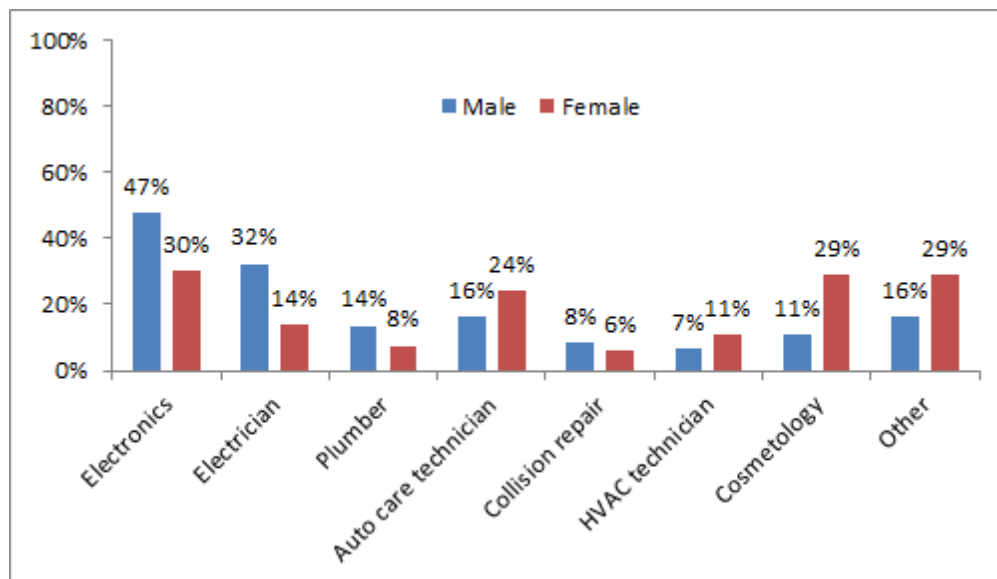


2020 Research Results, Collision Repair Hiring Trends and Opportunities

BodyShop Business (Babcox Publishing) and the Women's Industry Network embarked on a study in 2019-2020 to better determine why young people choose the professional careers they do. Specifically, the study tried to discern the most important reasons why someone might choose a skilled trades career in the automotive field, and even more importantly, whether there are differences due to gender that can be leveraged to attract more women to the automotive field.

To that end, the Babcox Research Department polled 420 young people between the ages of 18 and 24, equally balanced between males and females, on how they thought about their career choices. We called this group the "gens" because they came from the general population. This was followed by a second survey of young people who were currently enrolled in automotive trade schools or already working in automotive jobs. There were 222 in this survey, who we referred to as the "techs." Reflecting industry employment patterns, this group was 81% male.

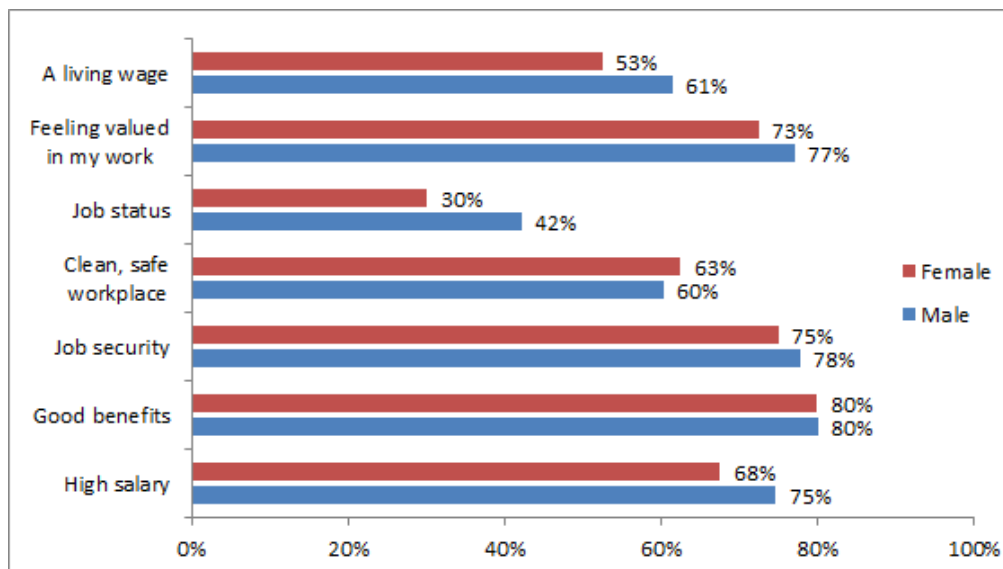
Perhaps the most glaring statistic gleaned from the survey was the percentage of those respondents considering skilled trades as a career who considered collision repair: only 8% of males and 6% of females from the gens considered this trade. Out of eight trades ranging from electronics to cosmetology to plumbing, collision was the second lowest trade considered for males (8%); only HVAC technician was lower (7%). Electronics was highest for males (47%). For females, collision repair ranked the lowest trade considered (6%), with electronics the highest (30%). Comparatively speaking, 16% of males and 24% of females considered auto care as a career – double the number of males who considered collision and four times the number of females who considered collision a viable trade. The reasons here could be numerous: the perception of auto care being a less laborious job than collision, higher paying, etc. It's important to note that these percentages were drawn from those who are considering skilled trades – if you calculate them over the whole population of 18- to 24-year-olds, the percentages are about half what we show here.



