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1189694 Ontario Ltd. C.O.B. as Over The Road
www.overtheroad.ca

Publisher
 Peter Charboneau
 peter@otrgroup.ca

General Manager
 Ed Novoa
 ed@otrgroup.ca

**Director of Operations
 & Editor-in-Chief**
 Cathryn Charboneau
 cathryn@otrgroup.ca

Account Executive
 Luke Zentil
 luke@otrgroup.ca

Account Executive
 J.C. Arseneault
 jc@otrgroup.ca

Account Executive
 Earle Madden
 earle@otrgroup.ca

**Graphic Design
 & Advertising**
 LKDesign
 lennykuiper@gmail.com

Controller
 Estela Navarrete
 estela@otrgroup.ca

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Making your Miles Count: The Cost of Turnover for the Operator

Our industry has produced many reports that focus on the cost of turnover for carriers because without a doubt, turnover is expensive to everyone. However, the cost to an operator can be much more devastating. As an accountant for hundreds of independent operators I see the cost directly and indirectly every month and every season. The true cost is not always calculable in dollars and cents, nor at times even directly attributed to turnover.

I had a client come into my office a while back. He wanted information about changing carriers and moving to a situation that allowed him weekends off. I reminded him that I wrote a story in my second book almost exactly like his inquiry.

There was a small carrier that had many/most power units as independent operators. The unique thing about this carrier was that nearly everyone had the weekend off, leaving Monday and getting back either Friday night or Saturday morning. The president of the carrier had operators on a list trying to get on with the company even though he paid about \$700 per month less in his contract than the industry "norm" at the time. The president decided to take

advantage of this opportunity and expand his company. The difficulty was that the new freight he would need to start hauling required Monday morning deliveries (therefore leaving Saturday or Sunday). As the carrier grew, operators were dispatched out on the weekends and the complaining began. In 4-12 months, operators began leaving the carrier and they couldn't be replaced. The carrier bought more and more company trucks to haul the freight. Within two years the carrier had no operators (only company trucks). In fact the president became so bitter he didn't even have an operator contract available any more.

If this client of mine was to now move to a carrier that gave weekends off, will he truly have every weekend off? Would it be guaranteed? If he does move, does he need to buy new/different equipment? If he needs to "upgrade" his truck, will his fuel economy be better or worse? Will maintenance now affect his new cash flow? He hadn't thought about any of that.

The operator then asked about maybe getting his own running rights? He asked if I knew anything about it. After pointing again to a couple of chapters in my second

book, I told him that we also consulted for several "one truck" trucking companies and I gave him the average returns in comparison to lease/owner operators. It ranged from -5% to +15% of the average lease operator (those paid by the mile). Compared to Owner Operators (those paid by percentage) however, it ranged from -15% to +10%. The reason it varied so much (especially with O/O or percentage) was because everything depended on which customer group he would seek to cultivate and haul for (compared to the customers of carriers who paid percentage). In conclusion, I stated that the majority of drivers who have their own running rights do it not to make "big" money. They do it as they enjoy the freedom of saying no to loads they don't want and they are satisfied to work less for less money or sometimes similar pay. They simply sacrifice money for time. The drivers who wish to make "BIG MONEY" drive for larger carriers (typically) that have cornered a market of good paying freight. Since good paying freight generally requires more driver attention and responsibility, carrier's use percentage as a means to fairly offload risk. If a driver hustles and knows how to reduce their risk by proper behavior they can produce net income in the top ten percent.

The point I'm making in this article is that independent operators need to seek advice and understand their industry. They need to have clearly defined goals, standards of behavior and take on risk that makes sense in relation to their projected and real net income. They need to be more scientific and

less emotional. They need to choose a carrier based on research, not trial and error.

In our industry, money is made package by package, skid by skid or maybe LTL but money is almost always lost by the truck load. Losing money may take months, years or even a decade to recover from. The generation of 'trial and error independent operators' is coming to a close (with the exception of carrier walk-away leases).

Many people boast of going to the school of hard knocks as if that brought huge benefits without tuition. That's not accurate. Though I've met many graduates who have learned a lot, too many are still trying to pay off their student loans... load by load.

About the Author:

Robert D. Scheper is a leading Accountant and Consultant to the Lease/Owner operator industry in Canada. His first book in the Making Your Miles Count series "taxes, taxes, taxes" was released in 2007. His firm exclusively serves Lease/Owner Operators across Canada. His second book "Choosing a Trucking company" is the most in-depth analysis of the operator industry available today. He has a Master degree (MBA) in financial management and has been serving the industry since he and his wife came off the road in 1993. His dedication, commitment and strong opinions can be read and heard in many articles and seminars. You can find him at www.makingyourmilescount.com or 1-877-987-9787.



