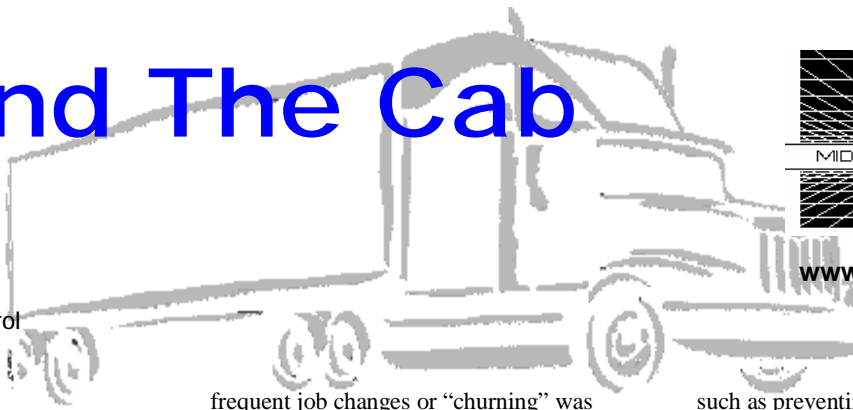


Beyond The Cab

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



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“Knockout” the Problems with Orientation Training

Virtually all trucking companies have some form of orientation for new drivers. However, the content varies considerably throughout the industry. Some trucking companies give due attention to both driving safety and non-driving safety within new driver orientation, while many others focus mostly (or exclusively) on how to complete paperwork.

Aside from screening new drivers through road tests, drug tests, personal interviews, and background checks, the interaction of management with new drivers is largely limited to what most of us have come to call “orientation training.”

This orientation training, according to some studies, is sub par. For example, a study published by the Office of Motor Carriers in 1995 assessed the entry-level training of truck drivers and concluded that drivers generally receive inadequate entry-level training. More recently, a study called “Driver, Vehicle, and Roadside Strategies for 2010” cited “inadequate and infrequent training” of drivers, as one of five high-priority safety problems in the trucking industry.

Not only is the orientation training that is being performed industry-wide “inadequate,” there’s a disturbing trend within the trucking industry, in which a growing number of trucking companies are advertising the brevity of their orientation training as an “employment benefit.”

The Impact of Turnover

The problem of inadequate orientation training is amplified by the rate of turnover within the trucking industry. Driver turnover rates of 50 to 100% annually are fairly common throughout the trucking industry, especially the long-haul truckload segment. With that in mind, it’s important to realize that a relationship exists between driver turnover and injuries

A recent FMCSA-sponsored report analyzed that relationship. This report indicated that

frequent job changes or “churning” was associated with a significantly higher probability of crash involvement. For drivers who average three or more jobs with different carriers per year, the odds of being involved in an at-fault crash were found to be more than twice as high as for those with lower job change rates.

With respect to non-driving injuries, the results are similar. New employees are more than twice as likely to become injured on the job than are experienced employees. On average, 1 out of every 8 employees is injured within the first year of their employment.

With these statistics in-mind, every trucking company should have a defined strategy for reducing driver turnover. Regardless of your efforts, however, there will inevitably be drivers who will leave because they want a change; because they are enticed by the promises of a competitor; because they have chosen to pursue a different career path; or simply because it’s time for them to retire. Because no trucking company is immune to this turnover, you must also have a strategy for focusing on the newly hired drivers... those who are statistically more likely to be injured.

The “One-Two” Punch

If the current orientation training for drivers is inadequate and turnover amplifies the problem. It’s time to deliver a “one-two punch” that will send your opponent (injuries) to the mat.

The Right Job

The content of orientation training is the “right jab” of your “one-two” combination. If you expect orientation training to stun your opponent (have an impact on preventing injuries), serious thought needs to be put into the content of the training.

Certainly, if your goal of orientation is to prevent paperwork errors, place your focus there. However, if you have more lofty goals,

such as preventing new drivers from becoming injury statistics at your company’s expense, then focus orientation training on both driving and non-driving safety. More specifically, enhance the content of your company’s orientation training by reviewing past injury records, accident reports and insurance loss runs, in addition to addressing common industry-wide safety concerns. If past injuries have occurred when drivers have been tarping loads, include that in your orientation training. If drivers have been injured from falling while getting out of their truck, include that in your orientation training. If drivers have been injured by freight falling out of the trailer, include that in your orientation training.

It’s certainly not rocket science, but far too few companies use past injuries and accidents to shape their orientation training.

The Left Hook

Consistency is the “left hook” of your “one-two” combination. If you expect orientation training to send your stunned opponent (injuries) down for the count, orientation training must be consistently delivered.

Identifying the ideal content of orientation training is fruitless if there’s no means by which to ensure that the same content is provided every time. Again, it’s not rocket science. The solution is to create a checklist of necessary training content and ensure that every person who will serve as a “trainer” has a sound understanding of how to conduct that training.

Many companies pair a new driver with an experienced driver for the first few days (or weeks) of employment. This is not necessarily a bad idea. In fact, it may very well be the ideal method for training new drivers. It provides the opportunity for the experienced employee to observe the new driver and provide feedback, and also permits ample driving time for discussing injury prevention. However, training new drivers through this means is even more likely to be inconsistent unless a training checklist is used.

