

The Danger of “Shadowing”, Then Vs. Now, Why You Chose Paintless, and How to Fix Big, Stretched Dents

Bet this is going to sound hokey, but I keep you close to my heart.

I have never been the touchy-feely type, but one cannot be a good teacher without empathy.

To do so, I must practice feeling your pain in my heart.

I do remember what it was like learning, practicing, being awful at first.

Trouble is, we also forget.

Have to. It is an inborn coping mechanism. A tool for progress which selectively keeps good memories and forgets the bad. Its why and how you build confidence. Forget the losses and treasure the wins. Its the human spirit we celebrate. But here’s the thing. You forget some important things along the way.

So, there you are learning, practicing. Working as much as you can to hone your skill.

Then one day, you’re out and you see a PDR tech working.

A sudden sense of camaraderie sweeps over you like you just found a long lost friend.

“He’s one of me, I’m one of him. We are brethren in paintless. Soldiers in the same army,” you think to yourself.

You approach this kindred soul, ready to high five and bump fists, to swap stories of battle and bloodied knuckles.

Sad to say, it just is not going to happen. Unless you find a rare person, you will be eyed with tons of suspicion, even hatred.

How dare you attempt to do what they do? Are you just here to ask free advice?

Too many well meaning beginners have in their minds the concept of “shadowing” a PDR tech.

“If I approach this guy and just ask to go with him for a few days, he’ll want to help me.”

Or, “Tim, can I come shadow with you for a day, or two? I’ll just be in the background, you won’t have to train me, really. I’ll just be there to observe.”

Um... let me think.

Actually, I don’t even have to think about it.

No.

Why Not?

First, its not in your best interests.

Second, the most important lesson has to do with value.

As you practice, as you improve, your experience is unique, but certain parts of it are not. The frustration, the time spent, all new techs *must* go through the same thing.

Here’s the problem. Your “pain-memory-eraser” will make you forget the struggle. Because the memory is fading, you will be tempted to try and “help” someone into the business. Call it over confidence, a desire to help, benevolence, philanthropy, whatever.

You will want to help someone, and the worst part is, your newfound skill will have you thinking you can help them get where you are, *and* avoid all the pain you are currently trying hard to forget.

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I have written before about the butterfly and the emergence from the cocoon. How the struggle is needed for the power to fly. It is by design.

There is life in this struggle.

Do you place high value on what you know? What you've been through? Will you give it away? Will you help a caterpillar out of his cocoon and kill him in the process?

I will tell you, being a teacher is a wonderful thing. I want you to enjoy it one day, but not for free. Not ever.

There must be some exchange of value (not always money) or there is no struggle. No striving on the student's part.

I hope you will say the same when your day comes to be the shadowee.

In a perfect world free of personality flaws and greedy, selfish influence, I will teach for free. For then it will work.

Today, to be effective, we must watch where we cast our pearls.

There are a fair number of techs who hate my guts for sharing as I do.

Others don't hate me, but know I'm good with dents and a good teacher. This worries them.

One friend and fellow tech, talked to his wife about it. She wisely told him, "Don't you ever forget the hours you spent in the basement, practicing. That was all you.

You went through it, no one can take this away from you."

And she is right.

So, before you walk up to that PDR tech with visions of back slapping and chumming it up in your head, remember this. He's a butterfly and you are still a

caterpillar. To him, a worm. Don't worry, you will be him one day, and then you can fly together. (though truth be told, you will rarely cross paths). Until then, don't ask him to kill you with free help.

Go home, build your cocoon, wriggle your way out, and spread your wings.

Ouch. Now the "pain-memory" is back again.

Ok, since we've opened the door, there is a recurring question I have about learning dents.

"Is it easier to learn today vs. seventeen years ago?"

The obvious answer, you would think, is yes.

In 1992, there were no internet forums. (Come to think of it, there was no internet!)

No Paintless Mentor DVD's filmed with "You See What I See".

No Mobile Tech Expos, no proliferation of schools and trainers and re-trainers.

So really, today, there is more information than ever before.

Information is good, it helps get you going, overcome inertia and all that. It can mean the difference between working and not working. Explaining PDR has never been done better than today. The tools are better, the lights for sure are better, and many will claim, the training is better.

1992?

Near total isolation. Everything I knew, I learned from my boss. No internet, no re-

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trainers around, no tool companies existed yet.

How in the world did we manage?

Quite well, thank you.

Truth is, we prospered because we had no distraction. We learned for ourselves because this was all we could do. We had no choice, and therein lies the answer.

Believe me, as a worm, I craved the distraction which is available today.

“Man, this is hard! It shouldn’t be this hard. Should it?”

Back then, my boss told me yes, its what he went through and to “just stay the course, keep going. Its what I did.”

Today, you can Google the above question as a search. What would you get?

