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**SETBACKS OFTEN
LEAD TO GREATER
SATISFACTION**

WIMMER'S AUTOMOTIVE, MORRO BAY, CA

WIMMER'S
Automotive

OWNER OF
WIMMER'S AUTOMOTIVE
RITCHIE WIMMER

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SHOP PROFILE

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WIMMER'S
Automotive

SETBACKS OFTEN LEAD TO GREATER SATISFACTION

Wimmer's Automotive, Morro Bay, CA

For **Ritchie Wimmer**, owner of **Wimmer's Automotive**, a NAPA Auto Care Center in Morro Bay, CA, shop success isn't simply found in the shop. While it's true that Wimmer juggles multiple successful automotive-related ventures, he says that getting out from underneath the car has literally saved his life – and changed the lives of hundreds of others.

Wimmer isn't just running a successful auto repair shop; he's actively shaping the future of the automotive industry. His dual role as a shop owner and automotive instructor at Morro Bay High School provides him with a unique perspective on the challenges and opportunities facing the trades. And his perspective about soaring success is the direct result of a crushing defeat.

Wimmer's journey, marked by entrepreneurial drive, a life-altering accident, and a deep commitment to his community, has been anything but a straight line.

"When I was a little kid, I always wanted to have race cars," Wimmer says. "When I got into high school in 1998, I had the chance to take three full years of auto shop at Rim of the World High School in Lake Arrowhead, CA. My first automotive instructor made a powerful impression on me and I just fell in love with the automotive industry."

However, as with so many similar stories, Wimmer was a good student in the rest of his classes as well, so he was steered toward college and

away from an automotive career. "I really wanted to attend the NASCAR Training Institute in Mooresville, NC, but I got into all the colleges I applied for too," he says. "It was actually kind of a bummer, but I was able to pursue my passion of cars through various car clubs and doing work on my own. I bought a car for 50 bucks with zero parts to build my own race car, and I rented a little shop to build it in 2006. I was working as a Park Ranger Aide and Camp Host as well as interning as an engineer in the water resources department for the County of San Luis Obispo, just doing that 'young adult thing,'" Wimmer says. "Then in 2008, I met John Neiswanger who owned a shop called Jim's Automotive in Morro Bay. Eventually, John suggested I come





work for him. 'I can teach you some stuff, and you obviously really like this.' So even though my parents didn't like the idea of me being a technician, it was what I really wanted to do. He started with an apprentice and ended up with a son-in-law when I married his daughter, Courtney. For four years it was just me and John."

Neiswanger became a pivotal mentor in Wimmer's life. "He taught me everything about the business, everything from cleaning the floor to oil changes, to diagnostics, to talking to customers, to parts," Wimmer explains. This comprehensive understanding of the shop's inner workings, from the most menial tasks to the most complex repairs, laid the foundation for his future success.

Neiswanger instilled in Wimmer a

key philosophy: "If you're really serious about this, you should own a business – that's how you can make it." This idea resonated deeply, and in 2013, Wimmer took the plunge, purchasing Neiswanger's shop and rebranding it as Wimmer's Automotive. He spent the next ten years honing his skills, building a loyal customer base and developing a team of skilled technicians.

AN UPWARD TRAJECTORY

"Once I bought it, I needed techs," Wimmer says. "I started backfeeding the information I had been learning back down through my team, developing several skilled technicians. One of them, Taylor Ketchum, moved on to work for SpaceX on a 2 year contact maintaining rocket engines! I am so excited to have Taylor returning

to our shop this year as an ASE certified technician, bringing back to our shop the skills learned in the big world."

Finding and developing techs became a passion for Wimmer and continues to this day. "Right now, I have an ASE certified master technician named James Lundeen who has been with me for more than a decade, Taylor Ketchum an ASE certified automotive technician, as well as a Toyota Certified Service Technician named Jaedon Morton, who just started with us. We also have two intern/apprentices from 2 different local high schools, Collin Trujillo and Jayden Yost who come in in the afternoon to help out with oil changes and maintenance tasks. Collin has been studying a lot and plans to get ASE G1 certified before he graduates in June of this year. Claire Wimmer, my

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sister, has been with us for many years and has taken over as service manager coordinating customer and technician needs on a daily basis. We are still understaffed, however.”

