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1189694 Ontario Ltd. C.O.B. as Over The Road  
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**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

Robert D. Scheper



# Successful Operators know their Business

There are four major things an operator may do that can cause success or failure: fuel consumption, maintenance, carrier contract and income taxes. Blame for the failure of an operator is usually not in that order. Both maintenance and income taxes get the highest blame while fuel and carrier contract carries the lowest blame.

Just because someone blames something for a failure does not necessarily mean it was the cause. Fuel consumption can fluctuate \$10-30,000+ on your bottom line easily if circumstances are ripe for it. Maintenance can fluctuate \$10-30,000 as well except they are generally predictable and easily budgeted for. Carrier Contracts are also very predictable. They should be charted out before even signing to make sure you have adequate cash flow. Taxes, of all things business, are the most easily managed. The two systems available produce differing results to the amounts of \$10-12,000. Using on-taxable benefits requires the operator to follow rules that make tax surprises nearly impossible.

The real reasons operators fail are usually not the voiced reason. The voiced (or public) reason is almost always a very short sighted view of their business. Simply put, failure comes from a negative business cash flow. The important question will always be "How come the cash flow is low?" Upon analyzing nearly all failures, I have come to five conclusions:

- 1. Operators begin their business undercapitalized.** They simply borrow way too much money and use expensive credit to carry the operations of their business. Assumptions about what they can afford erode available cash for the necessary business expenses.
- 2. Fuel consumption is an afterthought on too many truck purchases (a guess).** When the pollution control devices worked their way through the market, fuel consumption rates dropped an estimated 1 mile per gallon. It made a difference of \$700-1200 per month in cash flow. It devastated most operators' businesses. It remains the biggest impacting feature on trucks because it's the one with the most variations in it.
- 3. Maintenance is rarely set aside.** In a 2014 poll I found that 70% of operators drive pre-emission trucks. That means that maintenance is much more predictable than the rest of the industry. Predictable maintenance requires regular contributions to a savings account when things are good and yet, too many don't run with a savings account at all. Every operator must put aside a predictable amount that is reasonable for their future maintenance program.



**4. Carrier Contracts are not adequately analyzed.** There are too many assumptions made about performance, volume and its impact on cash flow. Most operators switch to a different carrier based on a friend's recommendation. Since no two trucks or two drivers perform the same, the outcomes in cash flow can vary significantly. It is very important to have a cash reserve for unexpected changes. If an operator has less than \$10,000 in their savings they should be in panic mode until they get that set aside. Trailing too close behind your revenue causes financial fender benders.

**5. Taxes are a NON-ISSUE if properly set up.** As stated before, if operators do not use the most effective tax planning available (non-taxable benefits), they are simply paying too much in taxes. Taxes are probably the easiest to accommodate and budget for. Follow the rules and have it done by someone who knows how to defend it to the CRA. If you worry at all about your taxes, you're not doing it right.

**6. Personal financial requirements place unrealistic burdens on the business.** Too many operators think that owning your own truck produces huge financial rewards. They think it will pull them out of debt. That is a dangerous half-truth. It can and will pull people out of debt provided their lifestyle doesn't respond with an automatic increase. The problem is that when most people have access to cash (or increased credit) they tend to use it. It's a sad fact but I have found that to be true, even in my life. I am a big fan of Dave Ramsey "Total money Makeover",

getting out of debt is one of the most important things we can do for our families. If you read last month's article you may realize you don't have much time left to do so.

Operator's financial success is what I have focused my 20+ year career upon. I have written two books on the subject; one on taxes and the other on carrier contracts. I have counseled hundreds of operators on how to set up their business efficiently and tax wise. There is only so much an accountant can do to help. The rest is up to you; your drive to succeed, your passion to build a financial future for your family. Without that drive and passion we can all get very, very lazy financially. If we don't commit ourselves to financial freedom now we may not have a chance in the future.

