

## Overcoming Challenges as a Woman in the Collision Repair Industry

As a young girl growing up on the poor side of town, my Mother never once TOLD me that I could do anything I wanted. She did however SHOW me what I could. She rebuilt her Buick motor on the sidewalk in front of our home in downtown St. Louis, Mo. We ate dinner sitting on the floor as there were parts to a carburetor on the table and could not be moved. If it needed to be done, she got it done. She was my biggest inspiration and role model, teaching me through example of the challenges one can get through should they set their mind to it.

I never realized how *overcoming challenges* could make me so strong. Starting out with little experience in automotive repair, I was what had been referred to by a co-workers wife, “swimming with the sharks”. I faced ridicule, doubt from others, and inexperience with a lack of support. I decided to take all of that and turn it into a positive. With ridicule, I turned to constructive criticism. With doubt, I chose determination. With inexperience and little support I chose self-taught knowledge and hands on experience.

My first job in a body shop entailed cleaning bathrooms twice a week for \$35.00. Being a single mother and care-giver of a disabled woman, my funds did not allow for any type of automotive training. I *took advice* from those around me that supported my desire to work in this industry. I *watched, worked and learned*.

There was a never ending “nit-pick” at all I did. While trying so hard to do a good job, I would hear others talking about me behind my back. I did not realize at the time that I could have and should have gone to my boss to report these things and enlist further support. Instead, I *learned the power of ignore*. I *taught myself* to pick up on certain things they said to better myself. I would *never allow myself to get discouraged* by what others said or thought, but instead *found strength to conquer those road blocks*.

Those stepping stones have led me from that janitorial position to becoming a full time estimator with customer service skills. I no longer have to doubt myself or the choices I made, as I now feel at home in the collision repair industry. It is through continual education and exercising mutual respect for my colleagues, that I am able to maintain respect from both customers and co-workers.

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