Wimmer balances his time in the shop in a unique way, one that allows him to interact with his staff, his students and his customers. “I’m up early at home in the morning, when I do a little bit of office work, check my emails, see what’s going on with the shop. I organize my emails and I use filters, spending a lot of time just organizing the chaos. It helps me know where to delegate things and prep my staff for the day too.”

Wimmer says he takes his son Copleand to school each morning, focusing his attention on him, not the shop or the classroom. After he drops him off, he heads to the shop, checking with his service manager on the way about any surprises he should expect when he opens the doors.

“Claire, my service manager, works remotely in Atascadero. She’s very good on the phone and can do everything that doesn’t have to be done at the shop, like billing and talking to vendors and processing work orders. Anything that can be done on the phone, she does it. So we have no phones ringing at the shop unless it’s a direct cell phone. That really helps with customer interactions and overall productivity,” Wimmer says.

Customers schedule their preferred appointment times through AutoOps. “That’s a big key, so we don’t overbook,” Wimmer says. “If you have everybody showing up at the same time to drop off cars it can be very chaotic. This way, customers know their times and they’re usually within five to 10 minutes one way or the other. I can organize the drop off time as we need them and I can be there in the morning to greet the customer. Sometimes customers want to chat, sometimes they want to leave.”

Because of the scheduling software capabilities, Wimmer says he knows



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what is expected before they show up. It allows him to be the face of Wimmer's Automotive and engage with his clients on a different level. "I get to see every customer, and this is what seems to have landed for me. I'm just there at the shop making coffee for the customers, maybe getting a special little donut for them. The process is still developing – it's a matter of just being there to greet all the customers at the beginning."

The shop relies on digital vehicle inspections and digital communication to keep customers updated on their vehicle status throughout the day. Wimmer says he implemented the procedure in 2015, when his shop was the only one in the county doing DVIs. "I was just trying to stay ahead of the curve, and we were very successful with that," he says.

It helps, of course, that his techs are well-trained and capable of meeting the needs of the surrounding community. Wimmer's belief in the importance of training led him to purchase the doctor's office behind his shop and turn it into auxiliary repair space and a dedicated training center.

"I didn't really have a structure of training," Wimmer recalls. "I need people in my town; there's interest. I've got young people who want to work with cars, so how can I do it? So when I

bought the office building, the idea was to set up a little computer workstation, a learning center, a place where we could do in-person training without distractions."

Wimmer and his team did all the work to add two new bays, an outdoor work area, a fully operational parts department, a locker room, kitchen and offices. "It's set up for three to four technicians, which we're hoping to add to the team," he says.

After working in the shop and teaching four classes at Morro Bay High School, Wimmer looks forward to spending each evening with his family, eating dinner together, playing games with his son, and settling

down to watch a show with his wife. For Wimmer, this is the perfect end to each day.

A NEAR-FATAL TURNING POINT

In 2016, Wimmer's life took a dramatic and unexpected turn. While working alone in his shop, preparing his race car for an upcoming event, a catastrophic accident occurred. "While I was by myself, I lifted the car up on a lift. It was above me, six and a half feet above me, and I was pulling on this side skirt. The rack had a failure, and the car fell on top of me and trapped me under the car," he recounts with chilling detail.

The accident left Wimmer with severe injuries, including permanent damage to his left arm. He vividly recalls the terrifying experience: "All of a sudden I started seeing all this blood coming from underneath the Miata and I couldn't move. I felt the blood, and all of a sudden my eyes started to go dark, and I had this feeling like I just killed myself...again." It was at that moment Wimmer recalls the feeling that everything was connected. He says the feeling of death was very comfortable, and that there was no pain to be felt. "I ended up coding 4 times during the accident, and each time I saw my family members who had previously passed



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away, and they kept sending me back saying, 'You don't want to die!'"

Miraculously, a neighbor heard the crash and found Wimmer trapped beneath the car. Emergency responders were able to rescue him, but the accident had a profound impact on his life and career. "Things at the shop were already stabilized, the customer base was good, but I was in the hospital in the ICU on life support. It was a really bad situation," he explains. "I thought, 'I have one arm – there's no way I can have a shop anymore!'"

As they say, when one door closes, another opens. "The accident happened on Saturday – by Thursday or Friday of the next week, I was already on my laptop. I needed to see what was going on at the shop. I'm sure they were scared and they didn't know what's going on. So I tried to communicate with them, which I was able to, and



then I just started looking at stuff remotely. That's actually what sparked our new business model. It completely changed how I ran my shop."

