

Sharpen the Saw

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It's that time of year when we resolve to improve in some aspect of our lives during the coming year. Sadly, few of those New Year's resolutions last very long. Instead of resolutions, I'd like to offer some simple things you can do immediately to improve productivity in your shop.

In 'The Seven Habits of Effective People', Stephen Covey shares Habit 7: Sharpen the Saw. Of course, he is actually talking about physical, mental and spiritual self-improvement, which you really should work on. But for this article I choose to take him literally and talk about improving your saws/tools. Here are some easy and inexpensive ways to get more out of your tools by investing a little time:

Sharpen

There are many cutting edges in your shop that need regular sharpening. Sharp tools produce better cuts and are actually safer to use. Hand tools, chisels and plane blades can be hand sharpened but carbide tipped blades will need professional sharpening. Band saw blades are generally not worth sharpening because the labor involved is worth more than the cost of a new blade.

Tune-up

Clean all your cast iron surfaces. I like to use WD-40 and a Scotch-Brite pad to remove rust on cast iron and pitch on blades. Check drive belts to be sure they are not cracked or frayed and be sure the tension is set correctly.

- **Table Saw** – Clean any dust or pitch accumulation inside your saw. Align blade, miter slot and fence per your manual's instructions. Adjust the throat plate height. Check the

miter gauge to make sure it slides freely with no wobble and that it is square to the miter slot.

- **Band saw** – Make sure the inside of the saw isn't packed with sawdust. Follow manual's instructions to set tracking, tension, guide blocks or rollers
- **Drill Press** – Apply a little drying lubricant inside the chuck to insure it operates freely. Set table at 90 degrees to the chuck – check that it is square in both planes.
- **Lathe** – Check the alignment of tailstock to headstock by bringing them together with the centers in. Shim the headstock or tailstock to align. Lubricate the tailstock quill and the sliding surfaces of the ways.

Protect

After all that work cleaning up your table surfaces, apply a good rust preventative to all the non-painted metal parts such as Boeshield T9 or a paste wax. A light coating will keep these parts clean and free of corrosion. Consider putting your valuable hand tools in tool rolls to keep them clean and nick free.

In his book, 'First Things First' – Stephen Covey explains that most people are driven by the urgent things in our lives. But we really need to reorganize the way we spend our time and focus on importance instead of just urgency. Giving your tools a tune-up is one of those tasks that is seldom urgent but is important.

Start your year out right and get your shop ready to produce excellent work.