It Was Never the Money.

We interviewed 1,000 technicians in 2026. The number one reason they were willing to leave a shop wasn't pay. It was not knowing.

1,000
Technicians interviewed across 2026

#1
Issue raised: transparency, not pay

$24,775
True revenue lost per empty bay, per week

> A shop can hide almost anything under a big paycheck — the same way heavy sales hide a broken operation. Neither one holds.

THE FINDING

Technicians don't leave over the number. They leave over the black box behind it.

Across a thousand conversations this year, the most common theme wasn't compensation. It was transparency — the absence of a clear, shared answer to "how does this place actually work?"

Every technician who reached out to us about changing shops had a number in their head. Almost none of them led with it. They led with confusion: how hours are set, how work is assigned, how pay is decided, and what it takes to earn more. When a person can't see the rules, he assumes the rules are rigged against him — and he starts taking calls.

Pay is a painkiller, not a cure. More money masks what's wrong the way a strong sales month masks a broken operation. It buys silence, not loyalty — and you can only pay out what the shop actually earns. Transparency costs nothing to install, and it's what they were asking for.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

On hours and visibility

FLAG HOURS

"Why are my flag hours where they are? Nobody can explain the number to me."

TEAM PRODUCTION

"How many hours am I earning this week? How many is the team earning? I have no idea until the check shows up."

On how pay is decided

RATE LOGIC

"I'm outproducing guys who make more per hour than I do. Nobody has ever told me why they're at their rate and I'm at mine."

THE PATH UP

"What exactly do I need to improve, or do more of, to get paid more? Just tell me the target and I'll hit it."

IN THEIR OWN WORDS — CONTINUED

On fairness and optics

WORK DISTRIBUTION

"Why is every bad job coming to me while the easy gravy goes to the less experienced guy — and he's flagging $50K more a year than I am?"

OWNER OPTICS

"I haven't had a raise in three years. The owner has bought four new trucks. I'm not owed an explanation, but I'd like one."

READ IT AGAIN

Every one of those quotes is a question — not a demand.

That distinction is the whole report. Not one of those technicians said "pay me more and I'll stay." They said **tell me how this works.** Those are questions a shop can answer this week, for free, without touching the labor rate. And the shops that answer them keep their people while their competitors quietly bid against each other.

Silence is expensive because a technician always fills it with a story, and the story is never generous. None of it requires a bad owner — only a quiet one.

WHAT SILENCE GETS FILLED WITH

WHAT THE TECHNICIAN SEES	WHAT HE DECIDES IT MEANS
Flag time he can't explain	"They're shaving my hours."
A pay rate with no stated logic	"I'm being taken advantage of."
The gravy work going elsewhere	"The boss has favorites and I'm not one."
No raise, but visible spending	"There was money. It just wasn't for me."
No stated path to a higher level	"There's nothing here for me long-term."

Not one of those conclusions requires you to have done anything wrong. Every one of them is what a reasonable person assumes when nobody tells him otherwise. And the last one is the sentence that gets a technician to answer a recruiter.

WHY A RAISE DOESN'T HOLD

A bump buys you quiet. It doesn't buy you an answer.

Run the tape forward on the shop that answers a resignation letter with two dollars an hour. The tech stays — but nothing he complained about changed. The discomfort is simply priced now. Six months later that number feels normal, the same questions are back, and the next shop offers three.

Worse, you just taught the floor how raises are earned here: threaten to leave. That lesson spreads faster than any policy you'll ever post.

> **"Getting paid more can hide what's upsetting people. It was never the thing that made a technician pick up the phone and call us."**
>
> TRINITY TALENT GROUP — 1,000 TECHNICIAN INTERVIEWS, 2026

TO BE CLEAR

None of this is an argument for underpaying.

A rate that is genuinely below market will lose you people no matter how well you explain it, and transparency is not a substitute for a fair number. The point is the order of operations. Most shops reach for the raise first because it is the only lever they know how to pull, and then wonder why the same tech is restless a year later.

Fix the visibility first. You will find out very quickly which of your technicians actually had a pay problem — and it will be a much shorter list, at a much smaller number, than the one you were bracing for.

The parallel every owner already knows: a huge sales month can hide a broken operation for a while — it never fixes it, it just makes the reckoning bigger. Pay works the same way on a shop floor.