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Action Overcomes Fear

I have had many changes since stepping aside from running a motor carrier. One of the rewarding parts has been the ability to set my own agenda. The flip side of that has been trying to stay focused on new challenges that I have taken on. You see, my new free time has created many new distractions that I truly enjoy but at the same time, divert me from what I still want to achieve in my business career. During my old routine I felt accountable to many people so I would write a 'to do' list every day and recap it each evening stating what I had accomplished and I would try to be disciplined enough to touch or accomplish all those items that were the most difficult for me. I did this by marking them AOF (Action Overcomes Fear). The rationale was obvious. Usually those things that we are the most uncomfortable confronting are made more difficult than they really are because, as humans, we tend to avoid them.

AOF was my mental reminder that in fact, confronting those difficult issues early usually revealed that they are not as difficult as I thought they would be. It's the procrastination that we get bogged down in and the avoidance of a difficult situation that we dwell on that makes the situation bigger than it really is. Some of you might be in the same type of situation, especially when it comes to dealing with issues with your current carrier. Remember that old song "Take This Job and Shove It?" It sounds great but the cost of changing jobs as a driver or changing contracts as an Owner Operator is expensive and need to be thought through thoroughly before leaving the situation you are in with your current carrier.

As a company driver, if you leave your carrier you will be giving up your earned benefits and possibly your safety bonus that has been earned to this time of the year. You'll lose your seniority, which may or may not mean that much to you, but does grant you additional vacation time or

the opportunity for better runs. You may have a waiting period for health benefits at your new carrier plus the inevitable cash flow interruption etc.

As an Owner Operator considering changing jobs you're probably going to cost yourself thousands of dollars. You should plan for 2-3 weeks to switch carriers as it probably will take that amount of time by the time you de-identify your truck, take out your satellite, surrender other company equipment, go through the new company's orientation, get a safety etc. While all this is going on you will be hit with your fixed costs, which keep coming no matter what, including your truck payment, break down insurance and your personal fixed costs such as your home mortgage, car payments and your insurance payments. Let's say this number for three weeks is \$2000.00 dollars for your truck and \$1000.00 for personal payments. That's \$3000.00 that's going to keep coming no matter what. Let's assume that your missed revenue or opportunity cost is \$9,350.00 (8500 miles @ 1.10 per mile for easy numbers) for 3 weeks. To be accurate we need to back out your variable cost. For fuel and maintenance; say \$3800.00. Your missed opportunity money is \$5550.00 plus your fixed payments might mean that the three-week change to your new carrier will cost you \$8550.00. You might have decided to move to the new carrier because they pay an additional 3 cents per mile. If you run 30,000 miles per year, that means you will earn an additional \$3,900.00 dollars and at that rate it will take you 2.5 years to re-coup the money it cost you to change. Put pen to paper and figure it out the numbers don't lie, they enlighten.

The burden of this industry's high turnover is usually placed at the doorstep of the company. After all, they are the employer and are the one dictating the contract content when Owner Operators are utilized and to a large degree

this is true. But I sometimes wonder if the transportability of your services isn't also a major contributor to high turnover. In other words it might be far too easy for you to simply look for a new job rather than confront what your significant issue is. And then to work on a solution. I know many of you who have flipped carriers in the past few years are now on the defensive and feel that in fact you did deal with whatever issue you had and then felt that you had no resolution so you cut bait and went on to your new carrier. It's not my intention to second-guess you but I will tell you that there is a major difference in outcome potential depending on how you choose to deal with your issues. What do I mean by this? It's easier to give you an example. When people had issues that they thought were worthy of my attention they would come to me in one of two fashions. The wrong approach would usually not help their situation because they would do this by living under the delusion that I was some kind of dumping ground for their problems. They

simply handed me their issue by stating their case and then when done they would look at me with the "so what are you going to do about this" look. The approach that is much more constructive happens when the individual explains the issue, offers alternatives and seeks my opinion on a single or a variety of solutions. It's much less tiring and a more intelligent way to seek lasting solutions.

So a word to the wise before you decide to cut bait. Take a long look in the mirror and ask yourself if you have truly been professional in how you have dealt with your issues with your carrier. Then put pen to paper and do the math on your new opportunity and if you have done both of these to the best of your ability, you can now make a quality decision.

