

Training Targets

Training represents an important investment, but where should a fleet focus its efforts?

The drivers attending Rosedale Transport's annual fall meeting knew exactly when it was time to learn something new. At the sound of a bullhorn, each group stood up and headed to the next workshop to address an issue identified by members of the dispatching, claims or maintenance teams.

There is a lot of information to absorb during these sessions, but it has a direct impact on how well the employees perform their jobs.

The cross-border fleet's commitment to training is a key part of the corporate culture, whether the content is delivered to a group or an individual. A driver-trainer evaluates existing drivers on a regular basis, and those who require additional support are coached by one of 10 top-performing peers. Reports of traffic violations, crashes or other incidents then help to identify the drivers whose skills deserve immediate attention.

The latter issues can actually help to predict other challenges to come, says Rick Geller, national safety and training services

manager with Markel Insurance Company of Canada.



Research by the American Transportation Research Institute (ATRI) proves his point. Those who are ticketed for an issue such as speeding or running a red light are 325 percent more likely to be involved a crash in the next 12 months. A lane-related citation means the driver is 90 to 105 percent more likely to be involved in a crash. A violation for speeding or an out-of-service condition increases the likelihood by 20 to 60 percent.

"You want to provide the remedial training to any of these drivers, but you want to prioritize which ones to get in on right away," Geller says, noting how high-risk drivers should attend a defensive driving course that combines classroom and over-the-road training.

"Safety is always a priority, so that gets first dollar," agrees Vicki Stafford, vice-president of resource development at Cavalier Transportation, based in Bolton, Ont. "Our main focus is always to empower our people with the knowledge and expertise to do their jobs well."

The evaluations that identify training needs should be an ongoing process. For example, a driver operating one of Manitoulin Transport's trucks needs to be retrained after an incident and will face an on-road evaluation at least once a year. Even an accident-free driver will be re-evaluated every three years.

"Most carriers have established driver selection criteria, but the question I ask carriers is how many drivers working for them today, if they came in as a new applicant, would meet your driver selection criteria?" Geller says. The most experienced employees can still slip into bad habits after spending years at the wheel of the same equipment, delivering the same loads to the same locations. "If they don't qualify, what is the remedial training program to get them back where they need to be?"

Many training requirements can be identified through regular audit cycles, adds Rosana Preston, Rosedale Transport's director of human resources and administration. The data from a truck's Electronic Control Module alone can identify issues such as hard shifts and poor fuel economy, both of which are the hallmark of an aggressive driver. The audits of activities do not need to be limited to driving skills, either. A study of inter-line payables can identify whether teams are choosing the right inter-line partners and truly understand all of the related documents.

Other training needs are spotted more informally. Preston identified the need to train managers in the "reasonable suspicion" activities of a drug and alcohol policy after a specific issue was brought to her attention. A focus on health and wellness emerged after news of the H1N1 flu virus began to spread. And she regularly approaches managers in the search for issues to be addressed during the half-hour "mini meetings" that can be held at the beginning or end of a shift.

Training is even an identified part of Manitoulin Transport's succession planning strategy. Two "managers in training" are paired with mentors as they prepare to fill any vacated roles, while all managers are exposed to general management development programs.

Regardless of the form that it takes, training

is often referred to as an investment into a fleet, and it can deliver a tangible return. An average crash will lead to \$12,600 in damage, Geller notes. Based on an operating profit of three per cent, a fleet that pays the related \$5,000 deductible would need to make another \$170,000 in revenue to recover the loss.

A commitment to the training that avoids that crash is pretty affordable by comparison.

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