

Measuring

Success in the shop

Helping your maintenance department achieve higher standards starts with tracking the right KPIs.

By Gregg Wartgow

[MANAGEMENT]

To find out if a fleet or shop's maintenance team is truly living up to its potential, there's one critical thing management has to do, according to no-nonsense efficiency consultant Peter Cooper.

"Shop leaders need to manage with facts, not feelings," he asserted.

The former director of operations for Iowa-based Merx Truck & Trailer—and present CEO of Ascend Consulting—expounded on this maxim with the hypothetical employee "Technician Jim," who he said "might be a great guy who shows up on time with a positive attitude, but he may also be the guy who takes three hours to do a one-hour job."

On the flipside, imagine a tech who routinely beats standard repair times, but exudes toxic vibes that poison your shop culture.

In both cases, facts—not feelings—must guide your assessment of their value, and more importantly, how to train them up on the hard and soft skills they lack.

And to do that, the best method is to focus on the key performance indicators that actually matter to your shop's definition of success, not the ones that make you feel good.

Each shop has different priorities, but the KPIs that matter should lead to more uptime and profitability. But whatever area you want to improve, make sure you can capture and analyze the related data.

"Any goals must be measurable and attainable in some way, otherwise you won't see improvement," efficiency guru Cooper said.

Next, because this is a team effort, you have to make sure everyone involved understands the full picture and how the data relates to success.

"It's essential for fleet maintenance departments to understand what they're measuring and why," said Ernest Acevedo, fleet maintenance director at DPV Transportation, a specialty passenger transportation company based in Everett, Massachusetts. "I've honestly been in rooms with other fleets where someone says, 'We're this percentage in this certain area.' Okay, so now what? How are you going to use that measurement to make your shop better?"

If they can't answer, it just might be the sort of esoteric data that feels good to boast about to colleagues, but won't sway your C-suite or lead to success. The top brass want proven results that bring in more revenue, and the facts explaining how that did or did not happen.

We also want that for you, so we canvassed several experts to find out which KPIs will help you get your facts straight—and lead to a highly successful 2026. And that starts with a trio of technician metrics that serve as the engine for your shop health.



» Data-driven KPIs help measure how productive, efficient, and proficient technicians are being on a sustained basis.

Jetco Delivery

Measuring management performance

Most fleets have two overarching directives for their maintenance departments: keep vehicles safe on the road and maintenance costs under control. To that end, there are a handful of important KPIs fleet maintenance directors can keep an eye on to help gauge how their shop-level managers are doing.

Scheduled vs. unscheduled maintenance

"Trucks just showing up can be very disruptive to production flow and technician productivity," said John Whittet, chief customer officer at Fullbay, a provider of fleet maintenance and shop management software. "Sometimes it's a matter of the shop manager making sure PMs are getting done right and on time."

RP 545 dictates that no more than 30% of total maintenance costs are derived from unscheduled PMs.

Maintenance resulting from DVIRs

RP 545 also advises that no more than 17% of a fleet's total maintenance costs should result from things drivers report on their DVIR. If it's more than 17%, the quality of the fleet's PM inspections should be reviewed.

PM completion rate

As an extension of the above KPI, the percentage of PMs completed on time is key.

"Our goal is 98%," said Wayne Skinner, senior

vice president of fleet, maintenance, and procurement at Summit School Services, a provider of student transportation. "I don't think 100% is realistic because there could always be a bus that was in an accident and is in a body shop when the PM comes due. Shop managers can't do much about that."

Aged work orders

Skinner also likes to keep an eye on work orders involving non-PM work, such as recalls. Any work order over 90 days is flagged because it should have been addressed during that vehicle's 90-day PM cycle.

Real-time out of service

Summit School Services had a software program custom-built for this KPI. Drivers and technicians can flag vehicles as out of service for various reasons. Techs are also able to place vehicles back into service if they discover that a reported issue isn't safety-critical. A dashboard is automatically updated every 15 minutes, allowing shop managers to take a quick view of what's out of service and why. This near-instant visibility helps ensure that issues are resolved as quickly as possible.

RP 545 recommends that vehicle uptime should be at least 97%, essentially for 29 days in a 30-day month.

Safety

Summit School Services has made accidents and injuries its own KPI for shop managers.

expect a technician to perform direct labor when they don't even have a wrench in their hand," Saltzgiver said.

Cooper said independent shops should be a little more ambitious in their quest for direct, billable labor.

"For a shop as a whole, 80% billable is a good goal. That said, I would never expect a lead technician to bill more than 75% of their clocked hours. That's because they should be spending some time mentoring the shop's more inexperienced technicians."

But if your best tech is mentoring 40-50% of the time, you might be better off hiring a full-time trainer, because you could be leaving that or much more on the table through lost billable hours.