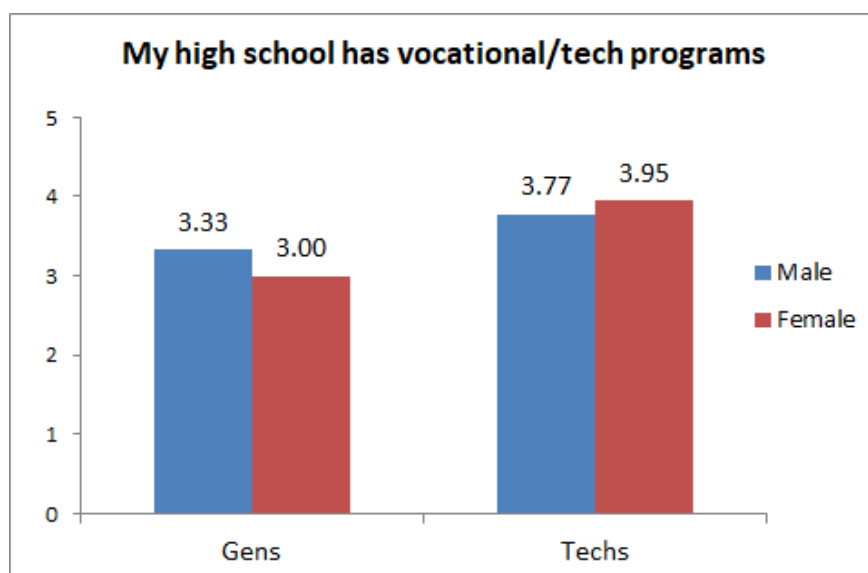
Also, perhaps not surprisingly, there was a significant discrepancy in those who liked to “work with their hands” between the gens and the techs. Out of a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree, male techs ranked 4.63 compared to 3.85 male gens who liked to work with their hands. For females, it was 4.29 for techs compared to 3.88 for gens. This clearly shows that those young people who like to work with their hands are more inclined to consider a skilled trade than those who don’t like working with their hands.

Also significant was the gap between those who “like to fix things”: male techs (4.60) to male gens (3.85) and female techs (4.27) to female gens (3.42).

Another significant discrepancy was high salary as an important factor for career choice between gens and techs. Gens, both males and females, ranked high salary as the 2nd most important factor out of seven for career choice, whereas techs, both males and females, ranked high salary as 4th most important. Good benefits, however, was ranked the most important factor out of seven across the board, for both male and female gens and male and female techs. Perhaps the assumption here is that male and female techs in the automotive field are not expecting to get paid as high as their gen colleagues, and they accept that, as long as the benefits (health insurance, 401k, paid time off, etc.) are good. Diametrically opposed to this is feedback from the field of auto body shop owners that good benefits are hard to offer given the stagnated labor rate they are forced to charge due to market pressures and diminishing net profits due to increasing expenses, increasing investment costs (training and equipment for increasingly sophisticated vehicles, for example) and more.



Considering that one of the factors why there is a deficiency in skilled trade workers is because of society's emphasis on attending a four-year college, the low numbers from the poll in response to, "I've considered a career in skilled trades", are not surprising: 2.92 for the gens, 3.30 for males and 2.55 for females (out of a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree). The emphasis on going to college is supported by the poll results to "encouraged to go to college": 4.01 for gen males and 3.88 for gen females. Also interesting is a high school's influence on young people if it has a vocational/trade program: only 3.33 of male gens and 3.00 of female gens said their high school has a vocational/trade program, whereas 3.77 of male techs and 3.95 of females said it did. In other words, if a high school has one of these programs, it is more likely that a student could be influenced to pursue a skilled trade.



A look at “clean, safe workplace” as an important factor in career choice is interesting, too. One reason cited for young people opting not to work in a skilled trade such as collision is that this generation is more health conscious than previous ones and is not willing to sacrifice their health for a job. Of course, with proper personal protective equipment, collision techs are in no more danger than someone working in an office, but that brings up another issue of the collision industry having to battle negative stereotypes about auto body work. The numbers would seem to support this generation’s health consciousness: male gens ranked clean, safe workplace as the 3rd most important factor out of seven, while female gens ranked it 4th. Meanwhile, clean, safe workplace was not so much of a concern with male and female techs as it ranked near the bottom of the list.

Summary

So what do we make of all this? For one, automotive/collision workers are a hardy, unique bunch who like working with their hands, like to fix things, aren’t afraid to get dirty, value good job benefits and job security over salary and job status, and like feeling valued in their work – a direct reference to how they are treated in the workplace. Are they treated as a dispensable cog in the wheel or an invaluable member of the team? That may determine whether they stay in collision their whole career or find another line of work. This poll did not reveal a lot of huge gender differences; one of the few was where female techs ranked clean, safe workplace only slightly higher than male techs as an important factor in career choice. To get more of the gens to consider working in the skilled trades, it’s clear those trades will have to focus on four things: good benefits, high salary, clean, safe workplace and making these people feel valued in their work.

It’s going to take a concerted effort from all parties to continue recruiting and enticing young people to enter the automotive/collision field: government, schools, associations, shops, corporations, etc. Young people are going to have to be reached early on to be educated on the auto trade and have negative stereotypes dispelled and be convinced that today’s techs are “well-paid, highly skilled, hands-on problem solvers,” as Jennifer Maher, CEO/executive director of the TechForce Foundation characterized them. Part of that education, especially for women perhaps as they gave less consideration to collision as a skilled trade as any of seven other trades listed, is knowing there are more opportunities in collision than being a technician: manager, estimator, customer service representative, human resources, sales, etc. “It’s all here,” Cheryl Boswell, chair of WIN, said. “And honestly, the ability to change positions and learn new skills is probably greater in the collision repair industry than most others.”