You would find many (seemingly) helpful souls who would say you’ve learned all wrong, that you can’t learn from video, that their way is better, on and on it goes.

Look, I’m happy there are solutions and improvements to learning. I’m proud to be part of it. But only a butterfly can tell you “keep going, this is totally worth it.”

If you crave distraction, you can go to the forums. Its where the complainers go to complain. And you’re forgiven for this, because yes, it *feels* like empathy.

At the very instant you do spread your wings, you’ll learn what every butterfly already knows. Its the worms who make all the noise.

Work Less, Make More

May I recommend a book to you? “The 4 hour work week” by Tim Ferris.

It is well written and highly inspiring, especially the first couple of chapters.

Typically, I read a book, and then spew its contents on my wife and tell her what its about. I repeat this same process, one by one with my boys.

Not this time. The stuff is so different, so compelling, the only way its contents can have full effect is to read it.

The ideas Tim shares are so good, I wanted Karen to own them for herself.

Not just because I repeated it.

So, at the risk of spoiling it for you, I’m going to spew (parts of it) it on this page.

Look out.

The basic premise is not necessarily new, the author encourages you to live a retired life now, instead of putting it off 20, 30 or even 40 years.

He casts a spotlight on the myths of the current employment system. Work - retire - then really start living.

A word of caution, not everyone will like what he says. So it goes with shattering illusions. You might not like him or his ways of winning, because he breaks the rules.

A lot.

If you were in a competitive match with him (he’s a fighter), you’d call him a cheater.

But he’ll ring your bell with this mental picture:

What would you do today if your basic needs were met and didn’t need to worry about punching a clock from 9 to 5?

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Tim uses his freedom to travel to, and then living for months in exotic places. While there, his job is to learn the language, and find a new master to train him in his field.

So, what would you do? What would you learn?

The thought is uncomfortable, right? Was for me.

Especially given the things one must do to create the right circumstances.

There's power in the last sentence. Read it again.

If you say, "when I retire, then I will...."

Or, "just as soon as I (have, get, do, take care of) then I can..."

Tim's telling us in "4-hour work week" that "when" and "as soon as" are here now.

Or at least, much closer than retirement.

"But I can't be thinking about living a retired life now, (in this economy, with my circumstances, the way things are)!"

Ok. I felt these self-imposed restraints at times. Most do.

Which got me thinking, Why?

I mean, why did you take an interest in Paintless repair?

Was it freedom? Extra income? As a vehicle to help you fulfill your other goals?

See, most people watch a dent repaired and are amazed. Then suddenly they become experts at math. They divide the expense by the time and arrive at a sum that is quite attractive.

But why?

Why do we all want to make more in less time?

Psychologists call this "laddering up".

Keep going farther up and back until you get to the root or topmost reason.

Often, the path to what you want is a series of discomforts you deal with one by one. The last one preps you for the next and on and on.

Many circumvent this with the illusion of job security, but, I digress.

Never a Straight Line

In a nutshell, the path for me was going from salary to commission. Now I was responsible for my own time and earnings. No more clock watching, except to try and beat it.

I remember working at a dealership body shop and going from hourly to the mighty commish.

I stopped punching the clock.

Why should I? They don't need my hours any more, just my flag sheet.

Turns out, for reasons I won't go into here, they do need it, and soon enough the front office was telling me to punch in and out once again.

It got worse when the end of week rolled around and no more cars to fix.

"Hey boss. Nothing to do, going home."

"You need to hang out for a bit more. In case a car comes in," he shot back.

Boom. Vision of commission autonomy and freedom shattered.

So, when the door to PDR opened to me, I was primed and ready.

Maybe it was the same for you.

Funny. It was actually more of the same those first few years in paintless. I doubled my income and had even more time to

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spare. Once again I found myself sitting at the shop.

Still, time freedom is what I wanted, and now I had it, sort of.

If you can't keep me busy, its OK, I'll bring a book. Or 5 or 10. This was long before internet.

At this point, your eyes just glazed over. I just mentioned books for the second time. Here's the thing:

You want to know why you were attracted to me and my stuff?

Because you are just as addicted to learning as I.

Its both the good and bad news about owning your own business. If you want to move ahead, you'll wisely place yourself at the edge of incompetence. Not quite qualified for the expanding role, but willing to learn.

What you'll discover in time is what doors paintless repair will open for you, too.

As you settle in and have more time, and you will, the trick is to fill it with productive tasks.

Sure, include recreation, but don't waste what you've been given.

This is the point of "4 Hour Workweek".

Finding time through delegation, outsourcing and better choices.

Then using said time to expand *yourself* even further.

During slow periods, I've studied real estate, electronics, photography, web design, and marketing.

I never went to college, but have invested a 'hole bunch in education.

What will you choose to do with your time freedom?

