

Choosing a Trucking Company: Home Time

Home time means different things to different people. Some operators require every weekend off (non-negotiable) while for others two days during the week is sufficient. There are also some operators who define home time as “four hours for laundry”.

Not only does home time change from one driver to the next, home time demands can also fluctuate seasonally within each driver. There are seasons when any and all loads are accepted, while other times more conservative values prevail. These “seasons” often time correspond with either personal cash flow or relationship demands (Christmas bills verses Christmas time or anniversary time verses anniversary bills). Additionally, driver home time demands can fluctuate within the seasons of life itself (single, attached, young married, young children, teenage children, empty nest or divorced). Each driver has their very own range of acceptable and unacceptable treatment in all seasons.

Different companies can sometimes have a wide range of philosophies on home time. Some companies can provide regular predictable schedules, while others stretch all definitions to beyond breaking points. This huge variation can even be within the company itself, practically speaking between one dispatcher and another. Whether the company has a clear corporate standard or an undefined one, each company deals with the tension this issue brings.

I became familiar with one company that was purposely hostile to family life. They weren't yet openly prejudicial or discriminatory (hiring only unattached drivers) but their culture strongly flowed towards single lifestyles. They were often openly hostile to infringing spouses (or at least what they thought was infringing) and they purposely trained certain staff members to assist in expediting driver divorces or present/encourage potential divorces whenever possible. They displayed it as a “service” to struggling drivers but behind closed doors, at Sr. management level, they openly believed divorced drivers are more committed to company values. They sincerely thought they were doing the right thing. I was even expecting someone to be appointed VP of divorce.

However, at times it appeared to me the philosophy simply was a means to justify Sr. Management personal lifestyles (if I'm gonna be wild and unattached I'm selling it to others as well). Whether that was actually the case or whether it was simply a selfish belief that drivers are: a dime a dozen, expendable, or not worth investing into is hard to tell. I failed mind reading 101.

Management philosophies like that aren't born over night, they are usually introduced gradually. Then, like the squeeze of a boa constrictor slowly crushes a family lifestyle from the corporate culture.

It's my personal belief that non-family oriented corporate culture produces short term positive results and long term negative ones (on average), replacing a predictable stress on customer service with a much more volatile one.

More often than not divorces produce: pain, hardship, financial devastation and personal insecurity. It's often followed by some form of depression and less-productive/accountable lifestyles. None of these features produce long term positive work performance.

I'm an accountant. I've been one for 30 years. I've seen and walked with many variations of lifestyles. Though every principle has its noted exceptions those who have strong secure families have predictable positive performances. If I was a trucking company building a team of professional drivers I would be foolish to ignore these high producers. I would be equally foolish to convert the predictable to the volatile, regardless of my personal prejudices. It all affects company moral.

It would be narrow of me to discuss home time without the typical conflict each request may bring. During seasons of high turnover in the industry statements like the following regularly occur:

“...I told the company six weeks in advance I needed that weekend off. The last three trips I asked if the load would risk affecting my time off. I was assured it wouldn’t. When I finally realized I wouldn’t make it... I hit the roof. I won’t be treated that way. I found out another load could EASILY have been swapped with me... I can’t trust them any more!”

Short Changing home time needs short changes driver personal priorities and commitments. It’s a slippery slope that too often backfires on the trucking company. Choosing the right company requires a sober evaluation of both the driver and the company culture/policies. It’s a debate well worth having