Not only has it changed his focus on business operations, the

experience altered his perception of the importance of education regarding shop safety, Wimmer says.

"The truth is that it's something to be really serious about. So I bring that knowledge of safety and the dangers

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of working late and alone and not checking a lift when you should have checked it. Now I have a story to tell that the kids will listen to.”

A NEW CALLING

While recovering from his accident, Wimmer received an invitation that would change the course of his career. He was asked to speak to an automotive class at San Luis Obispo High School. This experience ignited a passion for teaching and mentoring young people.

“I was all about helping young technicians, but I had never thought about becoming a teacher,” Wimmer says. “All of a sudden, it all clicked.”

Wimmer pursued his teaching credential and began substituting at local high schools. In April 2024, he officially joined the faculty at Morro Bay High School, where he now teaches automotive technology.

BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

Wimmer’s unique position as both a shop owner and an instructor allows him to bridge the gap between

education and industry. He uses his shop as a training ground for his students, providing them with real-world experience and mentorship. “I’m actually training both sides at the same time in order to create a pathway for students that are interested in cars,” he explains.

He emphasizes the importance of both technical skills and soft skills, recognizing that success in the automotive industry requires more than just mechanical aptitude. “You don’t need to understand how the cars go together when you’re starting,” he says. “Those master techs need



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to understand that they've spent 20 years learning it and they've mastered it. The young people need to be able to move, do an oil change without leaving an oil filter loose, double check each other, wash a car, vacuum it, talk to a customer, put a window sticker in appropriately, do all of those basic things that the shop owner is making sure is getting done."

A CALL TO ACTION

Wimmer is deeply concerned about the growing technician shortage facing the automotive industry. He cites alarming statistics: "500 transportation professionals are leaving the industry every single day in the US with no replacement for the next four years or five years."

To address this crisis, Wimmer is actively involved in his community, reaching out to young people and their



parents to promote the opportunities available in the automotive trades. He believes that changing perceptions and highlighting the potential for rewarding careers is crucial.

He also encourages other shop owners to get involved in their local schools and communities. "Get involved, really," he urges. "The programs are there." He points to his

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own experience taking eight students to SEMA for the first time. "That was a big deal, taking high school auto shop kids who aren't generally involved in sports, who haven't really travelled for school before." He sees events like SEMA and AAPEX as vital for inspiring students and showing them the breadth of the industry. "Seeing the industry brought together in the wild, but also under one roof, AAPEX, SEMA, you think that could be inspirational to students and maybe their parents as well?"

Wimmer says his long-term goal is to create a formal apprenticeship program for his students. "I know that NAPA has a full apprentice program that I'm learning about now and I'm hoping to incorporate it into the school."

As a NAPA AutoCare Center, Wimmer says he values the partnership that provides access to quality parts, training, and a valuable nationwide warranty. "The main thing that drew me in was the warranty," he explains. "The 24-month, two-year nationwide warranty is great."

The NAPA partnership also provides access to digital parts ordering and knowledgeable parts professionals. "We're almost exclusively online,"



Wimmer says. "We integrate through Parts Tech so everything is integrated in ShopWare." He appreciates the support and expertise provided by his local NAPA store, SLO Auto Parts, in San Luis Obispo, and its owner, Mike. "Like the old days, knowledgeable parts people are still a phone call away."

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

His advice to other shop owners is clear: "Get involved." By investing

in their communities, mentoring young people, and embracing new technologies, shop owners can not only build thriving businesses but also contribute to the long-term health and vitality of the automotive industry, ensuring that the trades remain a viable and rewarding career path for generations to come. He believes that by working together, shop owners, educators, and industry partners can steer the next generation towards a brighter future in the automotive world.

"Teaching was a way for me to deal with my recurring PTSD from the accident," he says. "After it happened, I was honestly trying to get out of the shop. It's funny, one of the management quotes that we keep hearing is that shop owners need to get out from under the car because if they're working on the cars and they're trying to talk to customers, they're not focusing ON their business, they're IN their business. Metaphorically, it can crush you."

For Ritchie Wimmer, the concept is more than metaphorical. "Getting out from under the car literally saved me. I've just been following that concept, and I hope to be able to help others do the same." ■

