



Owner-Operator's Business  
Association of Canada

Association professionnelle des  
routiers autonomes du Canada

*...from the  
director's chair*

## Finding a work-life balance that works

If you're wondering what's on the minds of trucking company executives these days, "driver shortage" is back on the list of what's keeping them awake at night. Carriers who were asked by the American Transportation Research Institute (ATRI) to outline their top concerns ranked it number five. Other fleet bosses believe we're in a crisis situation, facing a shortage of unprecedented proportions.

With the exception of the past couple of years when the recession pushed it into the background, trucking has been citing "driver shortage" as a critical issue for decades, so what's got the top dogs so riled up this time?

They cite increased freight demand and anticipated changes to the US hours-of-service that could shorten driving time, and some say that CSA 2010 could have a "catastrophic" impact by making as many as 200,000 current drivers unemployable.

ATRI also asked industry leaders what their proposed strategies are for dealing with the issues, and to my mind, what carriers say about their plans for fixing the problems provides some insight into why some issues remain on the list, year in and year out.

The top strategies for dealing with the driver shortage this time around are to: evaluate the competitiveness of driver pay and benefits to better compete with other professions; address quality of life concerns by developing programs that advance work-life balance; and engage in high-profile marketing and recruiting efforts to get more people interested in the industry.

Sounds good so far. The first two – addressing driver pay/benefits and work-life balance – are pretty high on the list of just about every driver out there too. In fact, "better money" and "better benefits" remain the top reasons why close to 85% of Canadian drivers would switch carriers, according to a recent driver satisfaction survey.

So, where's the money? I haven't talked to too many drivers lately who've been offered a raise.

Of course, carriers don't actually say they're going to pay drivers more – they're just going to evaluate pay and benefits in other sectors. But here's what really gets me: they single out the construction industry, which is, in their eyes, their biggest competitor for jobs. A seemingly innocuous point, perhaps, but it speaks volumes about where some carriers' heads are when it comes to understanding why they might have trouble filling their seats with good drivers.

Trucking's competition is decidedly not a single industry sector. Almost every sector of the economy is facing shortages as the population of the industrialized world grows older, and peoples' attitudes and expectations toward jobs and work change.

We have a handful of enlightened carriers in this country who are brilliant when it comes to dealing with their human resources, but by and large, I think trucking is slow to truly understand how profound an impact demographic changes have on our industry. And that's hampering their ability to attract, motivate, and retain good employees.

For example, we're in the unique position in Canada of having four generations in the workforce at the same time, and each of these generations has different attitudes and values with respect to work and life.

Good employers – trucking companies included – need to understand what workers from each of these groups want from a job, what they want from their boss, what the consequences are if the organization doesn't deliver.

Work-life balance issues are – and have been for ages – a significant concern for truck drivers, and if the light is finally coming on for carriers, well, hallelujah.

The National Study on Balancing Work, Family and Lifestyle, a ground-breaking 2009 study on work-life issues commissioned by Health Canada, examines myths surrounding work-life conflict. One of these is that helping workers find

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work-life balance is something "nice" employers do for their employees, and has little to do with the bottom line.

Not so. People who can't balance work and life have lower levels of job satisfaction, they're less committed to their organizations, and less loyal. They report higher job stress and they're more likely to be absent – just not show up – at the desk or at the loading dock. Only recently have experts been able to put a dollar figure to all of this; just the incremental increase in absenteeism because of not being able to balance costs Canadian companies over \$4 billion a year in direct costs.

Understanding how imbalance manifests itself in truck drivers, then aggressively seeking ways to improve the quality of life for commercial drivers, is not only a key recruitment and retention strategy (as the ATRI respondents see it), it makes sound business sense.

The fact that carriers are finally looking at driver pay and benefits, as well as quality of life issues, as possible strategies for attracting people to the job is encouraging. A supportive work environment, a decent wage, and a good work-life balance: these are the kinds of things that are going to attract people into the industry.

But unless they get the first two right, the third strategy – high profile marketing and recruiting – will be all for naught. A glitzy advertising campaign might successfully lure individuals into the industry before they choose alternate career paths, but if the job doesn't measure up, they simply won't stay, and "driver shortage" will be back on the list next year too.