THE COST OF GETTING IT WRONG

An empty bay doesn't cost you flag hours. It costs you the whole car.

Most shops price a vacancy by the technician's own labor, and that is the small half of it. When nobody is in that bay, the vehicle doesn't move at all. The booth stays empty. The calibration never gets billed. The parts never get marked up. The sublet never happens. You don't lose a labor line — **you lose the repair order.**

WHAT ONE AVERAGE REPAIR ORDER ACTUALLY CARRIES

LINE ON THE ESTIMATE	AMOUNT
Parts and parts markup	**$1,982**
Body and structural labor	**$1,090**
Refinish labor	**$693**
Paint and materials	**$396**
Calibrations, scans and diagnostics	**$446**
Frame, mechanical, glass and sublet	**$348**
Average repairable severity — one vehicle	**$4,955**

Only one of those lines is the body technician's own labor. Price a vacancy on flag hours alone and you credit that car with about $1,250. The car is worth $4,955. Every empty-bay calculation built on labor by itself understates the real loss by roughly 75%.

A technician flagging 80 hours a week moves about **five** of those cars. That is the number that leaves the building — five complete repair orders a week, not eighty labor hours.

$24,775

True revenue lost for every week that bay sits empty — five repair orders at average severity, with the paint, the calibrations and the parts gross that ride along with them.

THE COST OF GETTING IT WRONG

One empty bay, priced out.

Revenue is the headline, but gross profit is the number an owner actually feels — a share of every repair order is parts cost passing through. Both are shown here at a blended 45% gross.

IF THAT BAY STAYS EMPTY FOR…	REVENUE LOST	GROSS PROFIT LOST
One day (one car)	$4,955	$2,230
One week (five cars)	$24,775	$11,149
One month (4.33 weeks)	$107,276	$48,274
One quarter (13 weeks)	$322,075	$144,934
One year (52 weeks)	**$1,288,300**	**$579,735**

AND IT SCALES WITH THE TECHNICIAN YOU LOST

TECHNICIAN OUTPUT	CARS / WK	REVENUE / WK	REVENUE / YR
80 flag hours — solid producer	5	$24,775	$1,288,300
100 flag hours — strong producer	6	$29,730	$1,545,960
120 flag hours — top performer	**8**	**$39,640**	**$2,061,280**

Read that last row twice. The technician everybody in your building already knows is your best is carrying two million dollars a year through one bay. He is also the one with the most options, the shortest patience for a black box, and the phone that rings the most.

You are not choosing between transparency and profit. You are choosing between transparency and a vacancy — and the vacancy has a price tag on it. The bill doesn't stop at the empty bay either: a week down is a week of overtime, longer cycle times, work pushed onto the people who stayed, and customers who wait. That pressure is exactly what makes the next technician start listening, which is how one open bay quietly becomes two.

Figures use an average repairable severity of $4,955 and a blended 45% gross profit, at roughly five repair orders per week for a technician flagging 80 hours. Estimate composition is illustrative of a typical repair order. The model assumes the work is not absorbed elsewhere — in a shop already running at capacity, it isn't. Drop in your own severity, mix and car count; the shape of the number doesn't change.

FROM INSIDE THE BAY

The same math, from the technician's side.

Every hour on that board is money in both directions. Here is what those same flag hours are worth to the person turning the wrench, at three common flat-rate pay levels and 50 paid weeks.

FLAG HOURS PER WEEK	AT $25 / HOUR	AT $30 / HOUR	AT $35 / HOUR
80 hours	**$100,000**	**$120,000**	**$140,000**
100 hours	**$125,000**	**$150,000**	**$175,000**
120 hours	**$150,000**	**$180,000**	**$210,000**

At $30 a flag hour, **ten more hours a week is $300 a week and $15,000 a year.** That is the whole argument for putting hours on a board daily instead of revealing them at payroll. A technician cannot chase a number he can't see.

About that $50,000

Go back to the technician who asked why the less experienced guy was flagging $50,000 a year more than he was. At $30 per flag hour, a $50,000 gap is roughly **32 flag hours a week.** No two technicians in the same building differ by 32 hours of skill. That is not a talent gap — it is a dispatch and workflow gap, and it belongs to the shop, not to either technician.