Labor productivity by job, which some refer to as technician efficiency, is equally important. It compares how long it takes a technician to perform a specific job to the standard repair time. RP 545 recommends a ratio of 0.9, meaning that the technician is slightly beating the SRT. For instance, completing a 3-hour brake job in 2.75 hours is a ratio of 0.9166 (2.75/3).

The lower that number, the more valuable your tech is. This metric is naturally incentivized with flat rate, but hourly shops could consider productivity bonuses to drive this down more (though don't gamify without guardrails; make safety part of the equation).

Along those lines, tracking **Repeat repair rate** is absolutely vital to indicating the service quality you want. As Schuier touched on earlier, speed can't come at the expense of accuracy. Tracking this KPI helps shine a spotlight on quality issues, which enables shop managers to intervene before things get out of hand.

"Repeat repairs, or comebacks, should never exceed 2% of the total repairs being done," Saltzgiver said. "If a shop or certain technician is seeing more than 2%, there could be a serious problem."

Using KPIs to drive improvement

Once a maintenance director or shop owner has a way to record and measure all of these technician KPIs, is it simply a matter of looking at the data and deciding if "Technician Jim" gets a raise or gets shown the door? Not at all. While numbers are never *supposed* to lie, they can sometimes be misleading, failing to tell the whole truth.

"I was working with a shop owner who was concerned that a good technician's direct labor had slipped down to around 60%," Cooper said. "So I went to the shop one morning to observe. I noticed that the technician clocked in at 8 a.m., but then had to walk all the way across the shop floor, past six bays, to get to the service window. Then he had to stand there for at least 10 minutes while the service advisor was on the phone. By the time he was handed his first job and walked back to his bay, 20 minutes had flown by. That's not the technician's fault. That's a problem with the process."

Similarly, a technician's low direct labor rate could be due to unorganized scheduling or parts management failures. "A technician can't finish a PM on time if he has to wait for an oil filter to be delivered," said John Whittet, chief customer officer at Fullbay, a provider of fleet maintenance and shop management software.

On the other hand, if a technician is constantly disorganized, outside smoking, or fiddling with their phone, that's obviously a different story.

A low labor productivity (or technician efficiency) KPI could also be misleading. Cooper said the No. 1 goal is to make sure your shop's SRTs are accurate and fair. Secondly, there could be unique circumstances causing a tech's actual time to exceed the standard repair time, such as having to deal



» Summit School Services says real-time out of service is one of several important KPIs to help measure shop manager performance.

Summit School Services

BEST CPM — OR WE PAY THE DIFFERENCE.



apollo
TIRES

We don't ask for your trust, we earn it. Apollo guarantees the best cost per mile, or we pay the difference. Add in a 7-year warranty, 3 retreads, and road hazard coverage, and you've got the only tire brand that turns promises into paybacks.



with a lot of rust, road salt, seized hardware, etc. Finally, it's the shop manager's job to ensure that service advisors are doing a good job with their initial diagnosis, so techs aren't set up to fail right out of the gate.

In other words, shop managers shouldn't go blaming the technician until they're able to put any given KPI into the proper context.

"The job of the manager is to find out the root cause of why a technician isn't meeting their KPI goal," Saltzgiver said. "Shop managers should be having one-on-ones with their technicians at least once a month, preferably every two weeks. Then they can go through the metrics together and make sure everyone understands what's really going on."

Don't forget about attitude and behavior

Data-driven KPIs, as previously described, are an important part of measuring technician performance. But those metrics alone cannot be the measure of success.

"Shop managers should be having one-on-ones with their technicians at least once a month, preferably every two weeks. Then they can go through the metrics together and make sure everyone understands what's really going on."

Steve Saltzgiver, lead strategic consultant, RTA

And though Cooper went on about facts over feelings, he never said to completely ignore feelings. Some feelings, like employee attitude, can be measured and therefore quantifiably improved.

"Much like marketers use net promoter scores to measure how consumers feel about their brand, shops can measure how their technicians feel about their jobs and co-workers," he explained. To do so, he suggested managers send out quarterly surveys to techs asking if they receive enough support from leadership and if they get along with co-workers.

"This type of data is more subjective, but provides valuable insights into how individual technicians and the shop as a whole are performing," Cooper added.

Acevedo noted that a tech's psychology is a big part of their overall value to a shop. This refers to behavioral traits like hustle, follow-through, and genuine care. Overachieving technicians are focused on productivity, but are also careful to avoid cutting corners. Overachievers treat drivers with respect and are pleasant to be around in the shop.

» If you are lucky enough to have an overachieving tech, you will notice they excel under the hood and face-to-face with colleagues and customers. To get all shop employees closer to that level, you will need the data to troubleshoot their deficiencies.

Fullbay

"Those are the things that don't show up in maintenance software," Acevedo said. "A shop manager needs to observe how their technicians act in the shop. All you have to do is watch a person work to see if they care, are sloppy, or have no sense of urgency. These things don't show up on a time clock, but can cost a fleet dearly."

