

# Basic press skills sorely lacking

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By Frank Bourlon Columnist

This past year I have been in several pressrooms staffed with workers who, on the surface, appear to lack the basic skills to efficiently operate a press.

Yes, they get the paper out. Yes, they get the paper out on time. What else is needed? The problem is the operators don't understand good maintenance practices, which leads to poor print quality, higher-than-necessary newsprint waste and an improperly maintained machine.

The end result? Increased repair costs.

If operators clearly understand the mechanics governing how a press works, they can do a much better job maintaining the equipment.

Here's an example. What happens when the ink form roller switch is turned on? Or what happens, depending upon the press being operated, when the form roller lever is manually moved to the "on" position?

Here is what happens. When the form roller lever arm is moved to the "on" position, it moves two eccentrics that are mounted on the form roller shaft. The eccentrics contact the form roller bracket, allowing the brackets to move if the form roller shaft is moved or rotated.

If the form roller is operated by an electrical switch, then an air cylinder will move the form roller lever, thus accomplishing the same goal.

## **The goal**

Why am I writing about form roller lever arms? It seems as if a large number of press operators don't understand this simple concept. Operators can set the ink rollers if there aren't any problems with the ink form roller system. Operators don't appear to know what to do if the form roller lever moves but the ink roller bracket doesn't.

Indeed, I've watched operators set the ink form roller permanently to the plate cylinder because they didn't know what else to do. Their jobs were on the line and they had to get the paper printed because they were already past deadline.

Operators are running into trouble because, in many cases, the only knowledge they have is what they picked up from the last operator who showed them. And how experienced and how much knowledge did that operator have? In an alarming number of instances, the only training an operator may receive is by standing next to another operator, who may or may not know what he's doing.

I have seen press operators with as many as 17 years' experience who possessed less skill than operators with less than one year of experience - who had the proper training.

### **Worth the effort**

Please don't misunderstand. I do believe that on-the-job training can work as long as a good plan supporting that approach is developed and sustained. Unfortunately, that doesn't always happen.

I'm not trying to make the press operator a mechanic, although a good understanding of how different systems function will improve the press operator's ability to inspect and either repair the defect or at least describe the defect to a service technician so that the culprit can be fixed quickly without the need to band-aid the problem for an extended period of time.

The basic fact is that good training can save your newspaper money by reducing waste, increasing reader satisfaction and avoiding costly repairs.

Good training is worth the money and effort.

*Frank Bourlon is the executive and training director for the Newspaper Production and Research Center. He can be reached at [nprc@flash.net](mailto:nprc@flash.net) or 405.524.7774.*