

Finding and Keeping Drivers for the Small Trucking Company

By Timothy D. Brady



In trucking today, there's no argument that finding and keeping qualified truck drivers is the biggest challenge a trucking business owner faces. According to the DOT, there are over 11 million CDL holders in America today. With only 3.4 million trucking positions, that leaves 7.6 million commercial drivers not driving a truck. With numbers like these, there should be an overabundance of truckers available to fill your left seats. But as any small trucking company owner will attest, finding a qualified driver willing to put up with a trucker's lifestyle is like looking for a needle in a field of haystacks; and when you find that needle, you end up stabbing your finger.

What's the solution? The key to finding that team of super-truckers to haul your customers' tonnage is simple, honest communication. The biggest complaint drivers have about the recruiting process is they aren't told the truth about what they're getting themselves into as truck drivers. Envisioning a picture of a romantic, adventurous life on the road; the epitome of the professional tourist, is great for mythology and fiction, but it's not what trucking is all about.



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The three key drivers' needs, which must be filled by a trucking company, are:

- reasonable compensation for all hours required to perform the duties of driving a truck,
- consistency in pay from week to week, and
- scheduled time home.

Fulfilling these needs will put you on the road to higher driver retention. But the most important task you can perform to finding the right driver is to listen carefully for information:

- What are this driver's needs and wants?
- What is his/her family going to expect and need?
- What are his/her expectations in terms of money, time at home, type of equipment and amenities?
- What are his/her career goals; in the next year, three years, five and beyond?
- What are his/her personal financial requirements, house payments, car payments, other debt and personal financial goals? Are there any other income sources to cover these personal expenses other than the trucking position?

The point here, listening for information from this potential employee/contractor will assist you in determining if either his expectations or financial requirements are above what you can provide him. Or if there might just be a match.

The next step is to tell driver applicants all about your operation: the good, the bad, and the ugly. Give them every opportunity to ask for the details. Don't hide anything. If you've got a customer who makes your drivers wait for hours before loading or unloading, and the time is uncompensated, it's only fair it be divulged. This doesn't mean you paint a bleak picture, just an honest one. Most people don't like surprises that have a negative effect on their income, and there are instances in trucking when they're unavoidable. But a surprise known to operations or sales that isn't revealed to the driver is one of the largest causes of driver turnover today. The biggest complaint heard from drivers is they are given incomplete information during the recruiting interview. In some cases, the recruiter/interviewer is telling the trucker what the recruiter thinks the trucker wants to hear, or the trucker only heard what he wanted to hear.

Avoid these misunderstandings by providing the potential employee/contractor with a Question & Answer sheet. He or she must fill in the blanks with the information your recruiter provides them. The recruiter should have a similar Q&A sheet to note all the answers the trucker provides. At the completion of the interview the recruiter and trucker should exchange these sheets and go over the

information to be sure nothing is misunderstood. For this to work, both sides have to be totally forthcoming and honest.

When they have reviewed and corrected any misunderstandings on their respective answers, each of them, trucker and recruiter, signs his/her respective information as to its truth and validity. After copies are made, the trucker and recruiter should review the information privately to determine the compatibility of the trucker to the company and the company to the trucker.

Here are some key areas which should be covered for the trucker about the trucking company:

1. How are drivers paid?
2. What expenses or benefits does the company pay?
3. What percentage of the fuel surcharge goes to the driver?
4. Besides pay for driving the truck, what other activities do drivers receive compensation?
5. How often are drivers paid?
6. What is the company's load advance policy?
7. Are there any holdbacks or escrows deducted from the driver's revenue?
8. What insurance is required by the lease agreement?
9. What is the company's cargo insurance and cargo damage claim policy?
10. For a company-provided trailer, are there any expenses borne by the driver?
11. If a lumper is required, what is the company's lumper policy?
12. What is the normal amount of time a driver remains out before returning home?
13. What is the policy on getting home, and while at home?
14. When does dispatch start planning the driver's next load?
15. What benefits does the company provide for the driver and his/her family?
16. How many company trucks does the company own?
17. Is the driver required to attend orientation or other driver meetings?
18. If he/she leases or buys a truck from the company, what happens if the driver leaves the company?
19. What is the company's SafeStat Scores?
20. What is the company's driver turnover rate?
21. Does the company offer any accounting/business information and education workshops or courses?

The more information exchanged, the better the trucker and your company can decide on whether bringing this driver on board is beneficial to both parties. It's estimated it costs between \$8,000 and \$12,000 to hire and train a driver for your company. It can cost a trucker tens of thousands of dollars in lost income to switch trucking companies. So being diligent in the selection process for both sides makes sense. Knowledge is strength, and the more knowledgeable both the trucking company is about the trucker's wants and needs, and the trucker is about the company's methods and policies, the stronger the relationship will be. And all this makes for a strong, long-term business association between them.

Remember, it's your company, your truck.

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