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Little or no training standards for truck driver-instructors

In the June issue of *Over the Road*, I talked about the pitfalls of expecting driver-instructors to teach new drivers when they are given little to no training to do so. When I discussed the article with my colleagues, we came to the conclusion that I made a good point of explaining the importance for this type of training but it fell short of explaining HOW this could and should be approached. It's simple... currently there are little or no standards for trainers of truck drivers. In fact, when it comes to trades training, there is an assumption that knowing how to do the job automatically qualifies someone to be responsible for training new workers. I decided to conduct a little research to find out what's out there when it comes to training the trainer.

Currently, there is a patchwork of courses and standards in Ontario for training instructors. This trend seems to apply to most sectors including the trades. Some Ministries have identified some basic standards for a Train-the-trainer program and some go as far as listing the content of the training. But the training providers of these programs do not have to be certified or registered. Only the Ministry of Labour has created Certification Training Provider Standards for the delivery of a few of its legislated priorities, where only approved trainers can deliver the approved training programs.

I also researched the training provider requirements in the College of Trades and I cannot find a minimum training standard for trainers. The expectations appear to be that the apprentice will learn on the job and be under the supervision of a qualified journeyman. I believe it is assumed that the work experience and skill of the trainer determines his or her

qualifications to teach the apprentice. The best practice for teaching a trade is on-the-job training. Although there are merits to learning this way, and it should be included in a training program, there are also many drawbacks.

If an employer identifies the need to provide training for their instructors, they must resort to a generic Train-the-Trainer that is offered in the marketplace. Colleges and private trainers offer a one to three day course that focuses mostly on classroom preparation and presentations.

They vary in course content and price. There are no standards for these providers. Usually no attention is given to teaching techniques for delivering practical lessons such as truck driving.

And what are the training provider requirements for the trucking sector? And how does an employer or truck driving school ensure their instructors are qualified? Once more, the minimum standard is mostly based on work experience. The Private Career Colleges Act states that an instructor must have minimum work experience in the vocation of truck driver or have a combination of vocational experience coupled with some level of education. When it comes to the employer, the onus is on the employer to ensure the person hired to teach drivers is competent, has the skills to do the job and has knowledge of the Health and Safety Act. There are no minimum skills and knowledge standards required to become a driver-instructor. But what I find the most interesting is that, in Ontario, there are no minimum training standards to become a truck driver-instructor but there are mandatory training standards for a car driving-instructor.

The Professional Truck Driver Institute's (PTDI) instructor standards do go a step further. It sets a minimum of three years work experience and classroom instructors must provide documentation of instructional skills or teaching experience. In order to maintain certification of a school's program, the school has to adhere to an on-going staff development training plan that includes training activities that will improve their instructors' teaching competencies. The plan must also provide supervision and conduct evaluations. All of this training must be documented and proof is submitted annually. This is a higher standard. But there are only three schools in Canada, which are all in Ontario, that have PTDI certified truck driver training programs.

Over the years, 5th Wheel Training Institute has recognized the need for formal instruction to prepare its driver-instructors. We set our training standards and developed curriculum to meet the objectives. It is focused on giving our instructors, who were truck drivers, the tools to teach the

hands-on learner. As of today, we are the only Private Career College in Ontario that has an MTCU approved Train-the-trainer Program.

As we get closer to the looming Mandatory Entry-Level Training (MELT) standards deadline of July 1, 2017, along with so many other training providers, we are preparing to deliver a program that will meet the standards to help individuals become truck drivers. I am also hoping that the Ministry of Transportation or the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities will then set standards for training driver-instructors who teach these programs. I believe it would be the next logical piece to making Ontario's roads safer.

Louise Philbin

Co-founder and Education Director
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Electronic Logging Devices are Coming – The Effect on Drivers

Changes are coming to the trucking industry and drivers are afraid. It seems like every time we make changes in trucking, the driver gets the worst of it. Drivers always seem to be the ones who pay the price. Sometimes it is in the name of safety but always it results in a change of the drivers pay. When I say drivers I mean Driver Employees, Owner Operators and contract Drivers.... anyone that operates a tractor trailer or straight truck.

ELD's are coming. Will this time be any different?

When I talk to drivers they all tell me that they are deathly afraid that when the Electronic Logging Devices make it into law, their productivity will diminish and so will their pay. Knowing that a driver's pay can't buy the same bag of groceries as it did twenty or even ten years ago really puts this fear into the drivers. Most of them fear this coming change!

