

Beyond The Cab

The only safety management newsletter dedicated exclusively to addressing injury prevention and workers' compensation cost control for trucking companies.



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What Drives Your Safety Program?

Have you ever considered what drives your company's safety program? You can probably list a multitude of things that your company currently does in the name of safety. So, what's the primary motivating force that causes the management within your company to promote "safety?"

Unless you are the only management person within your company, I'm not asking you to assess what motivates you (personally). Instead, I'm asking you to take a step back... get a look at the big picture and honestly answer the question from the viewpoint of the collective management team. What "one thing" motivates your company do the things that it currently does to promote safety?

Compliance

You will never find a sane person who will deny that the trucking industry is among the most highly regulated industries in the United States. Although most of the rules are passed down in the form of regulations from the federal and state governments, other entities such as insurance carriers, consignees and others establish minimum criteria for safety as well.

With few exceptions, DOT regulations and the requirements of other entities have been imposed in the name of "safety." To their credit, those very regulations have helped increase professionalism within the trucking industry and have made trucking within the United States much safer. However, the unfortunate consequence of the excessive regulations has been that far too many trucking companies are so consumed with crossing every "t" and dotting every "i" that "compliance" has become the motivating force behind their company's safety efforts. The goal of the safety program within these companies is to stay out of trouble. This is indeed a poor state of affairs for any company, because the goal of the safety program is "achieved" when all of the minimum requirements have been met.

The mindset of equating "safety" with "compliance" has become so prevalent within trucking that an entire industry of safety consultants has emerged, many (not all) of whom have the "sole focus" of ensuring compliance with safety-related regulations. However, this is not mentioned to disparage those safety consultants. If the use of such a consultant is the full extent to which safety is promoted, it is the failure of the trucking company management.

Despite a slogan on the trailer doors, (or even an extended period with few injuries or accidents) "safety" in companies with the "compliance equals safety" mindset is neither a priority nor a value.

Profit

Other trucking companies have a management team that is primarily motivated to promote safety because of the "financial implications." They not only understand the direct costs of injuries but also are aware of the tremendous indirect (and frequently latent) costs associated with injuries.

Many entrepreneur-minded individuals find themselves in this category, because they are very adept in thinking in terms of maximizing profits. Additionally, companies who have felt the sting of sharply increased insurance premiums resulting from past claims many times find themselves motivated primarily by financial implications.

Because they understand the relationship between safety and profits, these companies will generally do whatever needs to be done to minimize the direct and indirect costs of accidents. Frequently, these companies will go beyond minimum legal requirement and will engage in some proactive strategies, such as safety meetings and individualized safety training if the ultimate financial benefit is seen. However, virtually every proposed safety initiative within these companies is measured against the foreseeable return on investment.

With these companies, safety is generally a priority. However, in the tough economic times in which the trucking industry has found itself

for the past several years, the long-term financial benefits of going beyond regulatory compliance may be quickly discarded in favor of efforts with more immediate financial returns.

Social

Lastly, the motivator that drives safety efforts at some trucking companies is best described as a "social" force. The management at these companies understands the need to comply with regulations and also has a sound understanding of the financial implications of promoting safety. However, the managers (individually and collectively) have come to the realization that the long-term success of the company depends on more than simply complying with regulations and maximizing short-term profits. It depends upon the success of the individual employees.

Therefore, within these companies, the drivers (and all other employees) are viewed as part of the "family" and are valued for more than the work they perform. These employers consider their civic and moral obligation to support and protect the welfare of employees and the driving public.

When motivated by this "social" force, managers are less likely to view their individual role as directing and controlling drivers. Instead, they are more likely to view their role as enabling and motivating drivers. Positive reinforcement (instead of punishment) then becomes the norm, whereby drivers are favorably recognized when they report hazards, participate in safety committees, make recommendations, etc.

Within companies in which a "social" force drives the company safety program, safety is perceived both by the employees and the customers as a core value of the company and doesn't diminish when compliance is achieved or when financial times get tough.



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