

By Jerry Ellner and Jan Tkaczyk

The Future is Bright for Skilled Automotive Technicians

AS EDUCATORS, WE MUST PREPARE TODAY'S YOUTH NOT ONLY FOR JOBS REQUIRING A FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE EXPERIENCE, BUT ALSO FOR CAREERS THAT DEMAND MORE THAN A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA BUT SOMETHING OTHER THAN A TRADITIONAL UNIVERSITY DEGREE.

FIFTY YEARS AGO, NEARLY TWO OUT OF EVERY THREE jobs were classified as unskilled.

Today, that number is less than two out of five. This data underscores the important role that education and postsecondary training play in finding—and keeping—a job in today's labor market. As educators, we must prepare today's youth not only for jobs requiring a four-year college experience, but also for careers that demand more than a high school diploma but something other than a traditional university degree. This is why technical schools can be a viable option for training students with skills needed for a particular type of employment, such as automotive technology.

The Demand for Skilled Auto Technicians is High

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' (BLS) *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2010-2011 Edition*, the automotive industry will need 35,000 new technicians nationally through 2018, and some estimates put this number as high as 50,000 a year. In addition, a large wave of the American workforce is reaching retirement age in the next few years, creating even more job openings in the field. Because Americans are now opting to keep their cars and trucks for longer periods of time, demand for vehicle maintenance and repair work is increasing in many areas of the country.

According to a 2009 survey by the Automotive Service Association, approximately 60 percent of the independent mechanics responding to the survey reported that repairs were up last year over

the previous year. Seventy-six percent say they expect more work. The enhancement of advanced technology in automobiles is also leading to new opportunities for automotive technicians with a postsecondary education or certifications such as Automotive Service Excellence (ASE). Workers with expertise in specialized systems, such as hybrid-fuel technology or certain automotive makes or models, are also in demand.

Adding to the appeal of this career is the fact that automotive technician work cannot typically be outsourced. Career coach Susan Bernstein, founder of San Francisco-based Work from Within, places automotive repair on her top 10 list of the most hard-to-outsourced jobs in an interview conducted by payscale.com in August 2009. According to Bernstein, it would take too long and cost too much for transportation to ship a car or truck to a foreign land for repair and back again.

Choosing an Automotive School Requires the Right Tools and Asking the Right Questions

As graduating high school students deal with labor market challenges, including international outsourcing and high unemployment rates, counselors should help students expand their career search to consider new options beyond two- and four-year colleges. Counselors can provide resources and information to students that outline promising career paths as an automotive, diesel, collision repair, marine or motorcycle technician.

Good starting points to search for technical schools are www.AutoMechanicSchool.net or www.



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four-year college students. Students who qualify may receive a combination of Pell Grants, Academic Competitive Grants, Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants, Federal Direct Loans, Federal Perkins Loans and Federal Parent

PLUS loans. There are also a variety of scholarships as well as state grants available. Some technical schools are associated with foundations dedicated to providing the financial support necessary to assist the student through graduation.

2. Will I have to relocate?

Chances are high that a student might have to relocate to attend the school of their choice. Recommend that students involve family in this decision. Most schools offer information on housing, neighborhoods, part-time jobs and other important local information. Recommend that students research the local labor market or interview employers in the area they are considering attending school. Willingness to relocate can also be considered a sign of commitment and maturity and can lend itself well to future employment opportunities.

3. Will I find a job after I graduate?

No academic institution can guarantee employment upon graduation. However, some automotive training schools, such as Universal Technical Institute (UTI), have strong partnerships with industry and local businesses that provide advantages. While researching their educational options, students should ask prospective schools about graduation and placement rates and ask for names of recent alumni who would be interested in talking to prospective students. There are strong trends in the automotive industry that are creating jobs for skilled technicians: automobiles have become large computers and technicians are problem-solvers; hybrids and other alternative fueled vehicles are gaining in popularity; and electrical/diesel backup systems also make the outlook good for diesel technicians.

4. Will I make enough money?

This depends on many factors and much of it is driven by the student's performance in school, and his or her internal drive to succeed. Pay will vary between independent shops and dealerships, as well as the technician's level of training and certifications. Most dealerships offer an hourly salary and commissions based on the quantity and difficulty of the work performed. Current and future salary

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projections are available on industry and government Web sites such as www.bls.gov. As with any profession, job performance, work ethic, flexibility and desire will ultimately determine compensation.

5. Will I be stereotyped?

The days of the “shade tree mechanic” stereotype are gone, and have been replaced with professional automotive technicians who have the technical equivalents of modern computer technicians. Technicians who graduate with specialized automotive technology skills can pursue jobs in research and development, parts and accessories as well as manufacturing and assembly. They can also consider careers as insurance adjusters, designers, help desk agents, manufacturer representatives, marine engine technicians and race team crew members.

The Job of a Lifetime

Technical education and training play an important role in our economy. By helping your students consider all of their options after high school, including a technical career, you could open the door to new opportunities. Encourage your students to pursue a career that allows them to do what they love and love what they are doing. If that career happens to be in automotive technology, the right technical training can provide an onramp to the American dream. **I**

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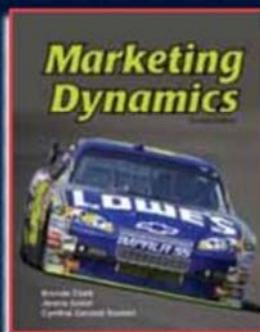
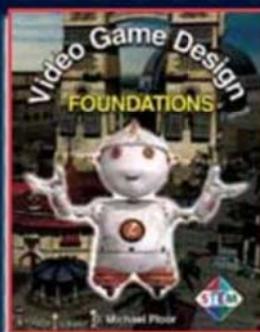
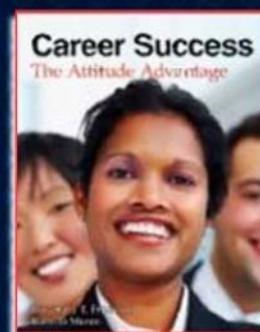
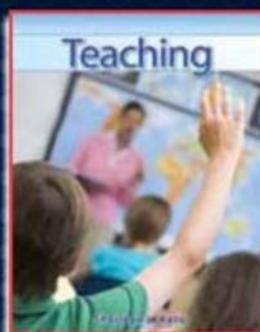
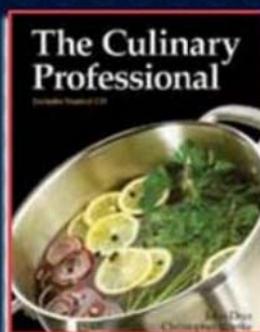
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