

Who's Afraid of PDR? How to Kill Your Dent Fears

Johnny Rocket was paralyzed. He had spent hours of PDR practice on junk panels, but now he was asking for money. He had been scared to charge for his work, and this kept him out of the market a month longer than he planned already.

His family was growing impatient. His wife? He knew she believed in him, but something in her eyes had changed. Was it disappointment? Did she see him as a sucker grasping at straws?

His fear of disappointing her now loomed stronger than anything else. He did not want to let her down

So he pulled the trigger.

His first paying customer came to him just like Tim said it would happen.

But he was unprepared for the new fears now gripping him. This strange feeling clamped down like a pit bull with its jaw locked on its prey.

He noticed his mouth was dry and full of cotton, now that real money was at stake.

“What am I afraid of?” he mused.

Slowly, the big monster in his mind's closet came into focus. As he took deep breaths, he realized there was not just one large fear, rather, many smaller goblins lurking in his mind.

This caused him to chuckle a little and, as he smiled, he felt a new power well up from within. In this instant, he decided to be his own hero.

To take on and slay his foes one by one.

“They live in my mind. Since they are here, there must be a way to beat them here, too.”

To tip the odds in his favor, he decided to shine a light on them one at a time. To turn the lights on and expose their weaknesses. As he carved up the fears, he gave them each a name.

The first was “I'm not good enough”.

He could hear the words of this monster in his head, and he recognized it's voice. This one he'd heard all his life.

To make it real, he imagined the monster wearing a t-shirt with its name on the front. “Good,” he thought, “you sit over there while I see who else is here.”

Then, as he looked around his mind, he could see a few others, but none were quite as big as the first. At this moment, he knew the real muscle lie in the big fear he named “not good enough”.

Suddenly, it reminded him of the Looney Tunes cartoon he watched as a kid. You know, the one where the bulldog walked around with his pal the Terrier jumping from side to side?

The little dog, Chester was always picking fights for his buff companion, Spike the bulldog.

Johnny laughed again to himself at the thought.

He imagined himself going back to “not good enough” and this time branding him with a new name emblazoned on the back of his shirt, ‘Spike’ in three inch letters.

“Now, lets see what these little troublemakers are doing.” Johnny said out loud.

One by one, he saw the little yelping Chester's flitting around, doing their best to get Spike excited. He listened to their, mean, insulting, fight picking words.

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“Come on Spike, beat him up! There’s another PDR tech nearby. He’s not good enough. Give it to him!”

Another yelped, “Whop him, Spike! This dent is too big for him. He shoulda sent dis job to a real tech.”

Still another, “Let him have it, Spike! He ain’t good enough to get paid. Put ‘em up, put ‘em up.”

Johnny Rocket laughed one last time, imagining himself standing in his cape and tights, towering over ugly Spike and his yelping buddies.

“You might look rough and tough, Spike, but you don’t scare me. I know how to put you on a leash and keep you in a cage. I am the Alpha male in this pack.”

Johnny pictured Spike retreating with his tail between his legs, running away with the Chester Terriers in the lead.

Cowardly, one of them from a safe distance turned and said, “we’ll be back.”

“I’m sure you will.”

Then he sat down and started pushing.

F.E.A.R.

This story is humorous, but it is how it often plays out. If you’re like me, these fears will rear their ugly head on almost every dent you do.

I wish I could say they go away completely, but for me they still haunt.

If you have seen me fail (or at least give up after 60 pulls!) on the newest Glue Pull DVD (2009) you can see the fear on my face.

Gary, from Manchester, United Kingdom wrote,

Hi Tim , just a quick note to say the new glue pull dvd was very good. Also nice to see that you are also human and get stressed and frustrated at times. Well done .

Thank you, Gary. You are absolutely right, we are all human and all of us face fears about PDR.

I hope you will discover what Johnny Rocket did.

Fear is an acronym for False Evidence Appearing Real.

These kind of fears only have power over us when we let them in.

But you should also know not all fear is bad.

Fear can be healthy if it means you respect the limits of our process. Paint is only so flexible, metal can be overstretched, not every dent is fixable. When you fear, or respect these limits, you will prosper.

This kind of fear, or understanding the limits, will keep you working within them as often as possible.

Paint can crack, so we heat it when our dents are sharp. Paint can burn, too, so we only heat it so much.

We know its possible to create pressure traps in our worked panel, so we are careful to

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relieve points of stress with our knockdown when possible.

Too many times, though, these same fears can become unhealthy. Paint can crack. We know this.

Will you turn down every job you feel has the remote possibility of cracking? Is it your goal to go through your PDR career without ever cracking it?

You are in for disappointment, my friend. If you push the limits, it will happen.

It's all the things you do up front, to remove liability that matter most. Put the onus or responsibility back on the customer. Feel them out. If cracked paint is going to ruin their day or worse, their life, send them along to a body shop. You won't likely please them anyway.

Which dents scare you the most?

Truly, it is too often whichever one is next.

