



Owner-Operator's Business  
Association of Canada  
Association professionnelle des  
routiers autonomes du Canada

...from the  
director's chair

# The job of finding work

One of my indicators of how things are going out on the road is the kind of phone calls I receive. I'm still on the receiving end of diatribes about unexpected deductions, crappy equipment, or a dispatcher with an iffy interpretation of compliant. But more often than not these days, the calls are inquiries or requests for information before things go haywire.

I'm encouraged that the message seems to be getting through; with a shortage of qualified drivers that's reaching GDP-limiting proportions, and a growing number of carriers who are committed to making trucking a well-paying, safe and satisfying career option, drivers have choices. And with the tools and technology available today, there is no reason for those choices to be uninformed.

There is a ton of information out there on how to choose a carrier. For example, a Google search on "How to choose the best trucking company to work for" will give you close to 13 million hits. The problem then becomes finding the best tips and advice on finding the best company.

If you persevere, you can weed out several million gurus, and the sensible information surfaces. The most helpful advice-givers will tell you to first narrow the field of carriers you'll want to research by setting some basic parameters: what type of freight you'd like to haul, how often you'd like to get home and where you'd like to drive.

They'll also give practical advice on the questions you absolutely need answered in order to make an informed decision. And the list is long: there's compensation, operating policies, safety, maintenance, and training. And don't forget retirement and benefit plans, wellness programs, and opportunities for advancement. Don't hesitate to inquire about the company's business: are they profitable, is their business growing,

and what's their turnover rate?

Talk to other drivers, dispatchers, mechanics, and customers if you can. Compare what they're saying with what the recruiter is telling you, and be wary of discrepancies.

But all that good advice and where to find it wasn't one bit helpful to the driver I got a call from last week.

Sam is an experienced driver who has been out of the biz for a few years. Carrier X has a terminal in his home town, so he walked in off the street and asked if they were hiring. The office manager asked a few basic questions, then they walked around the yard a bit, talking about the operation. The next day Sam got a call saying he was hired and could he do a quick run that night? Another driver had called in sick. Wow, that was easy.

On the first trip, Sam got stopped at a scale and soon discovered a few things about the carrier that he wasn't told during the interview. The carrier is on a watch-list for unpaid fines, it has a rather poor safety record, the cargo in the box wasn't exactly as the bills of lading suggested, and the registration for the trailer had expired. And he was overweight.

When Sam got back to the yard, he handed the carrier the \$254 ticket he got, and quit. He called me the next day; he didn't get paid for the trip, and he was afraid if he asked for his money, the carrier would make him pay the fine.

I asked how much was he owed for the trip. He wasn't sure, they hadn't really talked about money. And, Sam sheepishly admitted, they hadn't actually done any of the paperwork yet.

His only excuse was that he was anxious to get working, and he'd been driving by that company's yard for years, so he figured they were okay.

I told Sam that if he was really serious about



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getting back into the industry, I'd help him. I spent some time with him, and I think he's back on track. Me? Not so much. After a couple of hours on the phone and the Internet, walking Sam through all the "should-dos" I discovered that finding the right carrier can take an inordinate amount of time and patience: the homework required is not for the faint of heart.

But what really got me was how difficult it can be to tick off number one on everyone's list: checking a carrier's safety record. If the carrier operates in the US, you're ahead of the game – you have access to FMCSA's SAFER System and a carrier's CSA scores – but in Canada, it's a difficult thing to do.

Every jurisdiction monitors the safety performance of its carriers and maintains a database of carrier profiles. This "report card" is a summary of the carrier's performance, its compliance to on-road and administrative requirements, and its conviction, inspection and accident information, but of course, it's confidential.

Three jurisdictions make limited info available to the public, such as business name and contact information, and current safety rating (defined differently in various jurisdictions, by the way). Manitoba's C-SNAP is most accessible. Ontario has a free snapshot, but the CVOR Level I Abstract with slightly more information will cost you \$5. And a diligent search of the Quebec Web site will eventually lead you to a free one-pager.

At the end of the day, after exercising due diligence, and weighing all the pros and cons, it can be a mighty big leap of faith to choose one carrier over another. Good luck Sam.