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How do Carrier contracts impact shortage of lease operators?

According to my research there is a significant dollar difference between the top and bottom carrier contracts. In my sixteen years of tracking numbers, the net difference has actually doubled. This means, if the difference between the top and bottom carriers in 1996 was \$100.00, then in 2012 it was over \$200.00. This phenomenon would be one of the many results of deregulation. Supply and demand will relentlessly push competition and thus push market prices.

The net difference does not always imply something negative. Generally, the top carriers actually paid more while the worst carriers paid less (net), so for some it benefited while others were left in the cold. If you talk to the old timers you hear about the good old days, but were they really all that good? They claim the margins were much better, but were they really?

If the margins have decreased as much as some old timers have implied the industry should have seen a huge drop in lease operators over the last couple decades. Was there?

Turnover in the trucking industry is anywhere from 5-15% of all operators. They are either in the process of leaving the industry or entering it. For several years about 15% of operators left the industry while only 5% entered. Over the years the net number of operators logically decreased. Then for several

years 15% of operators were new to the industry while only 5% were leaving. The net numbers of operators rises and falls like waves. Though many operators definitely have left the industry, many have entered or returned.

I have interviewed thousands of operators and drivers in the last two decades. I've conducted national surveys, read a lot of industry material and talked with many other accountants and industry recruiters. It is my understanding that a significant amount of drivers and operators (if given an option) would not drive truck any more (estimates are as high as 50%). So why do they stay? In the end it's the predictability of their return on effort combined with a perceived (or real) lack of viable options. In other words, they don't think they have any other choice.

The numbers seem to be much higher in company drivers than in operators but there are still a significant amount of operators who (given a reasonable offer) would choose to come off the road. The number of operators searching to sell their equipment varies considerably from year to year and even season to season but it seems to range from 20-35%. This means a very significant percentage of drivers and operators are presently not fully committed to the industry.

Though operators only represent about 10% of all truck drivers they do

represent a significant force within the industry. They tend to hold much stronger opinions and may disproportionately influence perception within the industry. Many company drivers respect operators so much they even tend to view them as industry leaders.

It is generally known that operators are 25% more productive than company drivers. This is a common understanding because operators have a vested interest in their own success, pushing themselves more than many drivers would. The loss of too many operators would create a disproportionate level of stress within the industry.

Since the concentration of operators is so diverse between carriers the impact would be difficult to predict. The carriers with a small percentage of operators may hardly even notice, while

carriers with a high percentage may border on collapse.

Even though the potential of the impact of the loss of operators may be significant, most carrier owners and industry leaders are not concerned. They have accustomed themselves to living with dire warnings of industry collapse for decades.

Robert D Scheper operates an accounting and consulting firm in Steinbach, Manitoba. He has a Masters Degree in Business Administration and is the author of the Book "Making Your Miles Count: taxes, taxes, taxes" (now available on CD). You can find him at www.thrconsulting.ca and thrconsulting.blogspot.com or at 1-877-987-9787. You can e-mail him at: robert@thrconsulting.ca.



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**From our Family to your Family
Wishing you a Happy 2015**



Looking Ahead to 2015




So here we go again, the start of another new year. I know this sounds cliché but there is an element of truth to that saying, ‘man, how the years fly by’. I recall back in my youth reading a book by Alvin Toffler called “The Third Wave”. The author suggested that as each year goes by, it represents one more element of time that you have been on this earth. So if you are one year old, the next year you live on this planet would represent 50% of the time you have been alive. If you are 50 years old, one more year represents 2% of the time you have been on this earth so the context is less. Thus the year appears to be moving at a quicker pace. Like many of you my years are flying by right now!

So what will 2015 look like for you? Will you take the time to reflect on your successes and failures to see what you can change for the next twelve months? Will you make resolutions and set goals for yourself and your business? Studies suggest that if we do these things we have a greater likelihood of achieving a higher level of success. Wouldn't it be funny if we were to find out that the writers of all the self-help books that litter the shelves of bookstores had funded all these studies? A cute thought but common

sense tells us that these things work; it is just a matter of mustering up enough ambition, energy and focus to get at it. I have often wondered why complacency is such a comfortable place for many of us to reside in for long periods; I know I have found myself in such a state at times. One of my decade long mantras has been, if you have enough energy to complain about a situation then you have two options; either learn to live with your issues and please, no longer fill my ears with your problems or, figure out how to successfully deal with your issues. I like the second option myself. Taking action through setting a resolution; setting a goal or learning new skills is what is required. Plan a strategy and get at it. It is never too late to change, to learn, to better yourself! As speaker Jim Rohm says, “We must all suffer from one of two pains: the pain of discipline or the pain of regret. The difference is, discipline weighs ounces while regret weighs tons.”

