyman's Wage" to each of four levels of training and experience that roughly parallel the I-CAR Model. The results are shown in Figure 9.

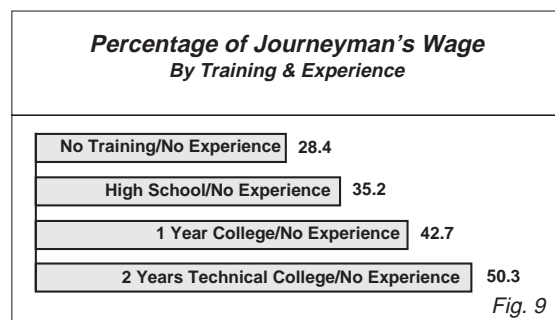
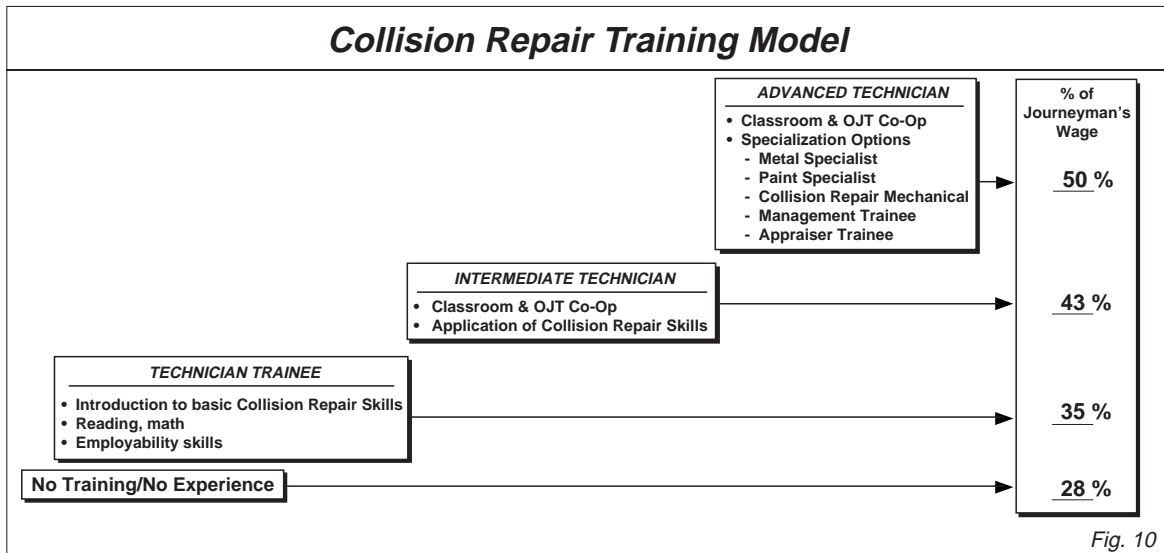


Fig. 9

It is interesting to note that this progression has approximately equal steps that could prove quite satisfying to an entry-level candidate.

Industry Skills Survey (cont'd)



Industry Involvement with Schools

Since it is believed that a co-op work experience is desirable, it was important to find out if shops would be willing to participate. The survey asked:

"Would you be willing to participate in a co-operative education program with your local technical school to improve the quality of entry-level graduates?"

The industry indicated its support for this concept, as 76% of respondents said "yes."

One characteristic of the most outstanding technical school programs is that they have very active Advisory Committees. The survey asked two questions about Advisory Committee involvement:

Are you a member of a technical school's Advisory Committee?

16% said "Yes" 84% said "No"

If "no," would you serve if asked?

65% said "Yes" 34% said "No"

While not many people currently participate with schools, they are definitely willing to help. This should serve as a positive indicator to the technical schools.

CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions can be drawn from this survey:

- The Collision Repair Industry segment sampled has a clear picture of what it expects in an entry-level employee.
- Employability and problem-solving skills are equally as important as technical skills and should be part of any training program.
- The industry believes there is room for improvement in the quality of technical school programs, particularly at the secondary level. It is also willing to assist in improving those programs.
- The industry is willing to pay higher entry-level wages for higher levels of skills and productivity. Therefore, quality and speed should be part of any grading system.
- Growing importance of Collision Repair Mechanical Technicians indicates a need for specialized training in this area.

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Sample Survey Of Employers

(SCHOOL LETTERHEAD)

COLLISION REPAIR INDUSTRY SURVEY

Company name _____

Name and title of person completing survey _____

Shop address _____

Shop phone, fax numbers _____

Type of shop

- Independent
- Dealership
- Franchise

Number of employees

- _____ Metal technicians
- _____ Structural technicians
- _____ Refinish technicians
- _____ Shop helpers
- _____ Paint preppers/helpers
- _____ Detailers
- _____ Mechanical technicians
- _____ Sales/Estimators
- _____ Other office staff
- _____ TOTAL

Do you require technicians to be...

- | | | |
|---------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| ASE-certified | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| I-CAR-trained | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |

Have you hired a graduate of (NAME OF SCHOOL'S) Collision Repair Technology program?

- Yes No

If you had an opening for an entry-level technician in the future, would you hire a graduate of (NAME OF SCHOOL'S) Collision Repair Technology program?

- Yes No

Are you interested in finding out about having a student in the (NAME OF SCHOOL'S) Collision Repair Technology program work in your shop part-time while attending school as part of the school's co-op program?

- Yes No

Sample Survey Of Employers (cont'd)

What is the average starting wage of entry-level technicians in your shop?

Metal or frame technician \$ _____ per hour
Painter \$ _____ per hour

What is the average wage of the technicians in your shop with two or more years of experience?

Metal or frame technician \$ _____ per hour
Painter \$ _____ per hour

Which of the following are the five most important non-technical qualifications you look for in a potential employee?

- Honesty
- Motivation
- Trainable
- Punctual
- Courteous
- Healthy
- Accepts criticism well
- Flexible
- Personality
- Appearance
- Physical strength
- Other

What are the five most important technical skills you look for in an entry-level...

| | |
|---------------------------------|---------|
| Metal technician | 1 _____ |
| | 2 _____ |
| | 3 _____ |
| | 4 _____ |
| | 5 _____ |
| Refinish technician | 1 _____ |
| | 2 _____ |
| | 3 _____ |
| | 4 _____ |
| | 5 _____ |
| Structural technician | 1 _____ |
| | 2 _____ |
| | 3 _____ |
| | 4 _____ |
| | 5 _____ |
| Collision mechanical technician | 1 _____ |
| | 2 _____ |
| | 3 _____ |
| | 4 _____ |
| | 5 _____ |