As shop-level managers observe these traits and behaviors, Acevedo said their findings should be documented in a technician's personnel file. Then, when the time comes to conduct an official performance review or simply have a one-on-one meeting, the information is there to be discussed. This helps keep everyone focused on meeting the set standards.

But shops must have clearly defined roles and expectations if they expect technicians to meet certain standards. What skills, trainings, certifications, and behaviors should a technician possess? Every shop must figure this out for itself—and communicate it to its technicians.

Schuijer has been working on this very thing at Jetco Delivery. For a Level 1 technician, it's about attitude and ambition as much as anything else.

"We want our Level 1s to have certain skills, of course," Schuijer said. "We also want them to show up on time, ask questions, gladly help clean the shop when asked, etc."

As for a Level 2 technician, Schuijer said measuring success depends on the situation. Some Level 2 technicians have no interest in rising to a management-type role. That's okay. "Here I like to find other ways of challenging and motivating them," Schuijer related. "Maybe they would like to attend some training on electrical or diagnostics so they can help with more complex jobs that a Level 3 technician would do. On the other hand, they might be content just doing what they're doing, even if it's just PM-related work. That's okay too, as long as they're doing a good job with a good attitude."

As for the most experienced Level 3 technicians, Schuijer wants them to help build Jetco's culture of growing from within.

"I'm looking for technicians who provide leadership and have others look up to them," Schuijer said. "I'm also looking for an attitude where they're able to see the bigger picture and are willing to stay late to finish a job, for example. They should also be good at maintaining excellent communication with our operations team."

In other words, Schuijer likes to see her experienced technicians begin exhibiting the qualities of a good shop manager. That way, she knows when these technicians are ready to rise from generating KPIs to analyzing them, making their shop a more efficient, productive place. ▀

For related content go to [FleetMaintenance.com/shop-operations](https://www.fleetmaintenance.com/shop-operations)

Quantifying managerial intangibles

Shop managers have plenty of concrete KPIs to meet to succeed at their job. But what about some of the "non-quantifiable" traits a good maintenance manager needs to possess? How can fleets gain visibility into that? A good place to start is by asking the technicians being managed, as long as their feedback is honest and accurate.

"Technicians are a unique bunch of people in that they hate to badmouth their bosses," said Ernest Acevedo, fleet maintenance director at DPV Transportation, a specialty passenger transportation company. "At the same time, fleet maintenance directors need their technicians to respect their shop leaders. Maintenance directors have to find a way to encourage honest feedback from those technicians."

Amanda Schuijer, strategic maintenance director at Jetco Delivery, has found a way to do that. "We've begun doing what we call 360-degree reviews for our managers," she said.

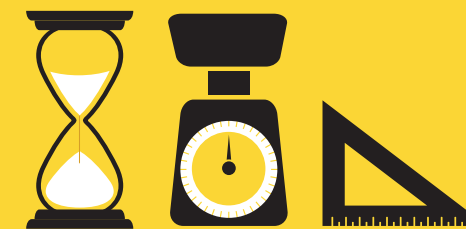
What is a 360-degree review? Each manager is reviewed by their shop team. To help ensure open and honest feedback, Jetco uses a platform that anonymizes responses. And Schuijer and the president of the company attend one of the shop's huddle meetings prior to a 360-degree review process getting started. They stress how vital technician feedback is when trying to accurately assess manager performance.

"We did our first 360-degree of a manager earlier this year and got 100% participation from the technicians," Schuijer said. "We look for themes in the feedback. For example,

if three technicians said the shop manager has a bad attitude every other morning, that's something we can address privately with the shop manager to fix what might need fixing."

That's the entire purpose of KPIs in general—to measure performance and identify what needs fixing. That goes for the hard data a software platform can provide as well as observational data that

helps provide deeper insights into an employee's behaviors and characteristics. When it all comes together, that's when fleets can truly understand how their maintenance teams are performing.



We Are More Than Mobile LIFTS

EXPERIENCE THE GRAY DIFFERENCE



MM-2000 Transmission Jack



WD-150S Wheel Dolly



FLJ-770b Floor Lift Jack



TSL-70 Truck Service Lift



QP-160 Oil Filter Crusher



QL-300a Surface Mounted Lift



PTRW-20



ES-2000 Engine Stand

- Clutch Jacks
- Engine Stands
- Floor Service Jacks
- Fluid Handlers
- Fork Lift Jacks
- Miscellaneous Equipment
- Mobile Column Lifts
- Oil Filter Crushers
- Shop Cranes
- Shop Presses
- Surface Mounted Lifts
- Transmission Jacks
- Truck Air Jack Stands
- Truck Component Jacks
- Vehicle Support Stands
- Wheel Dollies
- Wheel Lift Systems



1.800.821.7320 • [grayusa.com](https://www.grayusa.com)