I'll get off my soapbox now and let you know that I have decided to take action on a couple of health issues that I have been quietly beating myself up over. These things are well within my power to change and I am going to take them more seriously



and overcome them in 2015. That is my pledge to myself. One other thing that has me excited for 2015 is the roll out of a new product that I and a couple of folks I greatly respect have been diligently working on for some time now called “StakUp”. You have likely seen some of the ads that have been printed in this and a few other industry publications. It takes time and dedication to bring a new product to market, especially one that has not existed in the form that this one does. My partners and I believe in the value that StakUp can bring to trucking companies and look forward to the release of StakUp early in the New Year. Please visit www.stak-up.com and check it out.

I promised an update on Freight Haulers Express. As you will recall they are a company I have been consulting with for six months or so. To give a little more insight into this situation, FHE is not a stand-alone company and is in fact a subsidiary of a very large company from an entirely different business sector. The parent company fell into taking this entity over because of a large receivable it was owed and they decided to venture into trucking, almost as an afterthought. This is always a difficult situation when people who don't know the industry, don't know the capital investment it requires for growing a business and don't see the risk/reward

for being in this industry, decide to enter regardless. Trucking is tough for those that don't know that the rates of return versus capital investment in many other sectors of the economy are much more attractive than in transportation. Ever wonder why there are so very few publicly traded trucking companies? It is certainly no place for the weak at heart and even though the company had black ink and had the potential of a very good bottom line if the shareholders were patient, in the end, they decided to pull the plug and this company is now winding down. As is the fate of all consultants I am now kicking stones so to speak. But not really as I actually have a number of things on the go and I plan on being busy in the coming year.

2015 will surely reveal to all of us its own list of challenges and obstacles. How we choose to deal with them will determine if, in a year from now, we are looking back on 2015 with a grin on our faces or a scowl. I can guarantee you this. If you do everything the exact way you did in 2014, then your results in your personal or business lives will be no greater that they were, and they will likely be worse. I wish you all the best for this coming year!

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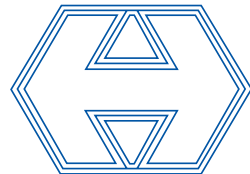
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Driver Shortage is more about Quality than about Quantity

Are you experiencing a driver shortage? Most of the trucking companies that I deal with regularly tell me that there is a driver shortage. But when I question them further about this, they quickly admit that it is not a driver shortage but a shortage of quality drivers. They usually have more than enough applications to fill all their trucks but in most cases, the drivers either have a Motor Vehicle Record (MVR) that is unacceptable, or they don't yet have the experience that the carrier requires.

So how do you get quality people to apply? How do you get quality drivers to work for you? The answer is easy but the solution is hard.

The easy answer is to make your company a place where quality drivers want to be employed! See, I told you the answer was easy but how do you do it? How do you make your company a place that drivers want to work? I believe it starts with a close examination of all aspects of your company. First, stand outside your front door and ask yourself, what is the first impression that an applicant gets? Is the entrance clean and inviting? How is the applicant greeted and who is the greeter? What hiring process or interviewing techniques are being used? Does the person doing the interview have the skills necessary to dig deep and be inquisitive with the driver while

asking only appropriate questions?

I could go on and on but what I'm encouraging you to do is to look at the whole process. Try to look at your office with "new eyes". If you were an applicant/driver, is your company presenting an atmosphere that you would want to be associated with?

And that's only the first step to get the driver in the door. Now walk into your dispatch facility. What is a conversation like between dispatch and the drivers, as well as dispatch and your customers? Is it professional and friendly? How do the dispatchers handle stressful situations? Have you trained your dispatchers on how to handle stress? Most companies don't offer a lot of dispatcher training. Hopefully yours can remain cool, calm and collected.

How about driver training? Many companies do not regularly communicate with their drivers about safety issues. I say regular communications because it is not just about safety. Regular communications could be a weekly or monthly phone call from the safety office that contains appropriate safety message. Of course this should be documented and placed in each drivers file. It could also be a regular memo containing safety insights. A safety meeting could be "a tailgate" meeting which happens when several

drivers are together and someone shows the initiative to discuss safety issues. And then documents that effort. Or it could be an annual safety meeting where all the drivers are asked to come in and listen to speakers. It is great to book outside resources as speakers. I know that often the MTO is available to speak to groups of drivers and the drivers usually have great questions for the officer. I've also been to meetings where the police have been the speaker. Think outside the box and ask local people to attend.

