



COLLISION REPAIR NEWS

Roadblocks to Repair Planning by Aaron Marshall

When an automotive collision repair company is labeled as “doing lean” (as if it’s some exercise fad, or some new voodoo religious con), what it usually looks like is that they have implemented a more thorough disassembly process than the traditional “teardown.” If the shop is really “doing lean,” we may see parts carts dedicated to each car, along with a dedicated person (not the tech assigned to the job), and mirror matching parts for accuracy before release to production.

I’m not sure what “doing lean” means, but let’s say that it’s the identification and removal of non-value added activities (waste). But without looking to the customer to define waste—and a structured process for isolating and removing it (improvement process)—there is no sustainable “lean” activity. It’s just copying some techniques others who work in that systemic manner have developed.

In the collision repair process, the most obvious and egregious sources of waste are the activities tied to supplements. Those include starting and stopping jobs, moving cars in and out, tying up equipment, floor space and lot space. It complicates the techs’ lives, whom we burden with managing all of these partially done cars (while actually trying to fix some of them). Supplements cause us to wait for estimators to look at missed parts or damages, wait for insurance approvals, wait for additional parts to arrive.

Once considered to be “the way it is,” it’s now obvious that supplements are not inevitable consequences in the collision repair process. Those who have virtually eliminated supplements achieve half the industry average cycle time and increased profit (more cars per day, no additional manpower).

In spite of measurable evidence demonstrating that fewer stops means faster repairs—benefiting techs, the shop, and most importantly, the customer—many shops that have tried taking the car apart further in the beginning (repair planning), are unable to sustain the activities. Why?

First of all, there is no dependent work system woven around this repair planning process, requiring it to sustain. Second, imposing the process upon the traditional repair model is destabilizing, characterized by a high degree of technician independence.

Imagine a body shop that is one car wide and six cars long, with a door on each end. In a line are body, prime, prep, spray booth, reassembly and cleanup. There would be no backing up and no pulling cars out. If a “parts hold” occurred, the entire process would grind to a halt until the missed part arrived and the chain could restart. All of the damage discovery would be a matter of financial life or death. Supplement-free estimating would become very good and very fast or else the business would go bankrupt. No choice!



March 2015 / Repair planning processes only add value when shops can fully commit to them

Very few people do this on purpose (unless their motivation is to drive rapid improvement and they are willing to accept the leadership challenges that go with it). Instead, we build buildings to accommodate four times as many cars as we fix in a day, we give techs multiple cars to keep busy since each can only be worked on for roughly two hours before some stop occurs. We require extended paint shifts mid-week, we sacrifice quality by trying to do too much work on the last day, we pay for expedited shipping and rental cars, mostly because we discover damages and order parts as we go, rather than all at the beginning.

The traditional model has become bloated with waste accommodations, along with the defective attitude (in some cases) that it's the tech's job to work through all those problems because that's what they're paid for.

Repair planning looks very different from the traditional "teardown." It can take eight hours on a big job. That can be very awkward for techs and estimators conditioned to getting a "first" supplement turned in soon after starting the job. If the technician is flat rate, repair planning disrespectfully interferes with how he has been conditioned to run "his" business, thereby interfering with the pay. It's no surprise then that repair planning gets implemented during a slow period and gets kicked to the curb when it gets busy.

In a connected system where "no supplements" are an absolute requirement to flow cars, collect revenue and pay bills, repair planning is indispensable. Life depends on it. The damage analysis department also becomes the source of the most active and intriguing discovery about what we need to do to make the work easier for those downstream.

Think about this: A repair plan event on a \$7,500-plus job may take eight hours, but the dismantle activities that expose everything (take off all damaged parts, detrim every panel, do the pulling, complete all repair attempts, etc.) facilitate one parts order with one two-day wait. That same car with all of those dismantle (discovery) tasks spread over 10 or 12 days and resulting in four separate parts orders (at two days each) will take eight days longer to get back to the customer. Both require the same amount of hands-on work.

Which process would the customer choose? Around whose needs (function, cost, time) is your value delivery system built?