In many ways, I can think of a process no crueler than PDR. You can go along for days and weeks with no trouble. All along building confidence and getting stronger in your esteem for your ability and self worth.

Then, boom! One goes bad.

You can feel your face get red, as you are embarrassed. You feel the scorn of the whole world, as if they could all see it.

But they can't see.

And even if they could they likely wouldn't care.

Yet there you are. A once confident, capable tech, turned to a pile of mush, ready for the garbage bin.

We have to think like a quarterback.

Author Dan S. Kennedy had Troy Aikman alone in the green room right before a speaking engagement. He asked the former quarterback for the Dallas Cowboys football team this, "What is the single most important thing you need during a game?"

"That's easy. A very short memory. You make a major mistake and throw an interception. You get about 1 minute to fume and fret about it, then you have to forget. You're up again and better be ready to deliver."

You and I, we need balance, and the same short memory. We push 900 times and sometimes one is too much. We stand up, brush off and go again.

Warning signs

There are indicators you are giving the fear of your next dent too much power.

First, you may find yourself doing everything but starting the dent. Organizing your toolbox, the sudden urge to fix the broken tool which has been broken for some time.

You recognize this as procrastination. Putting off what you fear may be the pain of a mistake or worse, a failure to fix at all.

"What if I work for an hour and something goes bad, or it just won't shrink. I'll feel stupid for wasting the time."

Yes, this is possible. Again, you can play it safe.

Would you believe some of the angriest phone calls and emails I get are from techs (not my students) who won't do big dents?

There is nothing wrong with making this decision, but why are they angry? I'll tell you the real reason further down.

For now, this. When you are ready to tackle larger stuff (and you'll know it), it is at the moments when you put your backside on the line where you'll find the greatest rewards.

Another warning sign you are giving fear of the dent power, is going too fast. If you find yourself rushing through, your mind does not want to be here right now. Be comfortable

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with yourself and what may happen when you push. Let it happen and stay in the present moment. Can you see why no one on an airplane wants to see the face of a scared pilot? Too often the fear of a disaster has a way of making it come true.

Fear of large jobs

There is a threshold of pain you can stand, which is best dealt with in small chunks.

The army is now experimenting with burn patients and virtual reality.

When shown scenes of snow falling through a 3-D VR helmet, a patient's pain tolerance goes way up. These patients are subjected to a wound cleaning process every day called debridement, where their skin is scrubbed each day so it heals properly. This pain I cannot imagine and I hope none of us experience it.

But it is a lesson for us, in the sense of how much one is helped by the immersion experience of focusing on the snow fall, rather than the pain.

The intensity of such pain would be overwhelming if concentrated on.

Unbearable in the moment, cascading into a waterfall of torture in the imagination if one were to dwell on facing it for twenty minutes.

But the success of the distraction of the snow fall scene teaches us something. The mind can take more when dwelling on something other than the thought of the reality of the pain.

So here you are, faced with a big hail job with, say, a thousand dents all together. You feel overcome with anxiety as you think about each dent. Then you start doing math in your head. One thousand dents times 5 minutes each, that's ... a long time!

Cliche` by now, but it is true. 'How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time.'

Dr. Maltz, author of "Psychocybernetics" used the saying, "Once difficult, now easy".

In other words, the thing which scares you to death today, won't seem near as bad the second time and will soon enough become old hat. The day will come when you won't even flinch.

What you need to know is this. There is a very real, psychological time limit for finishing a repair. This is an imaginary time limit, different for each individual depending on experience and personality.

For me its three days. Really, two and a half. This is the amount of time I can spend on a car and still maintain a little of my sanity. If it takes longer, my morale and good attitude are gone.

At this point, I now hate the car in front of me with all my soul. The longer it takes, the more I curse my decision to even start doing PDR in the first place.

For you, it could well be that my half day car will take you three days to finish. Don't worry, this is normal and I once was there too.

You should also know that you will get faster.

So if you look at a job and you feel a twist in your gut, it really is good to listen to it. But endurance is what you will gain. Slow and steady wins the race.

Later, I'll tell you how you can raise your tolerance by creating your own "snow fall scene".

Large Dents

But for now, back to the fear of large dents.

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Remember the angry tech cursing me for taking on large dents?
How does what I do or what I teach encroach on his rights as a PDR tech?
You already see his fear of large dents has become irrational. But its his choice.
This is a whole other fear all together. Do you recognize its really a fear of being bested by another tech? Or, going further, a fear of losing his right to say no due to competition. How? There are no regulations in PDR, but there are standards.
No drilling is not a regulation or there would be no drilling anywhere, ever, on any repair. We know this is not the case.

It is a standard, because the customer has asked for it to be. When insurance companies say 'no drilling' due to fear of liability, this imposes a standard which in a short time became industry wide.

So the angry small dent fixer is afraid of a standard being imposed upon him which he knows he will not like.

The standard in this case being that a large dent gets repaired using PDR, instead of conventional paint and body work. How and why?

