



Driver Care Program

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Motor Transport Underwriters is a managing general insurance agency based in Indianapolis, IN. Our only business is providing for the insurance needs of the commercial trucker. At MTU we handle the entire underwriting process, claims and loss prevention/safety services in-house. Part of our service includes a whole host of safety services.

About four years ago we started to re-think how the industry looks at safety and loss prevention. We in the insurance end of safety would preach to clients the importance of driver safety meetings. I would go out and participate in some of these meetings. I was at one in Charleston, SC one Saturday and I looked around and counted about a third of the company's total drivers were present. The more I looked into it, I discovered the drivers present were the top drivers for the company: the old hands that had been around and called this company home. Where were the rest?

From that moment on, I knew we had to find a way to help companies draw in that driver that was a fairly recent hire that had not yet connected with the company. We also had to reach those drivers that may have issues with the company from a safety and/or performance standpoint. Do you think the driver who is "on the bubble" with the safety or operations department would willingly show at a driver safety meeting?

Around this same time, we were also seeing a number of large claims by experienced drivers who had not necessarily been on the radar of our insureds' safety departments. These are the sometime catastrophic accident we used to say just somehow happened from time to time with good, experienced drivers. I can't say how many times I heard he or she was a good driver that just had a lapse of judgment or attentiveness at the wrong time. We would even say "that's why you buy insurance for those times you can't predict or prevent.

Well, after hearing that one time too many, I decided something was wrong. We started spending more time with dispatchers and driver managers, I learned in many bad accidents, the front-line driver manager or dispatcher indeed had some insight after the fact as to how an accident might have happened. The driver may have been having money problems. He hadn't been himself lately. He had been complaining of stomach problems that morning. The more I heard, I would ask if they let anyone know of this when they felt there was an issue. Ninety percent of the time, the frontline operations person really didn't think it was his or her business and simply went about their day. We then began looking closer at the relationships between safety and operations at various companies.

This led to the next step along this odyssey of enlightenment. How do companies look at the duties of the dispatcher/driver manager? Who does that person work for? What are their priorities in doing the job? Of course the end objective is to move freight in a manner that provides for the needs of the customer and does so in a compliant and safe manner. But, as I looked at how this happens in practice at many companies, I saw management oftentimes sends conflicting signals on exactly what they want. We tell dispatchers we don't want them pushing drivers when they're tired. Yet we found companies that base incentive pay purely on production. What's the real message for the driver manager here? Worse, what's the message we send to the jury when this comes up in a bad accident case? Add to that, less than stellar SafeStat results and all of a sudden a manageable claim becomes a catastrophic nightmare.

So how do we take this information and put it to use? We first started looking purely at accident prevention. Our goal was to help make a company more efficient and profitable all the while making them safer

and employee friendly. We know from our clients and others who do it right, there is indeed a way to profit, treat drivers with respect, be compliant and better control risks.

The traditional approach to safety and loss prevention has always had the safety department as the first step in a proactive program. As odd as it may sound, in practice the safety department is usually the last step. Granted most proactive initiatives begin with the safety area or the safety director. But the vast majority of work in most safety departments ends up being on the “clean-up” side. Drivers generally don’t encounter the safety department until they’ve done something bad. In many organizations tremendous safety directors never really get the opportunity to be proactive due to the amount of backend work.

We feel the first step towards a truly proactive program begins with the frontline driver supervisor. You can look at each of these individuals as running their own trucking company. This individual knows the driver better than anyone else in your organization. To your driver, they often ARE the company. They have the power to make or break any bond you hope to have with a driver. When properly trained, frontline operations personnel can play a major role in the reduction of accidents, compliance problems and driver turnover.

Drivers are the most valuable asset in a company. Again, while our initial intent was to create a program to help reduce accidents, we found companies involved in the program usually experienced improvements in driver turnover. We started focusing more specifically on this over the last year of the program.

The MTU Driver Care program was recently featured in a Truckload Carriers Association newsletter. A copy of that article follows with details of the program. We have also included a copy of a prior piece entitled “10 Steps To Treat Complacency Through Integration of Safety and Operations”. These share the basic concepts behind our approach.

We do not have a canned or cookie cutter program. Our first step is to visit an account and develop a profile on the operation. With this we look at everything from operational scope to dispatch arrangement, current incentive programs, past loss information, SafeStat results, driver recruiting and qualification, we also examine drivers who have left the company over the prior 6 months among other details. We also talk to drivers, management and frontline supervisors. This initial examination can take anywhere from a day to a week, depending on the size and complexity of the organization.

We then take this information and develop a detailed plan tailored specifically for the organization. The next step is to conduct kick-off training seminars for all applicable personnel. Usually this involves key management personnel, frontline supervisors, dispatch and safety. During this session we show the true costs of accidents, turnover, poor roadside compliance, etc. Much to our surprise, operations personnel oftentimes really don’t understand the depth of consequences from their actions. They have generally been conditioned in a task-oriented method to get off a call or issue as quickly as possible and move on to the next. Drivers know this all too well.

We actually show these important frontline personnel how to actually make their job easier and more productive, while creating a bond with the driver that will benefit all involved. These basic concepts can be applied to all areas of the organization. I have had clients ask us to do the same training for shop mechanics. How many times do they keep drivers waiting without accurately communicating repair status? Shop employees may also be in a position to identify a potential driver problem in their everyday interactions. Recruiters are also key in the process.

One of the most important steps is to work with company management to set up an internal support structure for the program. Operations personnel will not support the Driver Care program if we don’t address driver problems or observations they may bring forward. This is also tailored specifically for the organization.

We also show companies how they can also use this structure as a support for drivers’ families. How much would a driver value his or her employment with your company if they knew they had someone in their corner when out on the road? How much of an advocate are you going to have in that family member when a driver thinks about leaving your company?

We all want to know we make a meaningful contribution to the organization we work within. I think every motivational speaker at any trucking conference I have attended, talks about this at one point or another. We get up and go home feeling like we're going to conquer the world. In a day or so we're back in the old swing of things and nothing gets done. The bottom line is this is not rocket science. It is a common sense approach to treating people with respect and dignity. With the proper execution, organizational structure and management support, it will produce results and change the overall culture within your organization for the better. The program not only benefits the driver, but all those engaged in the process.

The MTU Safety and Loss Prevention staff is available as a service to all current customers. We can also tailor a program for others. If you would like to further discuss this or just kick around some ideas, please feel free to call Jeff Davis, Vice President of Safety for Motor Transport Underwriters at 1-800-809-3660 extension 2034.