#### **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.

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## SPEAKING FROM EXPERIENCE

Ray J. Haight



# Driver Retention Masterclass - Communications

Now that we have committed to improving Driver Retention we must do everything we can to support this objective. Communications are vital to achieving success since we must have effective ways of sharing the right information at the right times and in the right ways to the team and the rest of the company. Remember, communications is an act of trust – it demonstrates trust and encourages trust. To make sure that it gets the focus it needs, we will start by creating a Communications Action Team.

We must harness skills and insights from across the company so this team must be comprised of volunteers that represent every department. They will rotate onto and off the team according to whatever timeframes work best for your company, but the personnel changes should be staggered so that the team has continuity as members join and depart.

The Communications Action Team will become a vital part of building and keeping the kind of positive culture we need at a company that can successfully improve Driver Retention – and successfully tackle other important objectives. For this reason it should live on even after this project has met its objectives (it never really ends). Therefore this team is not a “Task Force”. The difference between a task force and a team is that a task force has a clear end goal or objective that it’s trying to achieve and once it achieves its goal it ceases to exist. We will establish some task forces later on.

Our action team will need some things to get off to a solid start. First it will need a written mandate, which represents the power to act for the team. For example; this team will bear the responsibility to communicate all facets of the business and its people to the company’s drivers, owner operators, employees, customers and to the motoring public.

The document will also explain the authority and restraints of the team. For example, it may have a financial budget that it cannot exceed without authority; it may have areas of the business not in its purview. Senior management will define these authorities and limits but the team can certainly draft them and submit them for approval.

The document will articulate the desired outcomes of the effort. For example, this team will develop multiple effective lines of communications between its drivers and all other areas of the business.

Once the team grasps the mandate it can now define the fine points of its structure and performance. The team should work these terms out together, document them and make sure all existing and new members are fully aware of them. Here are some examples of how we structured and defined ground rules for our team that worked well for us.

1. Members are volunteers with one from each department
2. Members do not need to be managers but if there are managers then there is no hierarchy within the team – all are equals
3. Members rotate on and off the team after not less than 2 or 3 months
4. The team will meet every week – or every second week
5. Minutes will be taken and shared with the team within days (pick a number) and must articulate action items, stating who is responsible and when these actions are due for completion
6. Be on time for the meetings
7. Treat each other with respect
8. Be prepared for each meeting



Yours might be different – and that is fine so long as there is a framework and stated ground rules.

Although the members are volunteers from the departments, we suggest that if possible, it include one of the senior managers to kick things off and help things along. The important thing for managers to understand is that they can guide but they must do so with a soft hand. They cannot dictate or the folks on the team will immediately shut down and let the manager own the process. This is the last thing that you need.

This whole concept is going to be strange for many of your folks so you'll need to be supportive, positive and encouraging at all times but even more so until they get their feet under themselves and start getting some traction.

The job of the Communications Action Team is to determine what to communicate and how to do it most effectively. Here are some ideas for both content and channels that we used and have seen at companies throughout the industry:

- A monthly or bi-monthly newsletter – general and project info
- A weekly or bi-weekly one page newsflash
- Social media efforts, Instagram, Facebook etc.
- Regular updating of the company notice boards – must be kept fresh and current
- Lunch and Learn sessions for various topics of interest
- Companywide surveys – ask for feedback and suggestions
- Include things like recognition of the driving force and employees and for special anniversaries or other accomplishments
- Make it personal
- Maybe do something focused on spouses, families – birth announcements, etc.
- Regarding drivers, note safety milestones, new equipment, special service accomplishments, customer notes of appreciation etc.

These are all forms of communication and community building. The more people know about the company and each other the more they will feel part of its success. The Action Team may run with some of these ideas – or others that they come up with.

We have discussed creating the team; its ground rules and looked at some of the possible channels to reach various audiences within and outside the company. The Communications Action Team is responsible for making the communications choices, setting up the on-going communications plan and then putting it into production.

