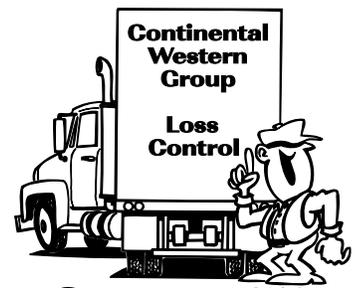


# TRUCK TALK

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## Retention Intervention

Volumes have been written about the current driver shortage and what can be done to fill the seats of equipment that costs money rather than produces revenue. Certainly, the need to hire additional drivers is a very important part of the growth trend many carriers are experiencing. Is there a magic answer?

Unlikely! The reason that a universal band-aid isn't available, and probably wouldn't work, is that it's very easy to lose sight of the fact that drivers are **individuals** – not a group driving our equipment. Individuals, in most cases, have individual needs that they are seeking to fulfill through their employment. As an employer, should you try to be everything to everyone? Certainly not, but there are a number of very basic ingredients that can help you retain the staff that you have worked hard to recruit.

There are numerous factors which can be applied to all companies that can help pave the way to a stable and satisfied work force.

**Hiring the correct person** is unquestionably a key ingredient for a successful employment relationship. These qualities can be difficult to define. Every carrier seeks to hire an individual with several years' experience and a good driving record. However, there are other factors that can affect long term employment. Certainly in the case of drivers, a company might not end up with a long term employee if their normal operating scenario involves many consecutive nights away from home and the potential employee is a part time farmer who must tend to a crop investment. This situation may seem obvious, but there are many variations such as coaching sports and other family activities, aging family members and other such obligations which would be compromised by long periods of time away from home.

**Fulfilling the promises** made by the person who contacts the prospective employee is a challenge. Certainly it can be easy to paint a flowery, exaggerated picture of the position, but it takes most employees very little time to find out the truth. If the human resources/recruiting department/dispatcher/owner is describing how easy and simple the job is, when the truth is that the position is everything but easy and simple, they are doing a disservice to both the new employee and the company. Very few companies need practice hiring; the task to be mastered is retaining! Communication between the person with hiring responsibility and those who manage the driver on a day to day basis is **vital**. Even more vital is the ability of the company to do what the employee is told they do.

**Complete training** is something that many companies fail to do. The training manual is followed, the training program is checked off, but it's easy to abbreviate descriptions to the point that a normal person not familiar with the task might have a basic understanding but not a complete understanding. A possible reaction of a person not familiar with what they are setting out to do can be confusion, hesitancy, and at worst, panic. None of those results are attributes of a careful and safe truck driver. Training isn't just a process for newly employed; it should be ongoing processes that will help the employee improve at what they do. Most people want to be good at what they do and be proud of what they accomplish. Ongoing training can help everyone improve.

**Recognition** for a job well done and for length of service is a proven method to reward top level employees. Are there other ways that could possibly be incorporated into a reward program? Many highly successful companies not only reward the employee, but also include the family in that recognition. Tickets to sporting events, amusement parks and even gift cards to local restaurants have proven to be a hit with families and help motivate the driver or employee to achieve again. Positive reinforcement of positive performance is the end result.

**Perception of the job** can be a difficult task. Over the years, it's been common to hear Household-Goods drivers refer to themselves as 'bed bug haulers' and Refrigerated drivers who are hauling produce as 'garbage haulers'. The perception of the job absolutely must start with the person doing that job. Possibly these folks should be introduced to the term 'Residential Relocation Engineer' and 'Temperature Controlled Vegetable Relocation Specialist'. In addition to a culture of pride, elevated self-esteem can occur through accomplishment and practiced by every employee of a company. This pride can be shared from the president's office to the wash bay and every level in between. It's easy to name companies that operate late-model highly chromed and polished equipment, but are those trucks recognizable because of the chrome or because the unit is clean? Is it because the drivers are neat and wear the logo of their company proudly? These companies are making the investment in these areas because it's a proven way to help retain drivers. When compared to other operating costs, cleanliness is relatively cheap.

Retention should be the job of everyone involved with a company. Creating a culture of respect, in addition to applying some or all of points above, can go a long way toward hiring and retaining the level of driver that enjoys the task and wants to make it a career. Best practices with respect to driving, hiring and retention includes creating a hiring standard and sticking to that standard without exception. Make sure that you're hiring from the top of the tree rather than the bottom of the barrel!

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