

by Ron Fisher

# Preparing for the Future

It is all about job safety, risk prevention, and environmental responsibilities.



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It could be easily argued that, in the automotive industry, the topics of job safety, risk prevention, and environmental responsibilities, are interconnected, particularly these days. As we look toward the future in these days of COVID-19, climate change, and electric vehicles (EVs) taking over from the internal combustion engine, we can see crossing paths.

Like many industries, collision repair continues to struggle to find replacements for retiring skilled workers. This, coupled with uncertainty about how technology will impact our industry and our people, makes the future appear to be that much more challenging. In addition,

mental health has been taxed to the max for many, given the duration of the pandemic. Some experts suggest we will never truly recover from it.

With these factors in mind, how do we measure job safety, and what is

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the employer’s obligation and/or moral responsibility in these times? In the past, we thought of work safety as having safety protocols and shut-offs for equipment. Now we need to look at potential exposure to

COVID-19 and mental health issues as well. Staff are less willing to work in the same office or factory as other employees for fear of exposure and are seeing the benefits of working from home from an economic and lifestyle perspective.

In the automotive industry, we are moving from the internal combustion engine to EVs, which will radically change the repair industry going forward. So, how do we prepare for the future? How do we position ourselves for success?

There are some hard truths we must face as we plan for the tide of change coming in the very near future. We know that a very small portion of the world consumes the majority of available energy, and Canada is

part of that small portion. In order to combat climate change, do we need to radically change how we live, and, if so, are we prepared to do it for future generations?

We thought we had supply chain issues already with COVID-19 and the resulting staff shortages, but apparently mother nature decided to throw us another curveball. In November, in B.C., flooding cut off many areas of the province from the rest of Canada, with protracted estimates to repair and reopen the highways. Only weeks

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earlier, a cargo ship lost hundreds of containers that fell overboard and floated up the coast, creating navigational nightmares as well as environmental issues. We seem to be getting more and more challenges and uncertainty, with no end in sight. It would be easy to throw up your hands and simply give up, sell that valuable real estate while the market is hot, and lead a life of leisure. That may work if you are an owner, but for how long? And what about your staff and their futures?

There is no doubt we are living in interesting times, which are perhaps unique to our time. There can be no sacred cows. We cannot continue to do what we have done in the past and expect a different result. I think Mother Nature has removed all doubt that climate change is real and requires us to make some immediate changes. We cannot afford to whine and moan any longer. We need to act now, for so many reasons.

With so much out of our control, what can we do? One thing we can do is position ourselves for the future by looking at how business is changing and what we need to do to be ready. This includes collaborating with our clients to make sure we are in a position to help them succeed in the future. We need to know their challenges and needs and make sure they know our challenges as well.

As one of my former staff used to like to say, “We are all in this together.” At the end of the day, whether you are in the collision industry, recycling, or in the insurer community, we all serve a common customer: the car owner.

It is becoming more and more critical to work together and develop alliances, supporting one another in order to serve our common customer while preparing for the changes that are coming due to advances in technology. Stick to your lane, do what you do well, and do not lose focus by getting oversaturated in different fields.

This does not mean you do not change, but rather pivot within a tight constraint. For those of us in automotive, we need to consider this change as being the most significant since the car replaced the horse and buggy.

What does it mean for the future in terms of repairs, replacement parts, and the number of cars on the road? As people switch to other modes of travel, watch the trends and recognize things are not going

to remain the same.

When I was growing up, like virtually every other young person of my generation and many after, I could not wait to get my driver's licence. Today there is an ever-increasing percentage of young people that have no interest or perceived need to get a licence. That is a distinct and important change that we need to watch carefully. It will likely require us to adjust our business models. Protecting the environment needs to factor into everything we do in business going forward, and we need to be good stewards of the planet. Those of us in our recycling group must embrace the issue of recycling electric vehicle batteries and our resulting role and responsibility.

In summary, those who listen to others more than they talk, and those who form alliances with others in business, are going to be in the best position to weather the storm while simultaneously addressing the needs of customers and staff. ■



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*Airport & Conference Centre*  
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**June 2-3, 2022**  
*Montreal Airport Marriott In-Terminal Hotel*  
*(Located in Montreal-Pierre Elliott*  
*Trudeau International Airport)*  
*800 Place Leigh-Capreol*  
**Dorval, QC, Canada**

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