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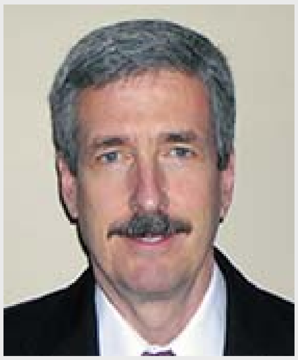

10 Reasons for Driver Turnover and What Carriers Can Do About It

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In 2005, an extensive trucking industry study performed by CostDown Consulting defined the top 10 reasons drivers cited for quitting a company. These reasons for leaving, called “influences,” were further classified into two categories based upon which group within a company most controlled each influence: corporate or field management.

Corporate-controlled influences are those that are the most capital- and cost-intensive. Three influences fall into this category and together define how competitive a company will be in recruiting driver candidates.

Field-controlled influences are those that deal with driver treatment. These seven influences have a significantly lower cost demand and are impacted mainly by driver managers through the use (or lack thereof) of “soft” skills. The ability of driver managers to effectively utilize these soft skills will define how successful a company will be in retaining drivers.

The Top 10 influences are outlined below along with brief descriptions of actions companies should take to remain competitive in each.

1. Compensation (including benefits) — corporate responsibility.

Drivers, like most of us, are attracted to companies that offer the highest levels of compensation. In trucking, this is often difficult to communicate because differences in cents/mile pay, average monthly miles run and “stop pay” (in which drivers are paid for each customer stop) make it difficult for potential applicants to calculate total wages. Companies should focus on a recruiting message that advertises average annual driver wages while making sure they stay wage- and benefit-competitive, at least on a regional basis.

2. Home time — corporate responsibility.

Getting drivers home frequently forces huge costs in terms of lost backhauls and circuitous miles. Because of the significance of these costs, Corporate defines the policy on home time. In the long-haul sector, a competitive policy gets drivers home once a week for 36 hours or every 10 days for two days off. To minimize that cost, driver managers need to plan ahead for backhauls toward home, stagger scheduled off days and, when needed, attempt to negotiate alternative home days that complement must-ship traffic while not overly inconveniencing a driver’s personal life and family schedule.

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3. Equipment — corporate responsibility.

Drivers work and, in the case of long-haul truckers, sleep in their tractors. The age of the equipment and the size of the sleeper berth are therefore two important factors to driver candidates. Companies need to maintain youthful fleet profiles and properly spec their equipment for driver comfort.

4. Respect and honesty — field responsibility.

The value placed on driver opinion, the effort made to accommodate drivers' personal needs and a commitment to deal truthfully with employees are retention-essential traits required of driver managers. Drivers must believe that the company wants and acts upon their input and watches out for their best interests. Recognition programs, suggestion boxes and joint driver-manager committees are some of the best tools to support this influence.

5. Communication — field responsibility.

Communication needs are individual and global. Drivers need to know individual performance expectations, how they are performing to those goals and what can be done to improve performance. They also should know how well the company is performing and be provided some insight into the company's strategic plans and the current state of the trucking industry as a whole. Regular one-on-one driver reviews provide the best process to not only inform drivers but also to share performance-improvement ideas and understand individual needs through effective two-way communication.

6. Problem resolution — field responsibility.

Problems on the road result in lost earnings for the driver, lost revenue for the company and could force missed home time. The driver manager must be responsive and communicate diligently with the driver about progress toward solving the problem. Some problems can't be resolved as quickly as desired, but constant communication of progress reinforces driver opinion that his/her company does everything in their power to resolve problems.

7. Equipment maintenance — field responsibility.

When their equipment is down, drivers lose wages. Driver managers are responsible for preventing and responding so that this influence is minimized. They must ensure that defined tractor-trailer preventive maintenance (PMs) schedules are kept so as to minimize road breakdowns and schedule PMs to coincide with driver home time or vacations. They also must ensure that when breakdowns occur, repairs are expedited, spares are issued or drivers are provided transportation back home

8. Training – field responsibility.

All trucking companies provide driver-orientation training that focuses on company policy and Transportation Department requirements. However, subsequent training often falls short, particularly with the introduction of new technology or the award of new business with unique requirements. Lack of training in these areas often results in driver delays, missed payroll deadlines (example: confusion on entering delivery data) and a general feeling that the company is adding additional work that has no apparent benefit. Driver managers should support the introduction of technology and new business with classes and manuals that clearly explain not only what must be done but why is has to be done.

9. Clear and fair work rules — field responsibility.

Drivers need to not only understand work rules but to be treated fairly within those rules. The perception of unfair treatment can occur when compared to how other drivers are treated and how salaried personnel are treated. Within the driver group, enforcing clearly defined dispatch, home time and equipment-assignment procedures minimize the risk of unfair-treatment allegations. Equitable-treatment concerns with supervisors usually deal with disagreements and working hours. The disagreements should be resolved in favor of policy and past practice. Avoiding the perception of inequitable working hours simply requires that supervisors should be scheduled to work similar shifts as their drivers, including nights and weekends.

10. Actual compensation and working conditions same as recruited for — field responsibility.

The final influence has to do with keeping the promise of employment. Companies with high driver turnover often use best-case scenarios in their recruiting campaigns. For example, they may advertise compensation as “Top drivers make $80,000 a year” even though only two drivers in the company earn that amount because they are on a special run. Similar best-case claims are made about the other recruiting influences, home time and equipment. New drivers quickly discover the deception when they look at their paychecks, discover their equipment assignment or realize they can’t get home nearly as often as told. Driver managers need to watch for these disparities and report inequities back to terminal, regional or corporate recruiters.

Understanding these influences is critical to building an effective driver recruiting and retention program.

The three influences that impact recruiting — compensation, home time and equipment — require a significant commitment of capital and cost. Corporate executives who don’t sufficiently fund these influences will position their company to lose competitiveness in attracting driver candidates.

Retention is the responsibility of driver managers, those company representatives drivers most frequently communicate with. Just as capital is the foundation of recruiting, training is the foundation of retention. Driver managers formally trained in the soft skills required to effectively manage driver needs are the key to maintaining a stable driver work force.

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