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Brian Kurtz Trucking.....	23	Liberty Linehaul .....	22	Skelton Truck Lines.....	9
Carmen Transportation Group...	37	Linamar .....	20	Speaking from Experience ...	24,25
Challenger Motor Freight .....	18	Livingston .....	12	Tenold .....	21
CNTL.....	40	Midwest Transit .....	3	TRANSAM Carriers .....	2
Fleetway Transport .....	38	Mill Creek .....	11	Trans-frt McNamara .....	34
FTI.....	37	Nishan Transport.....	15	Transpro Freight Systems.....	6
Genesis Express .....	15	OTR Digital .....	36	VeeBoards.....	6
Highlight Motor Freight .....	5	Pival Expedite .....	27	Walmart.....	8
Hyndman .....	7, 39	Ray Haight - Driver Retention		Wildwood Transport.....	28
K-DAC Expedite.....	4	Masterclass .....	29	Winnipeg Motor Express.....	13
Kelsey Trail .....	33	Robert Scheper Article .....	16,17		
Keystone Western.....	19	Rolling Force Transportation .....	22		



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## WOMEN IN TRUCKING

Ellen Voie



# Women In Trucking & Girl Guides

In October of 2014, eighty four young girls gathered at Olive Harvey School in Chicago, Illinois for the first Girl Scout Transportation event. These girls heard from a (female) Navistar Engineer who talked about designing trucks to better accommodate women. They were also given the opportunity to meet two female professional drivers and to climb into the cab of the trucks.

This was the very first Girl Scout event initiated by the Women In Trucking Association. Since then at least fourteen more events have been held in the United States and Canada (where they are called Girl Guides.)

The purpose of the Transportation Patch is to expose young girls to careers in the supply chain. From trucks, to boats and airplanes and pipelines, nearly 800 young girls have now earned the Women In Trucking Transportation Patch. Inquiries continue to come in from all over the world. Many are initiated by carriers, some are from truck driving schools, others are from dealers, but many are from Girl Scout (Guide) Troops themselves.

I recently had the opportunity to participate in the University of Wisconsin Superior's Girl Scout Transportation Day. We started the morning with 21 young girls eager to learn about transportation. We talked about how their Girl Scout cookies actually start out as grain in a farmer's field. The grain is transported, by a truck, to the bakery. Then, from the bakery to the packaging center the cookies are moved by a truck. The next step is to send them (via truck) to the distribution center.

After the cookies are transported to the regional Girl Scout office, the delivery is made by the Girl Scout to the customer. The girls related to the supply chain lesson and will now identify trucks as potentially hauling their cookies.

We took a tour of the S. S. Meteor, the world's last Whaleback Ship. The girls were fascinated by the massive cargo holds, but took a special interest in the Captain and Crew's sleeping and eating quarters. The tour guide allowed each group to tug on the air horn!

The next stop was a ride on the North Shore scenic railroad. The ride included a pizza lunch after a visit to the museum. The girls learned about trains and how steam locomotives transported workers to various locations in northern Minnesota.

After returning to the University, the girls were separated into three groups. Each group had the opportunity to move between learning stations. As one group of girls learned about airplanes and how lift and trust affect the way the airplane flows through the atmosphere, another group made a pipeline and watched it "erupt" like a volcano. The last group met a female professional driver, Terri, who showed them her truck and let them pull the air horn.

By the end of the day, the girls had learned about all modes of transportation, but more importantly, they were exposed to people who operated these engines and what the job entails.

The Women In Trucking Association developed the curriculum and the patches with the Greater Chicago/Northern Indiana regional office. The curriculum is free to corporate members of the association, and the patches can be purchased at cost for \$1 each.

This project will also be supplemented by an activity guide depicting the supply chain path of the cookies from the field to the final mile, which is the Girl Scout. This activity guide is currently being produced by the Women In Trucking Association and will be available for our members later this year.

For more information about the Women In Trucking's Girl Scout (Guide) Transportation Patch

and curriculum, please contact Char@womenintruckng.org or call 888-464-9482.

