



Are you the un-indicted co-conspirator to driver turnover?

By John A. Gentle, DLP

WHEN I THINK ABOUT DRIVER TURNOVER and the challenges of retention and recruiting, I can't help but focus on the numerous missteps both shippers and carriers are taking and the negative impact those blunders ultimately have on the driver population.

When soliciting freight from shippers, most carrier sales folks are hesitant to say anything that could be perceived as negative. They don't want to say "no" to multiple stops, counting, touching the freight, tarping, or delivering the shipment to the attention of Tony Soprano under a dark bridge in Northern Jersey. Seemingly, they would prefer to get the business and, if it doesn't work out, ask for forgiveness.

Additionally, many carrier sales teams don't do a good job ferreting out all of the information that's vital to providing the driver with a good experience—such as gaining a clear understanding of the nature of the material to be transported, the service sensitivities, and what the driver is really expected to do at the loading and receiving points.

The carrier's operations teams are also co-conspirators in the process. Rather than ensuring that they have a clear understanding of the program, many operations managers are just happy to get more opportunities for their team, reasoning that there is no such thing as "bad freight."

While some shippers contribute to driver turnover by not taking the time to collect information that carriers need to be successful, the good ones have properly positioned their carrier and their company for success by making a well defined fitness-for-use statement (FFU) available in print for the carrier—without having to be asked. Among other things, this FFU document clearly outlines:

- Product, package configuration, value, and classification—NMFC.
- MSDS (Material Data Safety Sheet) including Hazmat information.
- Safety and operational rules in force at the loading point.
- Nature of the customers and timeliness of the deliveries.
- Driver's role in handling returns, detention, and other issues.

John A. Gentle is president of John A. Gentle & Associates, LLC, a logistics consulting firm specializing in contract/relationship management and regulatory compliance for shippers, carriers, brokers, and distribution centers. A recipient of several industry awards, he has more than 35 years of experience in transportation and logistics management. He can be reached at jag@RelaTranShips.com.

- Special loading, unloading, and/or monitoring instructions.

Another mark of a good shipper: Insisting that the carrier's operations team sends someone to one of their plants before rates are agreed upon, or at least before the first shipment is made. This way they see the products; they understand how they are loaded/secured; they know how the plant loads; and they clearly see how the loading teams are staffed by day of week and time of day and where the pinch points are. The shipper then knows the answers to questions such as: Do they load by appointment or by first-come first-serve? Are there different waiting lines for long distance shipments as opposed to regional and/or dedicated shipments?

Regardless of whether the driver is going to a new shipping or receiving location, there is nothing worse—for the shipper or the receiver—than having a surprised and subsequently unhappy driver. Within one hour that unhappiness is shared at least with his teammates and likely everyone within CB range, translating into a poor service result for your customer.

So how do you avoid the indictment of contributing to the decline of the driver community?

1. Prepare a FFU document. And if the carrier sales team fails to ask the right questions, shippers must proactively provide them with the document and the MSDS information.
2. Prior to accepting a quote from a carrier, provide a video or insist that the carrier's operations team visit a typical plant to view the loading and/or receiving operations in order to understand the safety and operating rules, trailer pool requirements, driver reporting procedure, and where the pinch points are so they can navigate the driver around without incident.
3. Do not assume that the carrier's sales and operation teams have collected all the vital information. Rather it is incumbent upon you to ensure that both the dispatch and driver managers have the right information so that they can effectively plan and provide drivers with good experiences. This improves driver retention, and will not only boost your recruiting, but your reputation as a driver-friendly company.

Be proactive—don't become an accomplice to driver turnover!