




Idelic First Annual

FLEET SAFETY CONFERENCE

A decorative graphic consisting of a 4x4 grid of light gray dots. The dot in the third row, fourth column is highlighted with a larger, darker gray circle.

Coaching Driver Managers: Increasing Retention & Safety with Smart Management

Steven Garrish, Vice President of Safety, CRST

Ronnie Holland, Director of Safety, TCW, Inc.

Karen Smerchek, President, Veriha Trucking Inc.

Hayden Cardiff, Founder / Co-CEO, Idelic



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SPEAKERS



Steven Garrish

VP of Safety
CRST



Ronnie Holland

Director of Safety
TCW, Inc.



Karen Smerchek

President
Veriha Trucking Inc.



Hayden Cardiff

Founder / Co-CEO
Idelic

How Most Fleets Manage Their Drivers

How Most Fleets Manager Their Drivers

- It's not uncommon for driver managers to be thrust into their role with little training.
 - Managers might be told it's important to maximize safety and retention, but they're often given little direction.
 - Managers are typically younger and less experienced than the drivers they manage, which can lead to friction.
- Driver managers sometimes don't have support from others in their fleet.
 - They often don't feel comfortable reaching out for the help they need.
 - Sometimes driver managers are so inexperienced, they don't feel like they have the authority to address an issue they know is a problem.
 - This leads to a lack of accountability, which, in turn leads to poor outcomes.
 - Fleets need to make sure their managers have a sense of "ownership" of their drivers' problems and outcomes.
- The biggest challenge is the generation gap between managers and drivers.
 - A big problem right now is that we don't train managers to overcome this generation gap.
 - The generation gap leads to poor communication between groups, which leads to poor outcomes.
- Poor management is a leading cause of high turnover.
 - "You don't quit your job. You quit your manager."
 - Fleet culture is primarily experienced through your relationships in the fleet. If managers have poor relationships with their drivers, then your fleet has a bad culture.



The Solution

Coaching Your Driver Managers



The Solution: Coaching Your Driver Managers

- Veriha has a fundamental value they call “**Assume positive intent.**”
 - If you come across to your drivers as frustrated or disappointed, then they won't be motivated to improve. You have to assume they're trying their best.
 - This is a fundamental value you should train your managers on.
- TCW focuses on **positive reinforcement.**
 - **Example:** If a driver consistently stays within the speed limit, they normally don't get praise for it. Recognizing their good deeds can keep them retained.
 - If you only interact with drivers to discipline them, then the only experience they have with their managers is negative. This will give them a negative impression of the fleet and increase their risk of turning over.
 - “What gets recognized gets repeated.”
- CRST does **round tables with their drivers** to see how their safety messages are being received.
 - Fleets may think they're sending positive safety messages, but if they're taken negatively, you will never know if you don't seek feedback.
- CRST tries to **give drivers respect** and give them the space they need.
 - **Example:** Before placing a call, they'll check to see if they're in the sleeper berth so they don't interrupt their sleep.

The Solution: Coaching Your Driver Managers

- Onboarding for driver managers should vary depending on past experience.
 - While past experience is valuable, they may bring practices from other fleets that don't fit with yours. You have to train them to leave those practices at the door.
- Veriha has driver managers **spend time in every department** as part of their onboarding.
 - This gives them an idea of how their role fits into the fleet as a whole.
- Having driver managers **go on a trip with their drivers** as part of their onboarding can be particularly effective for inexperienced driver managers.
 - This can help driver managers understand the difficulty of being away from home for long periods of time.
 - This also gives driver managers a sense of how bad traffic can really be, which is important from an operations standpoint.
- **Upfront, honest, and proactive communication** is crucial.
 - Being empathetic is important, but you also need to be honest about any issues you see or there won't be any improvement.

