

## Education is not Enough – Filling the Experience Gap

There's an old shop instructor's axiom that states, "While techniques can be taught, skills are only acquired through repetitive good practice."

A book can't tell you the best physical stance to assume while spraying paint. Nor does it tell you how far any particular bolt can be tightened before it snaps. There's no way to learn secondhand how much one can wet sand before going through a topcoat. You need to learn it by feel; and more often, by mistakes.

While teaching methods have evolved greatly over the previous decades, there are still some simple truths when it comes to tactile skills. Students require not only education, but hands-on experience to become job-ready, productive craftsmen in the workplace. So, while curriculum looks to impart technique in an efficient certificate, two-year or four-year program, RPM looks for ways to increase opportunities for student experience wherever we can find it.

Employers know full well the experience gap of those new to the workforce. When Thor Thorson, President of Vintage Racing Motors in Redmond, Washington, recruited McPherson College graduate David Berg, he held realistic expectations. "We looked for intellect, curiosity, and basic mechanical skills. We need to get him pulling his own weight in the shop. In 5 or 6 years, if all goes well, we will have a main-level mechanic."

That once-commonplace hands-on experience – time spent with your father in the family garage, or what RPM call's "The Lost Hours" – must now be supplemented in other creative ways. But first, RPM must identify the specific skills employers value most, in order that we

may efficiently develop targeted areas of concentration to expedite the pathway to workplace competence.

Which basic disciplines can get a young employee out from behind pushing a broom, and immediately adding value to an operation? Welding? Engine Teardown? Component Assembly?

Greg Nel, owner of British Automotive Service in Scottsdale, Arizona, believes the answer is more existential. "The most important skills? Enthusiasm and aptitude. You can't teach that. Students need to invest in themselves through gained experiences. If you want to be a mechanic, you need to do the things that mechanics do. If you have a choice between going to a baseball game or a Goodguys hotrod show, you go to the hotrod show, because that's who you want to become."

While most automotive vocational or technical schools tailor their curriculum around the needs of new-car dealerships, the RPM Foundation acts as the primary conduit in shaping curriculum between learning institutions and the classic car industry. While the two fields share some of the same skills, their methodologies are very different. Dealerships work to a "book time" price, while restoration shops work to a standard. The mindset and experience requirements of the technician are completely unique.

Through close communication with our industry partners, RPM continues to advise educators on the changing needs within the automotive and marine restoration industry, and develops programs to close the experience gap of young students so they may become the competent craftsmen and artisans of tomorrow. 



RPM supporter and shop owner, Jason Wenig, and apprentice employee Michael Krukowski – an RPM scholar and graduate of Pennsylvania College of Technology – overlooking their award-winning 1921 Kissel at The Creative Workshop in Dania Beach, FL.

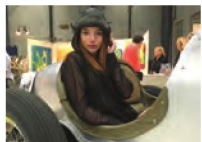
JLD Classic's John Abney welcomed RPM students from Lyons Township High School, LaGrange, IL, to the collection's storage facility during a recent Shop Hop in Houston, TX.

A 2012 McPherson College graduate, David Berg, made vintage racing his career focus, with Vintage Racing Motors in Redmond, WA, mentoring RPM students along-the-way.





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