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Overcoming the Challenges of Recruiting
Truckers and Drivers During the Pandemic

OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES OF RECRUITING TRUCKERS AND DRIVERS DURING THE PANDEMIC

For the transportation and logistics industry there's a certain irony to the job market situation since COVID-19 emerged as a significant concern in the US: while many, many people find themselves out of work and most companies are putting a halt on recruitment, the demand for drivers is increasing exponentially.

The trucking industry has been facing shortages of truckers for some time now. In July 2019, Bloomberg predicted that the shortage would more than double over the next 10 years and reported that: "The driver deficit swelled by more than 10,000 to 60,800 in 2018 from a year earlier," based on data from the American Trucking Association.

Fast forward to March 2020 and the situation has become even more dire. Particularly so, in an environment where Americans desperately need access to food and other necessities and also where, unfortunately, far too many people have gone into hoarding mode.

As those managing fleets of all types and sizes face growing challenges in finding, screening, hiring, onboarding and keeping drivers on board and on the road, we offer some advice, strategies and best practices to put in place now, and keep in place moving forward.

The State of Employment in the Transportation Industry

In March, The Wall Street Journal reported that: "The coronavirus pandemic is whipsawing the trucking industry, as retailers clamor for delivery of food and household staples while lockdowns aimed at curbing contagion shut other businesses, leaving rigs empty on the return trip."

The industry was already short about 60,800 drivers in 2018, according to FOX Business - which represented a 20 percent increase from the previous year.

This at a time when drivers, themselves, also are concerned about their safety and health. So what should companies be doing now to fight this trend and ensure they have the staff they need to meet demand?

Trucking Industry was short
60,800 DRIVERS
IN 2018



It May Be Counterintuitive, but This is the Place to Start

It might seem that the best place to start when needing to find and hire drivers is with creating and disseminating position descriptions and ads. While that's obviously an important step, it's not the first step.

The first step should be ensuring that the staff you already have—drivers as well as all the people who support them and the organization—work in an environment that they love. If that's not the case, staffing becomes a vicious cycle of constantly recruiting, hiring, training and losing employees.

Foundationally it's important for companies to ensure they are meeting their employees' needs. Amid a crisis that threatens personal health, employee safety should be a major area of focus.

The greater determinant of job satisfaction for drivers, according to an industry study from TruckersReport.com and advanced analytics software firm OdinText is not money, as many might initially assume. The study found that "while veteran drivers and those earning higher wages were generally more satisfied, money was not the best predictor of satisfaction: pay grade came in fifth." What matters more? "Across both new and veteran drivers, the leading factor behind job satisfaction was the extent to which their employer's company was 'family-oriented,' followed by being allotted sufficient time at home."

Obviously, during the crisis getting that desired family time and flexibility may not be an option, but it's an issue that should remain top-of-mind for future planning.

Beyond studies like these it's important to ask your drivers, and staff in general, about areas of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, to listen and to respond with what you can—and, perhaps, cannot—change. The simple step of asking and genuinely listening can go a long way toward engaging employees and helping to minimize turnover.

**A FAMILY ORIENTED
WORKPLACE**
is a leading factor in job
satisfaction



Recruiting Former Employees

In seeking new drivers, one often overlooked area of focus is former employees. Many of these former employees find after leaving a company that the grass is not always greener and are glad, even eager, to return to a former employer—if they're aware of opportunities to do so.

These returning former employees, also known as "boomerang employees" offer the benefit of already being familiar with the organization. In addition, their return can send an important message to other staff members: "The grass isn't always greener."

According to research from global staffing firm Accountemps, 9 out of 10 senior managers (94%) are open to rehiring boomerang employees who left on good terms. Unfortunately, the research also reveals that former employees aren't quite so eager to return to a previous employer—only 52% indicated they would be likely to apply for a job with a company they previously worked for. Reasons given for the hesitancy include: dissatisfaction with management (22%), poor fit with the organization's culture (17%), unfulfilling job duties (13%) and bridges burned by the company (11%). These reasons all point to potential steps that employers can take to up the odds that former prized employees will consider a return.

Dana Case, director of operations with MyCorporation.com, says: "We have re-recruited boomerang employees to come back and work for us—and like to refer to it as their 'second tour of duty.' This has been successful for our company due to a series of built-in pros. The returning employee already knows a lot about our company culture, working environment, and customers. It also makes for an easier onboarding process. As an added bonus, the returning employee usually brings back the knowledge they have acquired from other work experiences during the time they were away from the business."

ONLY 52%
of employees would apply
to a former employer



Hiring People With Criminal Records

As finding top talent has become increasingly challenging, employers have been more willing to think outside the box when it comes to finding, recruiting and hiring employees. Some are even becoming more open to considering employees who have criminal backgrounds. In fact, legislation—The Fair Chance Act—is receiving bipartisan support and a number of major employers have announced publicly their intent to give former convicts a chance.