Do you have hobbies? Kids? Volunteer work?

All of these are great reasons for diving into learning mode.

Standing here, I can tell you PDR is an excellent vehicle for gaining this time freedom. Do your kids have a school function you want to be at? Go. You can do what you want.

You don't need no stinkin' permission. You'll work hard at times. You'll work long days. But there will also be times when there's less to do. You'll fill this time with productive things, I know.

And you'll have the means to do it. At the times of higher earning, you can make things the way you want. Don't like your house? Move.

Funds to finance a project? Get caught up on bills?

PDR lends itself very well to all these goals. It is still a good business, a great vehicle. In my friends words, 'Why else are there high dollar guys who've stuck around for 20 years?'

So remember, whatever level you are at, you will build new cocoons. Find new endeavors which will make you uncomfortable. It is my belief you will face these with strength. Why? Because learning PDR is not easy, though it is simple.

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Now that you've crossed this bridge, you'll find yourself rubbing your hands together and asking, "What's next?"

For now lets work on some:

Large Stretched Dents

Almost all of today's cars are subject to stretching, even on smaller dents. The repair is not complete until it is firm and will not fall back in.

Why do you have to do it this way?

Really, you are cheating. Here is the truth: this dent really needs an open flame torch to heat and re-crystallize the broken grains of metal at the bottom of the dent. But this is pointless.

Since we are working cold, our only choice is to work harden the broken crystals at room temperature.

How to begin:

Start with a blunt tool, or make a tool blunt by covering it with a plastic tip, or heavy tape, or leather taped on with electrical tape. Or if you have them and prefer, use a tool which accepts screw on tips.

Why?

You are trying to bring up as much as possible without visible, permanent pushes. Often a deep dent is tough to read, due to its depth. It also has tons of resistance, so each push will be over emphasized.

What to avoid:

Going too high at any time and sharp over pushes at the beginning.

Why? If you go too high, you will re-stretch the metal, and those sharp pushes

become points of resistance, which block flow.

How do you work harden? You work it! After the initial large area lift up with blunt tool, you will take it up with small tightly grouped pushes, then press down with your finger.

When you push with your finger, you just want to make it fall, which it naturally wants to do at this point in its current state. You want to avoid using knock down, just your finger or thumb. If it takes a lot of pressure, you may have raised it too high on last round.

It is this up and down which will eventually tighten it up. You're going to need to do it a lot!

What will it look like?

Remember, it is work hardened in the center. You will have extra orange peel or texture there.

Here is a big secret every hail tech and door dinger knows to make themselves look good. Towards the end of the repair, say 80% done, you want to sand and buff with 2000 grit paper.

Doing it wet is probably best, but I almost always do it dry. Dry sanding is risky with finer grits because if you have a large chunk of grit between the paper and car, you're left with a spot hard to buff. So, I'm careful and listen for bad noises from the sandpaper. Now you grab the buffer with compound and wheel on a drill.

Why take this step? At the end of your sharp dent tightening exercise, you will be left with lots of "noise" or push marks.

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These are a by product of your multiple pushes needed for the tightening process. After this, same as first, push with finger, it may still fall down. Though hopefully, the area will be much smaller. This tells you its still not tight.

This next part will seem counter intuitive since you just made it smooth with a buff. So, here is where you do what you don't want. Make a slight, sharp high push and push down with finger.

Pay close attention here. This is truly Black Art stuff I'm telling you.

If you are near the end of the tightening process, the high should just disappear when you push down with your finger.

I know, it doesn't seem possible but it works. Where did the high go? It flowed back into the work hardened metal.

Very few seasoned techs are privy to what I just told you.

You may not believe it till you see it. With today's metal, you'll see it a lot.

If your high stays, you might have pushed too hard. This is trial and error. If it does stay, you're safe to use the knock down now.

Just a word about this; I've said push down with your finger, but this doesn't mean you haven't used the knock down some to get to this point. I would say 80 percent of the action will come from your finger though.

If this is working, the center which goes low from weakness will start getting smaller.

Be patient. It is not unusual to spend ten times the amount of time on shrinking and tightening a dent compared to one not stretched.

And please don't hate me, but it won't always work.

I've had some Toyota's where there was just no way to make it stay, the stretched area was just too large to be supported by the surrounding metal.

This is, by the way, what you are doing. Work harden the center enough to where it is stiff. It no longer falls in, since its stiff, but will now be level and supported by the good metal around it, which is not stretched.

Lather. Rinse. Repeat.

When you're done you should have a level area with some texture. When its pushed down, it may give in, but snaps back to level. Think Oil Can, but level, and not obvious, except for the slight texture difference.

To know if you are done, ask what if he waxes the car? Will it go down and return safely? Am I confident this will stay up?

As always,

Happy (lots and lots) of pushing,

Tim Olson

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