Because so many techs who are his competitors now will fix them, he will have to choose to say yes or no. In a sense, he is afraid of losing his choice, but he really fears becoming sub-standard. Except in this case, the standard is now imposed by the competition. As the customer becomes aware of what is possible, they now begin to demand it.

Some techs, me included, will not do large dents during a hail storm. Isn't this a double standard?

Couldn't it even be considered dishonest?

I suppose you could call it a double standard, but I prefer to think of it as self preservation. Dishonest? Only if you lie about your reasons why you won't do it.

If I have two cars in front of me, one will have me touching 90 percent of its top surfaces, be done in one day and pay me say, one thousand dollars, and another which is one panel, will take 3-4 hours and pays \$300 which would you choose? The right answer is to do them both, but what if there are a hundred cars like the first one, waiting for you?

See, the large dent becomes unattractive at best.

But there is a way to keep your integrity and be honest. Tell the customer the situation.

"If you would like to bring this back in the winter, I would be glad to take it on. I have a back log right now and cannot stop for this kind of repair during this hail event. But if you can live with it, I'll be glad to do it then."

You have not lied, so no dishonesty here.

Again, the choice belongs to the customer. You made it so. But I hope you see that, first and foremost, the choice lies with you. No one can force you to do that which you do not want. It is only you, to a point.

The balanced view says you need to do at a minimum what your competition will do, but this you already do. Believe me, he feels the same about large dents as you.

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See, what if he decides to do big monster dents for half what you charge? Then you let him have them all, even referring as many as you can to him.

You do this with full knowledge he is doing more work than you. Meantime, you're doing less and making more and are way less sore at the end of the day.

Fear has no hold on you, unless you let it.

Someone else is better

This is perhaps the most insidious of all fears. It sneaks up on you for one, and two, it is always lurking in the shadows.

None of us are in a competition, except with ourselves.

Why then do we give so much power to the ghost of dent perfection?

I came away from watching the International Dent Olympics last year with this gem. All the judges agreed the majority of the repairs done were of excellent quality. Most of them just fine for a commercial situation. Meaning, out of 100 customers, 99.9 of them would have loved the results. But the winners were judged by peers. People who know what excellence is.

For you, this means within six months of steady practice and paid work, you can be in the top 98 percent of techs.

It also teaches us this. Many of the same guys come back and compete year to year. But the same guys don't always win. This is a contest where great lengths have been made to make it fair and it works well. So why don't the best win year to year?

Because the differences are slight, and often have more to do with how one feels on a given day. Your work will too. Some days you'll be spot on, other times, nothing will seem to go right.

I hope you will use this knowledge to slay the Ghost of Someone Better.

I believe it is worse today than ever before, and here's why. In a room full of dent guys, what do they talk about the most?

"That guy is a hack".

"Is that guy any good?"

"I've heard he'll steal from you."

These statements say so much more about the person saying them, right?

Believe me, I've said my share of negative comments. I will try to do better, but sometimes my own fears get the better of me. If you are in arms length and you hear me "go negative," please, punch me in the arm and remind me I asked you to do so.

I must admit, there have been times when I, too, have been caught at my worst. Times when I could have and should have done better and a friend goes behind me and says, "eww yuck, what was this guy thinking?"

I have learned to do my best at all times, but also you cannot judge a repair unless you saw it in the first place. If you don't know what it looked like before, you can't really be fair. It could well be you might tackle and have the exact same result. Or maybe even worse.

So the keys to getting over irrational fears are this.

Do more dents. Nothing kills fear like confidence. Repetition is the true key to confidence.

Get over yourself.

When we think more of ourselves than we should, we now have to justify this belief, somehow. Since its not a positive thought, it can only be reinforced by negative behavior. Usually tearing down someone else's work.

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Like Johnny, when you learn to slay your inner foes, you also slay your fears.

Soft focus

Earlier, I promised you an exercise which mimics the army's virtual reality snow fall experience. How can you distract yourself and forget pain and fear?

While training someone in person, and demonstrating a repair, I discovered there is a way to choose your view. You can go wide angle or narrow focus.

When I am first beginning to push, I allow my eyes to relax and go into a soft focus. This has a way of allowing you to think about a large area. Your peripheral vision is what you are thinking about, concentrating on. This also works well in areas where your tip is not easily revealed. Sharp or deep dents for example. Taking a broad view forces you to look for less noticeable movements.

Now, once the pushing begins, you know about where you are. At this point you narrow the focus and look for the tip movement. Usually this is best done in the sweet spot of your fog or by locking one stripe of your line board right over the tip.

This serves you well as you switch from time to time, wide to narrow and back again. It helps answer the question, 'where do I push next?'

It also becomes an exercise in distraction. You are occupying a large amount of your visual brain muscles. You have now reached a point of distraction from all other fears and pains which are not helping you reach our goal of a finished dent. Later on you'll wonder why

your muscles are so sore. You sure didn't feel the strain during the repair.

Give this exercise a try and let me know how it works for you.

Till next time, keep pushing,
Tim Olson

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