Posted on a board, that gap becomes a conversation and a fix. Left hidden, it becomes a resignation — and the bay it empties costs you $24,775 a week.

And when a technician asks what the shop makes on his hour

Answer him. Of a $60 flag hour, roughly half goes to the technician's pay and the payroll burden that rides on it. The rest carries the building, the equipment, the booth, the insurance, the estimator, the parts department and the painter working the other half of the same car. A technician who hears that explained once stops assuming the difference is going into somebody's truck payment — and that single assumption, left unanswered, has cost more shops more good people than any pay plan ever has.

Both sides of this page are the same number. The shop is trying to keep $24,775 a week moving through that bay. The technician is trying to build a $120,000 to $180,000 year. Nobody's interests are actually in conflict here — but neither side can act on numbers they aren't allowed to see.

WHAT TO DO DIFFERENTLY

Seven moves. None of them cost a raise.

1. **Put the hours on a wall where everyone can see them**
   A visible board or shared screen: hours flagged per technician, per day, and the shop total against the weekly goal. Updated daily, not at payroll. The moment production is public, the guesswork — and most of the resentment — disappears.

2. **Explain how a job gets its time before the argument starts**
   Walk the team through where labor times come from, what the shop can and cannot adjust, and exactly how to flag a job that's mis-timed. Then honor that process. "Why is my flag time what it is?" should have a one-sentence answer any tech in the building can give.

3. **Publish the pay plan — the whole ladder**
   Write down every level, the rate attached to it, and the specific requirements to sit at that level: certifications, efficiency, comebacks, and hours produced. When the ladder is public, a higher rate stops looking like favoritism and starts looking like a target.

4. **Make dispatch visible and defensible**
   The loudest fairness complaint we heard was about work distribution. Track gravy versus grinder work by technician and review it monthly with the team. If the best diag tech gets the hard jobs, say so out loud — and pay for that reality on purpose instead of letting it look like punishment.

5. **Give every technician one number and one behavior to work on**
   Fifteen minutes, once a month, one-on-one: here's your production, here's the one metric to move, here's what it's worth in dollars when you move it. "What do I need to do to earn more?" should never be an unanswered question in your shop.

6. **Be honest about where the money goes**
   You don't owe anyone your P&L. You do owe them context. Techs notice new equipment, new trucks and new signage, and in silence they price it against their own last raise. A plain explanation of what gets reinvested and why costs nothing and kills the most corrosive story in the building.

7. **Close the loop out loud**
   When someone raises an issue, name it in front of the team and report back on what changed — or say plainly that it can't change and why. Transparency isn't an announcement. It's a habit people can predict.

The test: can every technician in your shop answer — without asking you — how many hours they flagged this week, what their rate is based on, and exactly what earns them the next one? If not, you have found your retention problem, and it is fixable without a dollar of additional labor spend.

ROLLOUT

The first 30 days.

Don't announce a culture initiative. Install four habits and let the team notice.

WEEK 1 **Make production visible.** Stand the hours board up — daily flagged hours per tech, shop total, weekly goal. No commentary yet. Just show the numbers.

WEEK 2 **Explain the time.** One short team meeting on where labor times come from and how to challenge a bad one. Write the process on a single page and post it.

WEEK 3 **Publish the ladder.** Hand every technician the written pay plan with the levels, the rates and the requirements. Answer questions in the open, in front of everyone.

WEEK 4 **Sit down one-on-one.** Fifteen minutes each: their numbers, the one metric to move, what moving it is worth. Put the next one on the calendar before they leave the room.

Then hold it for 90 days. Transparency that lasts a month reads as a stunt. Transparency that survives a bad month is what makes a technician stop taking recruiter calls — ours included.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Pay what the shop earns. Explain everything else.

You can only pay out what comes through the door, and every owner knows it. That's exactly why the finding from these 1,000 interviews matters so much: the thing technicians asked for most is the one thing that isn't rationed. Clarity has no budget line. It just requires the decision to stop being quiet.

Want an outside read on your shop?

Trinity Talent Group finds, trains and retains technicians for shops that want to stop rebuying the same seat every eighteen months. If your bays are open — or your best people are getting quiet — let's talk.

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