Ban-the-box laws have emerged in various locations around the country to prohibit employers from asking whether a potential employee has a criminal background. But many companies are going beyond the laws to proactively recruit those with criminal records. For example, in a joint initiative by the Charles Koch Institute and the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) a number of companies are signing a pledge to hire people with criminal backgrounds. NBC reported that, according to SHRM CEO Johnny Taylor Jr., 175 companies committed to the initiative within 24 hours of the pledge being announced—including Walmart.

This can't be done carte blanche, of course, especially when hiring drivers. David D. Schein, MBA, JD, PHD, president and general counsel with Claremont Management Group, Inc., says: "Because truckers handle the goods of others in most cases, criminal background checks are directly relevant to their work. Also, checking their driving records to make sure they are safe drivers is critical. A driver with multiple DUIs, for instance, cannot be insured and will most likely not be employable. Further, all over the road truck drivers are subject to the DOT mandatory substance abuse testing rules."

Background check firms can help to expedite this process and also deal with variations between state and local jurisdictions. FitSmallBusiness recently listed the top seven employment background check companies.

Avoid Hiring Turnoffs

Throughout the hiring process, from the initial posting of the job, through interviews and offers, it's important for companies to avoid the potential to turn candidates off. Unfortunately, many companies fail to take adequate steps to avoid common hiring turnoffs.

It's likely that during the coronavirus outbreak, many interviews will need to be done remotely to minimize the need for unnecessary person-to-person contact, says Jeff Magnuson, with Jeff Magnuson Consulting. "While not ideal, as I can understand companies wanting to meeting people in person, adjustments need to be made and a level of trust will be needed to make effective hiring decision," Magnuson says.

"Remote interviews will start to become even more integrated into the job market (even after this pandemic slows) and both candidates and companies need to be willing to face a period of adjustment if both sides want to succeed long term," Magnuson says. "Bottom line: flexibility and adjusting to the current state of affairs is mandatory if companies want to hire quality candidates. This is not business as usual and may not be for quite some time."

One of the big turnoffs for many job candidates is poor, or minimal, communication throughout the process. Candidates feel a lack of communication throughout the interview process and discrepancies between interviewers about the jobs duties are the biggest turnoffs employers commit in the interview process, says Nysha King, media relations lead with MRINetwork. MRINetwork's 2018 reputation Management Study, identified common applicant turnoffs.

To a candidate, stresses King, "an interview is a two-way street."

Ira S. Wolfe is president of Success Performance Solutions, a TEDX speaker and the author of Recruiting in the Age of Googlization, says that the most common unintentional mistakes that companies make are:

1. Having an out-of-touch application process. Candidate abandonment rates, he says, can be as high as 95 percent—"meaning that one out of every 20 candidates who start an application actually complete." To boost these numbers he recommends that Initial applications contain no more than 15 to 20 fields, are mobile friendly, and take less than five minutes to complete.
2. Sending applications into a black hole. "Candidates live in a world that with one click they can purchase almost anything they want and receive updates from the time it is packed to when it was delivered at their doorstep," says Wolfe. "But when they apply for a job, the application often slips into the HR black hole. It could be weeks, months, or never until they get a response." Transparency is now required throughout the application and interview process, he says. It's important for companies to open and maintain the lines of communication with applicants throughout the hiring process.

CANDIDATES SEE INTERVIEWS as a two-way street



3. Long delays. The time-to-fill open positions is at all-time highs, says Wolfe. "This is frustrating for hiring managers and one of the top complaints from candidates," he says. "Unfortunately hiring managers are often the cause of the problem. When a high caliber candidate is presented, hiring managers need to jump at the interview and clear their calendars." That's a mistake especially in this environment. "When they're finally ready the candidate has often accepted another offer or rejects the company for a bad candidate experience," Wolfe says. Those are the kind of delays companies just can't afford right now as they're looking for drivers.

Little things can make a big difference notes Stu Coleman, partner at recruiting firm WinterWyman. "Job seekers want to feel needed and know that their addition to the team will make a difference to the company," he says. "But here's the trick—everyone at the company has to show them they are wanted. This is a mindset every company should have when trying to attract talent. I'm not saying you need to bake the candidate a cake, but being a little welcoming wouldn't kill anyone. From the minute they open the front door of your office, the interview process begins. Let whoever is going to greet the candidate when they arrive, a receptionist most likely, know they are coming. What does it say to a candidate when no one seems to be expecting them? Immediately, they feel like an imposition instead of a welcomed and wanted guest."

Even for those companies that are able to expedite the process of finding, screening, interviewing, conducting background checks on and hiring new drivers, and providing a positive candidate experience, the challenges are not yet over. New staff are still at risk of changing their minds, or jumping ship, if the job doesn't turn out to be what they expected. That's where a successful onboarding effort can come into play.

