



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

...from the
director's chair

Women and trucking: Imagine that!

It's that time of year again, when many organizations are hosting conferences and annual meetings, and a big part of the industry is gearing up for our two major "even-year" truck shows, Truck World in Toronto in April and Truxpo in Abbotsford the following month.

Not surprisingly, the various workshop topics, special features, and guest speakers at these events more often than not reflect concerns that are top of mind for the industry.

The driver shortage, which has been scaring the daylights out of fleet owners for years, is high on the agenda again. If you're one of those who pooh-poohs a dearth of drivers as the biggest myth in the industry, get over it. There's no denying our aging driver demographic and the absence of young people knocking down trucking's door.

And this is not just a trucking thing; technicians and drivers share Canada's list of the top 10 toughest jobs to fill, with occupations as diverse as office support workers, engineers, accountants, and senior executives.

As the population of the industrialized world grows older, there's fierce competition to attract young people entering the workforce. There's a vast range of options available to them, literally hundreds of careers that didn't even exist a generation ago. And we have the added burden of trucking being stereotyped as a last-resort kind of job.

One of the upshots of shifting demographics and labor shortages was industry turning to "non-traditional" sources for drivers and technicians. Trucking is a bit behind the curve, but most of the industry has cottoned on to the low participation rate of women in the industry and is paying more attention to them as an untapped labor pool.

And a large pool it is indeed. StatsCan data shows that close to half of Canada's workforce includes women, yet the female participation rate of women in trucking is one of the lowest, at 14%, in all transportation-related industries including air, rail, marine, and supply chain/logistics.

When you drill a little deeper into the various subsectors of the industry, the female participation rate as a truck driver is a measly 3%.

But these numbers have been staring us in the face

for years. In 2006 when the trucking industry was singled out by a Federal Labour Standards Commission Review, while the carriers who were interviewed generally acknowledged women as a potential source of new drivers, they also believed that a number of factors inherent in the truck driving occupation were – and always would be – barriers to women entering the workforce.

They believed the very nature of the job made it unattractive to women, and that most of the barriers women faced were beyond their control. And, they said, implementing measures to help women navigate around some of these barriers was simply "too costly."

Is it any wonder the percentage of women drivers has risen by only .05% in over a decade?

It would be unfair, though, not to acknowledge that numerous carriers in this country are making significant strides in changing operational strategies to attract women to a career in trucking. A panel of industry leaders at Trucking HR Canada's Women with Drive Leadership Summit early in March confirmed this.

A shout-out to Eassons Transport, whose fleet of drivers is 11% women. And what about XTL Transport's management team at 30% women, close to triple the national average? Or Snowbird Transportation Systems, which boasts an all-women management team? Kudos galore.

In 2015, the Asia Pacific Gateway Skills Table published a report Women in Transportation Careers: Understanding Participation in Canada. The organization was engaged by Transport Canada to conduct a study to validate the widely accepted assumption that women are underrepresented in transportation careers across Canada.

One of the key research areas focused on the challenges and barriers women face in typically male-dominated industries such as transportation. The themes that emerged from a thorough review of existing research come as no surprise.

Topping the list was lack of information and awareness. Many women simply do not know about the opportunities available in non-traditional occupations, nor the prerequisites, benefits and working conditions associated with them. It's very challenging for women to develop an interest or curiosity in a career



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that they simply do not know exists.

Another theme involved branding. Trucking is not actively chosen by women because it's not acknowledged as an attractive job. A lot of the problems in helping women get excited about transportation as a career choice lies in a stale brand.

The report also determined that information on associations and opportunities that exist for women is not publicized well enough. This is frustrating for those organizations, companies and individuals who work hard to encourage the employment of women in the trucking industry, promote their accomplishments, and minimize the obstacles they face.

So we continually seek fresh ways to communicate our message. That's why you'll be introduced to Canada's first Image Team at Truck World in a few weeks. The Image Team is an initiative of the Women In Trucking Association (WIT), an organization with membership in the U.S. and Canada, as well as Australia, New Zealand, Norway, United Kingdom, and Japan. That in itself sends a strong message that we're not alone in struggling to overcome the lingering perception that transportation jobs are for men.

It's an old saw, but it has to be said: we need to find new ways to work together. A strong community of like-minded organizations and individuals will take us further, faster, toward our goal. So please join us in making history.

If you're at Truck World, be there on Saturday, April 21 at the Salute to Women Behind the Wheel to meet the Image Team. If you can't be there, the Image Team will come to you. Curious? Well, you'll just have to wait; that's all I'm saying for now.

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