The smaller companies are often the ones who have "self-employed drivers". If you arrange for them to have health benefits, it may help retain them longer and attract new drivers to your company. We do know that health benefits are very important to some

applicants. Do you pay the same as everyone else? Or are you at the top of the echelon, willing to make a little less profit per mile knowing that higher pay is what it takes to retain your drivers?

The point I want to make is that I think every company owner should walk into their facility and look at it with fresh eyes. If you were an existing driver, would you want to work at your company? If you can answer that in the affirmative, then great! Spread the word. Shout it out from the rooftops. Include it in your advertising and your recruiting processes. If you cannot honestly say that you would like to work at your company then perhaps it's time to make some changes.

Best of luck in your recruiting and retention processes.

Chris Harris

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Different Approaches to Driver Shortage Problem

In the 1993 children's novel *The Giver* by Lois Lowry, all children are assigned to a career or job at the age of twelve. The community leaders determine who will be engineers, legislators, shopkeepers, and even surrogate mothers.

Although the author doesn't address the role of professional driver, this is an assumption made based on the society's effort to control the community by "assigning" a job according to the child's skills and aptitude.

For those of us in the United States and Canada, we have the option to choose our life aspirations and to change those goals as we mature. In fact, many of us made career choices in high school, but changed those ideals based on our experiences and circumstances.

Even those of us who entered college with a specific course of education in mind probably changed our major more often than we had anticipated. When addressing groups at a conference I often ask whether they had CHOSEN a career in transportation when they were younger. For most of them, the answer is "no."

The common perception by the general public is that truck drivers often pursue the career as a last resort. Maybe they were laid off from a construction or factory job and they

responded to a recruiting ad to obtain a CDL and become a professional driver. This perception isn't entirely misleading.

The problem we have in the United States and Canada is that we are limited in focusing on teenagers as drivers because of the interstate restrictions that require a driver to be at least 21 years old to transport loads across state lines. Add to that a two-year experience requirement for many insurance providers and you've got a work force that starts at the age of 23.

While we don't want to assign twelve-year-old children to the role of professional driver as depicted in *The Giver*, it would be difficult to make a prospective driver wait another nine years to earn a living in the trucking industry.

There are ways to encourage children to consider a career in the trucking industry, especially as professional drivers. Other countries are ahead of us in this effort.

In Sweden, education is mandatory for children ages seven to sixteen. Although there are classes for younger children, compulsory comprehensive school, named "Grundskola," begins at the age of six or seven. While most schools are publicly funded, there are a few independent schools in Sweden that might have a different orientation than their government counterparts.

Once the student has completed nine years of primary school, they can elect to enter secondary school, named "Gymnasieskola." In this environment, they are given the option to prepare for higher education or to receive a vocational education. During this three-year education, the students are further divided into programs, or different educational pursuits. Those who choose vocational courses will receive at least fifteen weeks of workplace training over the three years.

While core courses are taught to all students in "Gymnasieskola," the student is guided into program specific classes. One of those vocational training options is in "automotive and transportation."

Sweden, like most of the transportation industries, was experiencing a need for professional drivers. The percentage of females was very low; estimated at about two percent. With smaller trucks, shorter routes, and more home time, the job should have been more attractive to both men and women.

However, efforts to address this need through secondary education have been successful, especially in northern Sweden at the Lapland Gymnasieskola. Here, girls are guided into traditionally male careers at a rate that exceeds the boys, with forty to sixty percent of them preparing for jobs such as mining and transportation.

Female drivers are valued for their

aversion to risk and their exceptional treatment of the vehicles, where, according to a TV Gallivere article, "they treat the large vehicles better than male colleagues, they force them not as hard and take [fewer] chances."

Bill Rehn, of TYA Sweden, the Vocational Training and Working Environment Council, is excited about the efforts to encourage girls to consider careers in trucking. "We now have eighteen percent of women in the secondary school for transport truck driving and that is very good." He added, "Twelve percent of the employment of new truck drivers in Sweden [are] women."

Although the Elders in The Giver didn't give children the option to choose, they did make their determinations based on talents and skills. Perhaps we should look at the Swedish model.

With a projected 100,000 new drivers needed annually, we must reconsider the way we recruit and train the next generation of drivers. Encouraging the next generation to look at careers as professional drivers by prompting them into vocational programs during their high school years instead seems to be working.

Maybe Sweden's model provides a needed solution to the future driver shortage.

Ellen Voie

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