In a previous issue of GEARS I wrote about the importance of time management; particularly in the face of significant social upheaval and economic uncertainty. The truth is, good time management skills are important all the time, regardless of the events that may occur around us. Business owners or managers may be able to pick the time in which they launch their business, but certainly over a long period of operation they will encounter bad economic times as well as good.

Much of what I’ve discussed in past articles concerns how we interpret those events that happen around us, and how that interpretation shapes our response. Our perception of events, and how we interpret them, then, becomes our reality. And it’s within that reality we live and conduct our business. Coming full circle, it’s how we choose to view the events around us that will ultimately dictate much of what happens in our lives. If it sounds as though I’m assigning much of the responsibility for our success and attitude (even happiness) upon the individual, you’re
exactly right.
And for that you can be thankful.
I’ve always ascribed to the belief that adversity breeds character.
I’ve seen how life during the Great Depression and a series of wars shaped and affected the mind set and behaviors of my grandparents and parents. My father never bought a thing he could fabricate or repair in his shop, and he plowed through garage sales like each one could offer up the Holy Grail.
It was more than just doing things less expensively. For him, it was a continual reaffirmation of his self-worth. When the day came that I had to tell him he was suffering from a terminal disease, he accepted the news as he did his eventual death; secondary to his primary pursuit – which was getting as much as he could out of each day. Maybe that’s why, when I feel that life has cut a little too deep, I think of those in my life who have taught me ways to either see something positive, or to know that something positive is just around the corner.
It is about choice. It’s just that we don’t want to believe it could be that simple when we’re up against something that’s extremely painful or difficult. I certainly don’t mean to minimize or dismiss the affect that tragedies will have in our lives, and I know full well just how deeply they can run. But it’s important to realize that at some point, to varying degrees, every life suffers tragedy. And those tragedies may be events that forever alter our lives and make living much more difficult or painful. But even then we make decisions – either active or by omission – that will ultimately affect how we continue to live.
I have written for GEARS for over ten years. During that time I have heard hundreds of shop owners bemoan the state of the industry, citing several common factors that have made business success more elusive than ever before. My point is each generation experiences great change within all aspects of life; apparent to those within that generation who have experienced more of it than those who are younger, and who have less basis for comparison.
Adaptability to that change is often more easily accomplished by those who are younger, simply because they are still establishing the initial skill-sets with which they will confront life. Those of us who are older may still be clinging to our initial skill-sets, even though the life we know, personally and professionally, may have evolved beyond their greatest level of effectiveness. We are capable of adjusting our skill-sets through education, training and the determination to do so, but for too many, such adaptation is seen to be beyond our reach.
Adaptation to change is often difficult, and depends in large part on our motivation. Motivation can often be compromised by fear of failure, especially when compounded by advancing age. Age isn’t a limiting factor in and of it’s self, but represents a longer period of time in which we have used our decreasingly effective skills and coping methods. You can teach an old dog new tricks … but you need a motivated dog.
Of great benefit to the experienced shop owner or technician faced with significant change is the extent of their experience. With time and exp-
These are the Good Old Days

experience in essentially every market area, a progressive business person should have identified a “sub-market”, a niche, or market within a market, that sets their business apart from the pack. It could also be the development of a sub-specialty, or an additional line of service that breathes new life into what may have been a faltering business.

Realistically, the business need not be faltering. Often, a person simply grows weary of “the same old thing” and needs a change to re-charge their batteries. They might be too young to retire, or just want to do something of a different application while still using at least some of the skills they have developed over the years.

Dewane Coffman in Bend, Oregon, owns Visual Cut-a-Way Concepts, and is a good example of what I’m speaking of. Dewane started his mechanical career decades ago, eventually focusing on the repair of automatic transmissions. This evolved into a highly select sub-specialty – the cutting away of selected areas of tranny cases to reveal color-coded moving parts that represent the function of the transmission (refer to Seeing is Believing, GEARS issue #75, April 2002). The products are working pieces of art and highly sought after by many in the industry. Dewane found the transition full of challenges, and at times, difficult. Remember: change is not always easy or without cost.

For Dewane it was a change he felt he needed to make for a number of reasons. With continued effort and recognition, the personal time and expense poured into this effort will pay dividends for Dewane and it will take him to a new level of success and enjoyment within the industry.

When done right, our vocations should be more than a series of repetitive movements, done with studied similarity along with people who are themselves caught up in a current that is similar to ours. Our vocations should be a means of making a decent living through methods we find interesting, challenging and rewarding.

We need to expect change and be ready to do whatever is necessary to meet the challenges it will certainly bring about. And those changes and challenges are just as apt to bring along positive constructs as negative. Much of how that will be interpreted is up to you – how you perceive it, and what you do to shape it. Regardless of what these upcoming changes may be, you can bet that some years from now you will think back to this time, and wish once more for the Good Old Days.

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