### Ellen Voie

President/CEO/Founder of Women In Trucking, Inc.  
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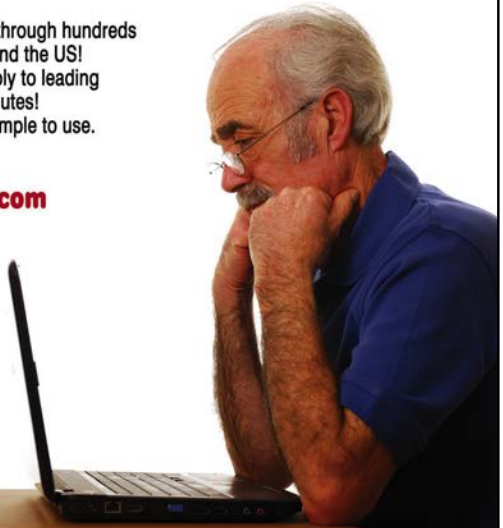
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**Mission:** Women In Trucking was established to encourage the employment of women in the trucking industry, promote their accomplishments and minimize obstacles faced by women working in the trucking industry.

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## Do You Tailgate?

Why do truck drivers tailgate? I would love to hear your response to this question. Because I just don't understand it. Why do you follow so close? I see this action each day that I travel on Ontario's Highway 401. What are the advantages to tailgating? You are putting yourself in a position to have a crash. You are exposing yourself to a really bad day. And of course, you could ruin someone else's day. So again I ask the question "Why?"

I have had the privilege and opportunity to ask this question directly to truck drivers and I have gotten a variety of answers. The most popular ones are:

*I don't do that; I have to because if I don't, I will never get to where I'm going; If I don't then someone will jump into my space and cut me off; I get paid by the mile and I need to get to where I'm going as fast as possible so that I make as much money per hour as possible; The law that sets the speed limiter to 105 km is against my rights.*

I have heard all of these excuses coming from the mouths of drivers. For those of you that tailgate and follow too close, which one is yours?

Let's talk about why you should not encroach on another vehicle's space.

You have all heard about stopping distance. I have written before about how much space a truck needs to stop safely. But how do I change your behavior? What can I say to get you to listen and stop putting yourself in danger?

I think that each driver has to find their "Big Why." Your big why is the reason that you can make huge changes with the least amount of effort. For many people, it is making changes for other people that love you. Most often it is your children that can cause the biggest change. An example is a story that was told to me by a friend; this is an example of a huge change that happened to him. My friend had tried to quit smoking. He had tried and tried but each time he failed. He had tried vaping, the patch and hypnosis. Each failure made him feel like a loser. He wanted to quit. He knew that for his health he should stop. But failure greeted him each time that he tried.

One day my friend came home from work to find his seven-year-old daughter waiting for him at the door. She was anxious to see her father this day and as he opened the door, there was his daughter crying! He quickly scooped her up into his arms and asked her "What is wrong dear?" She said that today at school

they had watched a movie. It was a film about smoking. With tears falling from her eyes, she said: "Daddy, if you don't quit smoking you are going to die!" Well, guess what? Although all the previous attempts to quit smoking had failed, he succeeded this time. He has now been smoke free for two and a half years. How did he do it? He found his big why! Although he knew that smoking was bad for him, he couldn't quit until he found his big why. And of course his big why was the love of his daughter. We can often do very difficult things for others that we just can't do for ourselves.

Now back to tailgating. I'm encouraging you to find your big why so that you can

stop following too closely. I know that it is difficult. But you can do difficult things. You have done so in the past. So I'm asking you to protect those that love you. Tailgating and improper following distance can result in horrific crashes, causing loss of life and often puts people into jail. Don't let it happen to you. Keep 5 to 6-second following distance at all times.

All the best and stay safe.

### Chris Harris

Top Dawg, Safety Dawg Inc.

905-973-7056

chris@safetydawg.com

@safety\_dawg (twitter)

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