That being said, there is a group of drivers that don't fear the change. Generally speaking, this smaller group is made up of the drivers that are already on some sort of ELD. They don't fear the change because they have been forced into it already. Some

drivers even chose the current carrier that they are working for because they had electronic logs. These are the drivers that had been abused by previous carriers and wanted to work according to the law. Maybe they had received a logbook ticket in the past and they have had enough.

I think the ELD's are a positive game changer for all drivers. I certainly can understand a driver's fear of change. If they look at the past they have every right to be afraid. But I do think that this time it will be different.

Here is what I see for change. The shippers will have to change how they do things the most and also the route planners. Whoever it is that is planning the shipments and the "Just on Time" deliveries are the people that will have to figure it out and plan ahead. They will no longer be able to count on the driver to make up for lost time in the shipping schedule like the drivers have been able to do in the past. So the shipper will have to plan ahead and figure things out long before they call the carrier to book the load.

Next group of problems will be for the dispatchers at the carrier. They will have to learn the truth about how much time it will

take to make the delivery and again, not rely on the driver's creativeness to get the load there on time. Dispatchers will have to know how to do route planning in real time. I think too many dispatchers believe that trucks average 100 kilometers per hour. So all they do is look at the load and say 'Well if it is 1200 KM then the driver can get it there in 12 hours. He has an hour to spare in Canada!' ELD's will force the dispatchers to figure it out for a change and not just be an order taker.

So I see positive change ahead for the Drivers. They might even earn more money. I think that they will get paid for the waiting

time spent in loading docks and get paid for the mistakes of shippers. Their overall income will go up and perhaps they will not have to run any extra miles for the dollars. At least that is my prayer. It is time to let the truck driver make an honest living at our profession.

I await your comments.

Be safe.

Chris Harris

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Ten Tips to Attract and Retain Women as Professional Drivers

#1. Let them know you WANT to hire women. If your recruiting ad doesn't include women or worse yet, excludes women, you won't get their attention. Don't always show a male driver in your ads and don't assume that the only woman in your ad should be the wife at home. Go back and look at your recruiting advertisements and see if they appeal to women. Ask some of your female staff members if they would respond to your company's ad?

#2. Tell women WHY you are interested in hiring them. For example, do you have a real desire to hire women as drivers because you believe they are capable and competent? Women don't want any special privileges; they just want a level playing field to compete for jobs as a professional, not because of gender. Don't ever patronize women or give them the impression that you are hiring them because you are filling some quota or making a statement. Women can see through that!

#3. Let potential drivers know why you are a good fit for them. Do you have loads that are regional instead of long distance? Do

you have equipment that makes the job less physically demanding? Do you have female trainers available? Do you make every effort to provide a safe environment for all drivers?

#4. Safety is a top priority when hiring women. Making sure the work place is safe is important but you should also consider ways to protect your drivers from harassment. The trucking industry is very male dominated so women are often harassed on the job. Make sure YOUR drivers aren't the source of this negative behavior. Talk to your drivers about how they can work together as peers.

#5. Equipment. The more you can remove the physical aspect of the job, the easier it will be to recruit and retain women (and men!) Order your trucks with as much technology as you can afford. Air ride seats, brakes, hydraulic dollies and even automatic transmissions take less physical stamina and relieve some of the strain drivers experience each day. More driving and less unloading, cranking, pushing and pulling will save your drivers from pain down the road.

#6. Basic needs. Be sure your terminal has equal access to rest rooms and locker facilities. If you have a company store, make sure you stock women's clothing sizes and feminine products. Ask your drivers for their basic needs and they'll tell you what you are missing.

#7. Train, educate and mentor. Help your drivers be the best they can be. Teach them about safety and how to avoid a hazardous work environment. Give them lessons on self-defense and how to avoid and deflect harassment. Provide the knowledge they need to do their job well.

#8. Provide mentors. If you have female drivers already, pair them with a new recruit to give them a different perspective. Encourage them to talk on the phone and meet in person and help them in the process. Sometimes a driver needs to know that there is someone who understands her (or his) situation and can relate to them well.

#9. Set an example. Promote women into leadership roles and make sure they are visible to your drivers. If you have female dispatchers, managers and others who are leaders in your company, feature them in your newsletter, on your website and in your advertising. Welcome and encourage women to apply for leadership roles within your organization.

#10. Join the Women In Trucking

Association. Visit www.womenintrucking.org and become a Corporate Member. You will have access to many resources; from an anti-harassment employment guide to a recruiting guide. Although the organization is based in the United States, there are many members in Canada that benefit from the knowledge and information available from this organization.

To learn more about the award and related events, please visit www.womenintrucking.org.

Ellen Voie

President/CEO/Founder of
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