

SMALL BUSINESS

Cold weather tough on cars

But it's been good for repair business

By R'becca Groff, correspondent

Man and beast are not the only ones suffering from this winter's extended cold temperatures and incessant snowfall. Automobiles also incurring more than their fair share of damage and mayhem.

Trying to get around in excessive cold, snow and ice is chaotic enough, but when stalled or broken vehicles get tossed into the mix, the challenges of winter driving and repair bills increase, keeping auto repair shops busy.

Goodyear Tire Center in Marion started seeing more customers in November, owner Troy Benham recalled.

"It's been very brisk with the cold weather, all the snow and ... now with the condition of the roads," he said.

Benham employs 11 full-time mechanics and estimated that they run 80 to 100 cars a day through his shop, 6 days a week.

"We are a high volume shop," he said with some understatement.

"We are seeing a lot of broken suspensions. Also a lot of bent wheels, damaged tires and control arms," he added.

The severe weather and the freezing and thawing process is taking its tolls on the roadways, which present heaved paving and holes that get deeper as traffic drives over them. The end result can lead to expensive repairs.

"The advice I would offer to people is to make sure they are compensating on the air pressure in their tires," Benham said. "That is huge when the weather fluctuates. Tires lose 1 pound of air pressure for every 10 degrees of temperature loss."

"When the cars with low profile tires get low on air and



Justin Wan photos/The Gazette

Assistant manager Dustin Lacey (right) inspects a car on Tuesday at Goodyear Tire Center in Marion. Business has been "very brisk with the cold weather," owner Troy Benham says.



General service technician Jason Hines (left) and assistant manager Dustin Lacey (right) work on replacing a car battery at Goodyear Tire Center in Marion, which employs 11 full-time mechanics.

they hit one of these chuck holes, they do not have a lot of sidewall to take that cushion up, so that's what bends wheels and pinches the tire in between

the wheel and the chuck hole, damaging the tires then," added Mike Hubbell, owner of Hubbell's Auto Repair.

Hubbell employs five full

time mechanics and on any given business day lately they see 10 to 15 vehicles in their shop for repairs.

"We saw an increase in our business volume up through January, but what we are seeing now is a lot of cars with suspension issues because of the roads," he noted.

"We've had bent rims, and damaged tires. We're also seeing an increase in broken sway bar links.

"Those are always oscillating underneath the car when the car is being driven down the road — and when someone hits a pothole, they are either being broken, or their life is shortened because of the severity of the bump."

Hubbell noted that in early winter, "we were dealing with cars that needed repairs because they were fine when the weather was warm. But once

it started getting cold, they couldn't hack it.

"In December and January alone, we were probably selling two to three batteries per day, but that has dropped off now."

Hubbell also has seen a rise in starting and heating problems, as well as coolant leaks due to the cold.

Extreme cold can cause rubber parts to become brittle. Radiator and heater hoses should be checked for cracks, leaks and contamination from oil or grease, and replaced if they feel brittle or overly soft, both repair shop owners said.

Hubbell added that car owners should continue basic maintenance, such as regularly changing their car's oil and keeping all fluids topped off.

The cold and potholes have done their part for increasing the bottom line for Havlik's Auto Service owner Aaron Phillips, too.

"We've probably seen a 10 percent increase just from the damage caused by hitting potholes this winter," Phillips said. "The tires, shocks and struts absorb all of that pounding.

"Batteries and alternators have been very big sellers for us this season," he added.

"If the battery is going bad, it can have an effect on the alternator because once the battery starts to go down, the alternator has to work harder to keep it maintained. With the cold weather dropping below zero for long periods of time, we've seen a lot of batteries failing — their cells are actually dropping out, which kills the battery."

The best piece of advice he offered, and one that may be a little hard to do considering the widespread prevalence of potholes in Iowa roads this winter, is "avoid them, if you can — although I know it's a little hard to do that right now."

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP | JO MILLER

A checklist for when to diplomatically say no

If you're ambitious about climbing the career ladder, you eventually will reach a point in your career where you find that you can't advance to the next level without being able to show that you have relevant experience.

But you can't get the experience without doing the job.

One way to demonstrate your potential to grow beyond your current role is to take on "stretch" assignments. By volunteering for additional roles and responsibilities, you can learn new skills, make your talents visible to your leaders and demonstrate your readiness to step into a more responsible role.

Despite all the benefits of volunteering for stretch assign-

ments, there are times when the extra workload actually can work against you. For example, at a recent seminar one guest told me, "A mentor told me that volunteering for stretch assignments will help improve my career. I took on three new projects and now I am not getting any sleep. Help!"

This woman's mentor had given her good advice, but within reason. We must learn to put "guardrails" around these stretch assignments so that we are not stretched too thin while performing them.

But how do we say no to stretch assignments without also saying no to furthering our careers?

The key is to be highly selective. If you are going to take

on responsibilities outside the bounds of your job description you must choose strategically if they are to work to your benefit.

One common career misstep that emerging leaders make is accepting too many low-visibility assignments which require them to work overtime without gaining the benefits of recognition and skills growth that such stretch assignments should bring.

To avoid stretching yourself too thin for no visible career benefit, here is a checklist for when to diplomatically say no.

Don't volunteer for:

1. Assignments that stretch you too thin — Instead, look for projects that stretch you without overwhelming you, so that you can deliver a con-

sistently high quality of work. Think quality of assignments, not quantity.

2. Assignments that don't build your strengths — The best stretch assignment is one that requires you to build business acumen, new technical skills or leadership skills. Don't volunteer unless a project has the potential to expand your ideal skill-set and lets you demonstrate your potential to go beyond the job you are currently in.

3. Assignments that don't meaningfully expand your network — Stay away from projects that are all about work and have no networking opportunities. Go after projects where you can build stronger working relationships and

demonstrate your expertise to leaders, sponsors and other stakeholders.

4. Assignments that don't build the reputation you want to be known for — Say no to projects that don't align with the specific brand you are trying to build within the organization.

Remember, "stretch" assignments are designed to build your skill set and organizational brand, not simply add duties to your already busy schedule. Be ruthless, but diplomatic, about turning down assignments.

Otherwise the only "stretching" you'll be doing is stretching yourself too thin.

● Jo Miller is CEO of Women's Leadership Coaching Inc., <http://www.womenleadershipcoaching.com>.

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