

Transport Topics

The Weekly Newspaper of Trucking and Freight Transportation

Week of February 7, 2011

Coach Your Drivers and Win

By Rim Yurkus
President and CEO
Strategic Programs Inc.

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's new Compliance, Safety, Accountability program is changing transportation's driver-retention game. Every driver will have his or her own CSA score, and every company will have its composite CSA score.

Whenever scores are mentioned, sports come to mind, and just as baseball's stars expect to be treated better and paid more than the average guy in the dugout, we can expect top-scoring truck drivers to use their CSA scores to negotiate compensation packages in much the same way baseball giants negotiate deals based on their batting averages.

That's fine for the team because a team packed with A-level players is going to win games, and winning teams can do more for their players than less successful ones.

Developing a winning team doesn't happen with a snap of your fingers, but you can develop a championship team if you or your driver managers adopt a coaching role to help drivers win — and maintain — good CSA scores.

Coaching always has been an informal part of a fleet manager's job description, but now it's a critical requirement.

Begin by explaining the rules to your drivers, training them on the fundamentals and motivating them to focus on what's important.

Under FMCSA's old SafeStat system, a carrier's performance on the road and potential crash risk were assessed using only four broad categories. CSA, SafeStat's replacement, uses seven categories. FMCSA calls them BASICS, short for "Behavioral Analysis and Safety Improvement Categories." They are:

- Unsafe driving.
- Fatigued driving (hours of service).
- Driver fitness.
- Controlled substances and alcohol.
- Vehicle maintenance.
- Cargo-related.
- Crash indicator.

Clearly, driver behavior is a major part of the new measurement system, hence the need for serious coaching.

Gary Kelley is Senior Vice President of Driver Services and Human Resources for D.M. Bowman Inc., Williamsport, MD. He's been recruiting and

managing truck drivers for more than 35 years, so I asked him for his thoughts on coaching drivers in the shadow of CSA.

Kelley's answer provides a good jumping-off place for thinking about the art of coaching drivers: "Never before has it been more important for drivers to realize the consequences of their actions (or inactions) regarding pre-trip inspections."

That comment was echoed and augmented by the top-level flatbed drivers for Boyd Bros. Transportation of Clayton, Ala., whose company asked them for their own winning driving tips. Here's what some of them had to say:

■ Fred Thornton: "Every morning when I get up, the first thing I do is check my logbook and walk around the truck, checking the equipment. Thinking that I'll do it later has come back to haunt me."

Coach your drivers to do likewise as part of their daily routine — not just in the morning but every time the truck is loaded or unloaded.

■ Don Walter: "Inspectors look at the straps on the side of the trailer. If they are properly rolled and secured, it's a sign that everything is in order. If they are rolled up sloppy and loose, that causes inspectors to look closely at other things. Look at the tarps. If the corners are securely tucked, the load is secure. Other officials notice whether the tarps are torn and/or shredded. So use edge protectors to prevent tearing. Inspectors can tell at a glance if there are enough chains or binders."

■ Waymon Burks: "Always check lights, turn signals, flashers, brake pads — especially on trailers. Check the tires for pressure and for wear. Check air lines; check under springs of the air line to look for pinches in the hose. Look under mud flaps. Actually touch lights to feel for cracks."

Burks added that he takes along extra rubber seals, because an ounce of prevention can add up to a higher CSA score.

■ Ken Bufford: "The No. 1 thing when you stop for road inspections is the first impression you make. If you have a three- or four-day beard and 'road-map' eyes, that alerts the official that you might have been pushing yourself, and other things might be out of order. Stay clean-shaven, eyes clear and keep a neat appearance."

A professional appearance that makes you look like a winner also provides the mental confidence to ward off an inspector's suspicions.

■ James Spann: "When they pull you over, the way you get out of the truck and the way you talk and act

[have] a big impact on your inspection. If you get out of the truck with an attitude — they will have something for you. Also, your appearance and the appearance of the truck are very important." He advises

drivers to shower daily, keep their trucks clean and tidy, show respect for the officials and always be polite. What's more, "If the cop has an attitude, be extra polite." Pay attention to nonverbal communication as well as the questions an officer or inspector asks — signals as well as audibles, to stretch the sports analogy a bit further.

These suggestions make a good foundation for a daily checklist for your drivers. Other checklist items could include making sure the rig and cargo aren't overweight by even a few pounds, carrying a physical card and an unexpired commercial driver license with your current address, and even keeping a spare pair of eyeglasses in the truck if you need corrective lenses.

As the comments by the Boyd Bros. drivers suggest, half the battle in being a top professional driver is behaving like one.

Gary Kelley told me, "In past years, drivers didn't worry about many of these BASICS because most of them were considered the company's problems, not the driver's problem."

That is emphatically not the case anymore. As your drivers' CSA coach, stressing the importance of being totally prepared while maintaining a professional attitude and appearance will help drivers make a positive first impression that will reflect well on your company — and keep those A-level drivers on your payroll.

Based in Denver, Strategic Programs Inc. has worked since 1988 to help organizations recruit, develop and retain their employees.

 **STRATEGIC**
Programs, Inc.
High-Tech Measurements • High-Touch Solutions

800.800.5476

www.strategicprogramsinc.com

Opinion

