

# TRUCK TALK

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## Driver RETENTION or REPLACEMENT?

As the economy improves and the industry moves toward improved productivity and expansion (yup, it's really happening!), there will certainly be a need for MORE drivers.

The realization that more drivers need to be hired and additional equipment purchased usually comes after the realization or management discussion (depending on the size of the company) that systems have been tweaked and drivers have been pushed to the limits of the law with respect to productivity, and many drivers are quitting faster than they can be replaced. Certainly this realization is never a happy day at any size carrier, and there are clearly some steps that can be taken to solve, or at least minimize, this age old problem.

### Retention

Drivers quit for a number of different reasons and some of these reasons are conflicting in nature:

"Dispatch is working me too hard. I'm never at home and, as a result, my spouse is always mad at me."

"I'm not getting enough miles/loads/trips; therefore, I'm not making enough money and my spouse is always mad at me."

Most carriers have heard versions of these reasons for termination for decades. In many cases, the solution can be found within the company. Most drivers tend to speak the truth as they see it and are providing the solution to their problem within their complaint. In this case, communication can be the root of the problem and increased communication can solve the problem, with the communication coming from both sides of the issue. There are many other examples of such conflicting reasons drivers quit, and they can vary from company to company.

Is money the root of all turnover problems? No, but it seems to crop up a lot within our industry. Other issues include time off, accurate payroll, equitable distribution of work load, benefits (lack of and/or expense of), nature of the task expected (fingerprinting, tying down and tarping), and level of respect (employer and staff to driver and vice-versa). Certainly sounds simple, and if this would solve every carrier's retention issues, it would be marketed by someone. At least it is a place to start. Simply stated, if current driving staff is retained, the need for hiring new drivers is eliminated (which is a time consuming and expensive process with sometimes uncertain results).

## Replacement

No segment of the transportation industry says, “Drivers are a dime a dozen – it’s easy to hire them.” Most carriers have minimum standards included in their Safety Policy that spell out their minimum qualification standards for drivers. The more specialized the carrier is, the more difficult finding the desired experienced driver becomes. The advanced screening that many carriers use today, (MVR, PSP *please see Truck Talk 09/2012*) when combined with previous employer checks, should reveal undesirable qualities and make the hiring process quicker and more precise. To be able to apply these pre-employment checks, the candidate must complete the application along with releases to allow this verification. Yes, it’s a time consuming and expensive process that, if not completed quickly enough, can yield no results due to the applicant going elsewhere. There is no guarantee that an applicant appearing to have the correct experience, work record and attributes will meet your standards. Experienced recruiters have identified that their hire rate is only 1 driver out of 10 contacted.

Dropping standards and looking away from the attributes of potentially problematic drivers will gain nothing over the long and short-term and should **never** be considered. Most great carriers (defined as profitable, compliant and SAFE) have very high standards and have learned the difficult lesson that it’s better to have a truck parked safely in the yard than to have the wrong driver behind the wheel.

## Summing It Up...

When all factors are considered, the best path is to retain desirable drivers. Experienced, compliant and safe drivers are difficult and expensive to replace, and retention of these folks should be the number one priority for all. When retention is not an option, knowledge that the search may be long and arduous should be expressed to all management and owners. Some carriers have found that the concept, “birds of a feather flock together,” can be the case with drivers. The referral of applicants who are ultimately hired, and who stick around, should be rewarded in a meaningful way. Others have found that hire-on bonuses can attract applicants, but caution should be used to ensure that these new hires stick around long enough to justify the bonus.

Recruit or retain is a decision that all motor carriers need to make for themselves after weighing all of the facts involved. As this article has shown, there are a lot of facts to consider and difficult decisions when either path is chosen.

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