Onboarding

A root cause of high turnover in the trucking industry, especially for those new to the job, according to FreightWaves could be "the difficulty acclimating to working conditions that exist for drivers, especially long haul drivers."

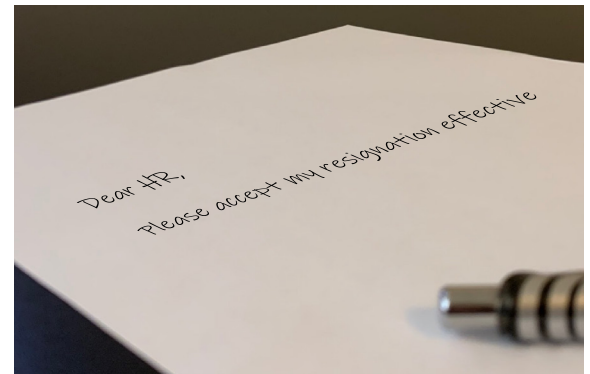
Even when carriers can get drivers on board, they face challenges in keeping them.

According to TCA Profitability Program periodic surveys, FreightWaves reports that the primary causes of driver turnover include:

- Human nature. A need for more interaction and connection with others.
- Economic. Drivers are generally paid on a per-mile basis which can vary significantly between payroll periods.
- Health. Lack of healthy food options and the ready availability of less healthy choices

TCA survey participants also reveal that turnover is higher among drivers with limited tenure. Drivers with less than 180 days on the job represent a turnover rate of more than 85% of the annualized turnover rate.

**DRIVERS WITH LESS
THAN 180 DAYS**
on the job make up 85% of
annual turnover rate



Could a change in onboarding practices help?

Yes. First, it's important throughout the hiring process to provide a realistic job preview. It has never been a good idea to try to sugarcoat what the actual on-the-job experience for drivers will be. That's more true now than ever.

Employees must also be sure that they take the time to fully acclimate new drivers to the job, the company, their colleagues and customers. Don't cut corners and don't try to put drivers on the road before they have been fully educated and informed—and have had the opportunity to ask questions they may have or address concerns.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, it's particularly important to ensure that employees' feel safe and understand that the organization is concerned about their health. This is especially relevant for drivers who literally put their lives on the line every day—now, more so than ever.

Magnuson says: "Generally speaking, during this pandemic, companies absolutely need to reassure candidates that their health and safety are number one." With drivers, in particular, Magnuson says, companies should be considering the steps that are in place to protect them in areas they need to travel. "Are medical benefits included and do they kick in immediately upon hiring should a trucking professional start showing symptoms? What is the plan as far as time off, continued salary, etc., if a trucker becomes ill and is far away from home?" While companies may have these types of policies, he suggests, with elevated risks of Covid-19, standard policies may not be adequate and should be reviewed, revised and updated as needed.

**EMPLOYEES WANT
TO FEEL SAFE**
and like their employer is
concerned for their health



Additional Tips to Attract Drivers

Cathleen Anderson is managing partner, professional search and contract staffing for PrincetonOne, a recruiting firm. She suggests:

- Reach out to companies struggling and laying off staff. Many brick and mortar retailers are cutting back, she says, and suggests reaching out to their HR departments to inquire how you can help in hiring those employees displaced.
- Connect with Transportation Directors in the same industries to network and brainstorm on ways you can help one another find talent.
- For those struggling to retain, or needing to attract more drivers due to business picking up, increase their pay so that you can retain and attract the best drivers
- Advertise specifically that you are hiring drivers that are displaced by Covid-19. Response rates are better when requests are specific, she says.

Ryan Naylor, CEO, VIVAHR, says: "We have seen a lot of companies using social media groups as a great way to engage with new drivers. Get creative with using live video inside the groups. Use it as a time to interview other drivers about what they like, what is frustrating and show you're a resource. With the current COVID-19 situation, a lot more people are engaging with social platforms in ways they haven't in the past. Get in front of them tackling the biggest questions on their minds."

Good News for the Transportation Industry?

"If one good thing comes out of this unfortunate crisis it may be a temporary easement of the truck driver shortages facing the nation," says Shaun Savage, founder and CEO of GoShare, a logistics technology company that connects customer to independent owner-operators in real time.

"For the newly unemployed, there are incredible opportunities in the industry," he says. "GoShare has seen a surge in interest and applications since the crisis began."

Logistics and transportation has been deemed an essential industry to preserve supply chains. The industry will continue to operate and, in fact, says Savage, "demand for goods and services is increasing the demand for trucking services. The Outbound Tender Volume Index, which measures carrier willingness to accept loads, is rising as the number of loads rejected increases under tightened market conditions." There are, he says, plenty of loads available.

The bottom line: "People want to work, and the trucking industry has jobs, it's as simple as that," says Savage.



Resources

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