Have you ever tried to do a job and didn’t have the right tools to get it done? I have, and it isn’t always easy or successful. I’d like to share one experience I had that did work out, as well as my personal philosophy on filling your “tool pouch.”

My first car was a used 1971 Toyota Corolla bought in 1974 for $1,200. It came with two options: AM/FM radio and carpet; the base model only had AM radio and vinyl floor covering. I did my own oil changes and muffler replacement, and even installed a new engine head gasket.

The car had a MacPherson strut suspension system: you tested your shocks by pushing down on the hood and waiting to see if it comes quickly back to neutral or bounces awhile. Well, my car started bouncing—the front shock absorbers were shot. I thought to myself, “No mechanic needed for me; I’ll just buy the materials and install them myself.”

The old shocks came out pretty easily; however, there was a loud “sproing” noise when I undid the bolts holding them in place. The next step was to install the new shocks that fit within the now much longer springs that supported the weight of the engine. These two springs were made of very stiff spring steel and they needed to be compressed in order to be reinstalled. Because I didn’t weigh as much as the engine, I knew I couldn’t compress them by just squeezing them by hand.

The solution: I took a pair of my father’s heaviest channel locks and squeezed two parts of the spring together. That shortening wasn’t nearly enough, so I tied them together with picture hanging wire. I then proceeded to do the same along the entire length of the spring. Voila! It was now short enough to house the shock and be reinstalled into the car’s front suspension.

I “released” the wires by cutting them with electrical wire cutters. The noise was loud and a new tone rang out with each cut, but the job was done—finally. And when the hood was pushed down, it didn’t bounce anymore. Success!

I found out later that the car-parts store rented out the tool used to compress the springs. My method got the job done, but it was more time-consuming, tricky, and just a little dangerous.

The work done every day in the water industry can yield new challenges that can also be time-consuming, tricky, and dangerous. The knowledge and experience of those who work in water can lessen these factors, but only if they have the right tools in their tool pouch.

Your own “tool pouch” includes all of the ideas and methods of dealing with various challenges; it may also include physical tools like wrenches, computers, compressors, operating...
Continued from page 30

manuals, and backhoes as well. When you have all of the tools you need, a job can be very easy; if the tools are not there, it may not be.

We all start our careers with a tool pouch with just the basics: work ethics, consideration for others, a little math and physics, and not much else. But over time, we fill our tool pouches from watching others, reading, taking classes, completing tests, and learning from the school of hard knocks.

I’ve always loved learning hard lessons the easy way: from someone else’s mistakes (even though I’ve made plenty of my own!). As Eleanor Roosevelt said, “Learn from the mistakes of others. You can’t live long enough to make them all yourself.”

Membership in the American Water Works Association (AWWA) allows you to be exposed to a wealth of knowledge. Almost everything that has been learned or experienced in the water industry is memorialized in writing. If it’s not in writing, there’s bound to be other members who have experienced it; all you need to do is ask them.

As members of AWWA, we can access the tool pouches of tens of thousands of other members. Our employer, co-workers, and, most importantly, our customers, all have the benefits and wealth of all those tool pouches.

One of the handicaps many societies have is knowledge and experience not passing properly from one generation to the next. Fortunately, we don’t have that handicap. The opportunities to fill our own tool pouches and access those of others in the water industry is a blessing we share here in America that is in place now—and for generations to come. And, AWWA is a key tool to help that happen.

I encourage you to join AWWA, if you haven’t already. I invite you to encourage others to join AWWA as well. Fill your tool pouch full and help others fill theirs. Our industry and the customers we all serve will be all the better for it.