



Owner-Operator's Business
Association of Canada

Association professionnelle des
routiers autonomes du Canada

*...from the
director's chair*

How Do We Close the Gap?

If you're concerned with attracting, training, and retaining qualified drivers, check out Closing the Gap, a Canadian Trucking Human Resources Council (CTHRC) initiative.

Getting young people interested in a trucking career isn't easy, given the competition out there today. Still, driving schools tell us inquiries are strong, suggesting there's no shortage of people considering a career in trucking. That's where another challenge arises – filling the gap between the entry-level skills needed to earn a license, and those required to be effective in a career at the wheel.

Licensing standards vary across Canada, and rarely meet the industry needs. Trucking has traditionally demanded a high level of skill upon entering the industry – every load is the real thing.

Some licensing requirements are appallingly low, and many training programs meet minimum standards. Believe it or not, half of Canada's entry-level drivers get their license with no formal schooling at all.

The problem is, if we make it tougher to get a license, while it might get rid of the so-called license mills, it could also raise the cost of turning out the kind of driver a carrier will hire right out of school. And who's going to pay for that?

Good schooling is already costly. With tuition fees at better driving schools running between \$6,000 and \$8,500, students with no income can't afford it. Trainees are seldom eligible for funding programs, and don't receive the tax credits most college/university students enjoy. And there is no financial help for Cana-

dians who want to trade low-paying jobs for a higher-paying career in trucking.

We must explore different and creative funding arrangements and it's essential that they be linked to minimum national licensing and training standards.

If we raise licensing and training standards, carrier buy-in is also essential. Carriers need to invest more in the development of their future workforce and help pay for training to the standard they demand. I would challenge carriers to get involved in helping establish these standards by working in closer partnerships with schools, and then supporting accredited schools by hiring their students.

Maybe carriers should actually shorten their wish lists, shifting some of the burden and cost away from the students. Why not let the schools concentrate on the basics of steering and gearing – and graduating good, safe drivers – while carriers pick up the tab for the administrative stuff like clearing customs, managing HOS, map reading, and so on? Many of the things that turn a good Class A license holder into a truck driver are better learned out on the road doing the job anyway.

As we drive change toward a higher level of professionalism in an effort to attract new people to the industry, let's not forget it's equally important to reward that skill and professionalism with the higher pay and lifestyle benefits superior workers expect – or we'll never be able to keep them.



**Joanne
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