Measuring Success with Manager Coaching

Measuring Success with Manager Coaching

- Metrics to determine the success of driver managers:
 - Turnover for each manager
 - Operational excellence measures
 - Revenue per truck per day
 - Preventable accidents per million miles
 - Percentage of drivers that achieve their safety bonus
 - Tying manager incentives to driver incentives can improve outcomes for both.
 - Percentage of drivers who hit their earnings goal
- It's important to set clear expectations for managers.
 - You cannot expect improvement from driver managers if they don't know what they're being measured on.
 - Holding a regular performance review process with your managers helps them see their progress toward meeting expectations.
- Tying incentive pay to your expectations can get managers more involved in the process.
 - If their pay depends on meeting metrics, they'll be more likely to ask questions about how they can improve.
- **Everyone is in need of coaching, all the time.**
 - While it's important to identify who is most in need of training, you should be training all of your managers, all the time.
 - During training meetings, ask your managers what they feel is working and what isn't, and encourage them to ask the same of you.

Practical Steps You Can Take Today

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- **Improving communication** is the most important thing you can do.
 - Twice a year, TCW has in-person performance reviews because in-person contact improves communication.
 - TCW also has quarterly masterclass coaching programs where all driver managers are invited to attend. They hear speakers discuss their experience with managing drivers and explain what has worked for them.
- All changes in your management training have to start at the top.
 - If managers see that their training is important to the executives of their fleet, they'll be more likely to learn from it.
- Improving managers' **emotional intelligence** is critical to success.
 - Managers should know when a driver needs care or when they need discipline to improve.
- Having face-to-face meetings between managers and drivers can improve their relationship.

Q&A

Q&A

- “Fleet managers in the lumber industry typically have other responsibilities and may have no driver experience at all. Do you have recommended resources to teach them the regulations?”
 - Steven Garrish, CRST:
 - Yeah, absolutely. There’s no substitute for just getting in the truck and spending a few days with your drivers. You’ll see what things that are regulatory in nature help people drive effectively on the road, as well as what things do you need to remember to do and a basic overview of the equipment. And then I think some of the best resources I found can be found at NATMI. They have a lot of certification courses and basic knowledge courses that I found very useful and they offer some certifications to in different areas.
 - Ronnie Holland, TCW, Inc.:
 - I would just like to chime in there and say, I would reach out to your state association. They probably have some training set up there locally.
 - Karen Smerchek, Veriha Trucking:
 - We have some amazing driver managers that are CDL holders, so just because they're not in the truck doesn't mean that they can't do a great job in that role. We utilize TCS fleet leader training program as well for our drivers, but we also have them do the same monthly safety training that all of our drivers.

Q&A

- “Can I get some suggestions on how to hold recruiters accountable when what they say to drivers conflicts with the way our driver managers actually are?”
 - Steven Garrish, CRST:
 - I like that question. Now, I think it's important to know what is the delta between what drivers are being told from the recruiter versus how they're being managed once they get a board. I think much like our discussions around driver managers, having the driver recruiter be a part of the onboarding process is important, and then having incentives and metrics tied to retention will help too.
 - Karen Smerchek, Veriha Trucking:
 - Any turnover in the first 30 days has to be because the recruiters hired the wrong driver or you did a poor job onboarding them—you missed a step in communication. Really diving into any of those instances is important so you can get that corrected immediately. You should also put your expectations in writing to the driver before they step foot on your property. If it's in writing, there shouldn't be any contradictions.

Q&A

- “What is your best advice when management requests training with more involvement with the drivers and a ride along to gain trucking experience, but due to the office always being busy, this option is not readily available. Are there any external programs or services that you recommend?”
 - Karen Smerchek, Veriha Trucking:
 - We like to do our ride-alongs the first week before they have a workload. I would encourage you pursue personal development in your career. So, whether it be better comprehension or cross training, it's going to help you 10X your results. Whether it be the hour that you just spent on this webinar, look at it as a way to improve and to help your business.
 - Steven Garrish, CRST:
 - One, it has to come from the top. I think you have to schedule a ride along well before they start in their role. You have to have a plan set up, schedule it, and execute it properly. We've got, say five fleet managers and we will have a rotation where we will have one out for the next five weeks to do this training. If I'm an operations manager or even a leader of the company, you know, I'll sit down and cover for him if need be because the returns on that investment as Karen mentioned are are priceless.