

Time to Keep Your Focus!

We have all been through some variety of trials and tribulations over the last year because of COVID-19, some making it through better than others. About a year ago I wrote [“How We Created a New Normal”](#) where I talked about the processes shops were changing to overcome the pandemic restrictions. I asked you then, and will ask again now, *can you sustain the changes you made in your processes for the long term?* As we start to pull out from the confines of this pandemic, it is time to keep focused on the things that have been accomplished over the last year to understand what it will take to maintain them.

Process improvement has been paramount as shop management has looked at ways to maximize employee capabilities. Each team continues working through the challenges of workforce reductions, taking care of customers while following newfound restrictions, overcoming part shortages while repairing vehicles, and dealing with virtual claims processing challenges. All of these things created obstacles most have not encountered before but were overcome by focusing on the end result, getting vehicles repaired correctly and on schedule. Through all of this we have become very customer centric when creating new expectations. A strategic focus will be required to determine which of the processes you decide to maintain as the pace of day-to-day challenges increases, while weeding out those that are not sustainable.

While I think everyone is pretty much “Zoomed out,” many took advantage of down time by taking virtual training to gain accreditations through various providers. That was fine when things were a bit slow, but now that those achievements have been gained, your focus should move to the requirements needed to maintain those accreditations. As things start getting busy again it will be easy to put training on the back burner, so maintaining a training schedule to keep up with requirements is essential.

Another thing I have seen as I begin visiting shops again is how clean they’ve become due to implementing 5S strategies while work was slow to organize their workspaces. I know some shops took more effort than others, but the result is the same in that they have created a working environment that promotes productivity. Again, while it will be easy to let things slide as the work pace picks up, having a routine that encourages employees to focus on maintaining the workspaces will be beneficial. Remember the fifth “S” is sustainability!

If you have not given much thought to these things, now might be a good time. I know the pandemic took many out of their comfort zone, so I encourage you to look back over the past year to see what you’ve accomplished while locked down by restrictions. I believe you will be surprised on how much your business model changed, how you overcame obstacles and how you managed in a new normal. As you begin to understand exactly what changes you made, it will be clear that your working environment has also changed.

Before you know it there will be a very much welcomed pick-up in business, making it easy to revert back to the old way of running things. Unfortunately, the old way is not going to work for many reasons. Some of the changes created during restrictions will become commonplace as I do

not believe virtual claim processing will go away nor will customers want to go back to some of the mundane pre-pandemic customer service processes. It will definitely be a challenge to maintain the business model you created over the last year but if you keep your focus and don't become distracted by what each day brings, you will maintain what you built.

To help you work through this, a couple of colleagues and myself will be facilitating [“The Ebb and Flow of a New Normal”](#) at SEMA this year as part of the Society of Collision Repair Specialist Repairer Driven Education offerings. We hope to see you there.