

Choosing a trucking company: Change what you can, not what you can't

There are some things in life we can control and some we can't, some things we have to put up with and some things we simply decide not to tolerate.

As a driver, proper business edict requires civility and tolerance towards the shipper/receiver under most circumstances.

One of the worst situation I was ever put into involved an early morning unload in an isolated North Carolina mountain town. We arrived the night before and woke up for our 7am drop. I entered the receiver's office (pre morning coffee) and found a pleasant middle age man behind the desk. After niceties he stood up to start making arrangements. Before grabbing the phone he picked up an empty can of Mountain dew (an interesting breakfast drink... I thought). He proceeded to unload an eight inch string of morning chewing tobacco into the open aluminum can (I – I – I still haven't re- re- recovered from that sight). Luckily I hadn't eaten yet (and decided not to till later in the afternoon).

Another time I was sent to pick up some springs at a manufacturing plant. The shipper's office hadn't received a single drop of paint or upgrade since its 1920's debut. The original one inch thick wood cubbyholes were polished smooth, round and dished to nearly half its original thickness by literally tonnes of individual sheets of processed paperwork over the decades. Though the decor was inviting, my small town upbringing did not prepare me for the relationship between the shipper and production manager.

It was one of mutual respect and admiration, however it was laced with a 94.7dB* thick cloud of blue cussing. They jovially discussed the indiscrete and intimate habits of each other's mothers, accompanied by strong implications of mutual involvement. I later washed my ears out with lye and a box and a half of Q-tips.

Drivers must tolerate many situations like these since they do not have control over the random environments they are placed in. However, they do have much more say about the environment they call "head office".

I know of one very professional driver who, when shopping around for another company, refused to consider one very well paying company because he wouldn't want to send his wife or kids (or himself for that matter) to the company office due to the flesh tone wallpaper decorations. This is the choice the driver made: sacrifice finances for family values.

It is the right and duty of each operator to make their professional standards known. It is one of many things they actually have control of. Without ever voicing opinions, stating standards and calling attention to inappropriate behavior, drivers will never experience their appropriate environment.

Companies allow cultures to be built by allowing (or disallowing) driver behavior. This means the trucking company must sometimes cull the driver pool to save standards. The culture then attracts or repels like minded drivers. Practically speaking it's the drivers who actually define and BUILD company culture while the company merely enforces the perceived standard. Sometimes the argument appears to be a: which came first, the chicken or the egg but the higher the industry turnover the more drivers are in charge. Without this proactive perspective on the culture, drivers would be forced to operate in a victim mentality (I believe, unnecessarily).

Professional drivers who seek a more professional culture must accept responsibility for their personal surroundings. They must stand up against unprofessional behavior, thereby actually leading reform within the industry culture.

Ultimately there must be a “fit” between the culture of the company and the individual standard of the driver. Each driver must change what they CAN... by communicating and BEING what they want to see their cultures become.

* 95dB (Decibels) is the noise level of a jackhammer at 50 feet.

Robert D Scheper operates an accounting and consulting firm in Steinbach, Manitoba. He has a Masters Degree in Business Administration and is the author of the Book “Making Your Miles Count: taxes, taxes, taxes” (now available on CD). You can find him at www.thrconsulting.ca and thrconsulting.blogspot.com or at 1-877-987-9787. You can e-mail him at robert@thrconsulting.ca.

696 words