

VOICE OF THE TRUCK DRIVER 2:  
BEST PRACTICES FOR  
RECRUITING AND RETENTION

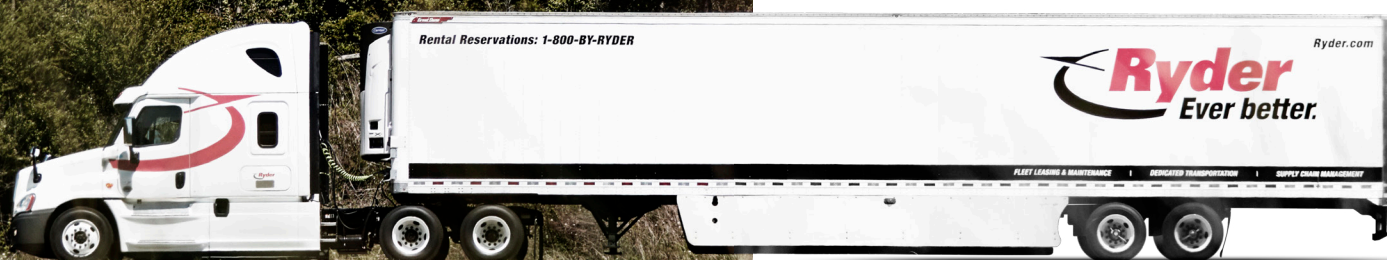
*Every day, professional truck drivers in the United States are delivering essential goods to communities all over the country. In fact, over 80 percent of the goods consumed in the US, travel on a truck at one point or another. Drivers deliver medical supplies to hospitals and clinics, food to grocery stores, building supplies to construction sites, raw materials to manufacturers and fuel to gas stations just to keep the nation moving. Today, there are over 3.5 million professional drivers in the US.<sup>1</sup> But that's not enough.*

Many predicted the driver shortage, and they were right. It is no longer a prediction. According to the American Trucking Associations, the current shortage is between 55,000 - 65,000 drivers and growing rapidly. By 2020, experts predict the industry will be short by 175,000 drivers, which can be catastrophic. Such a shortfall would amount to a 20 percent gap between demand and supply. And with only 11,000 new drivers being added annually, there are not nearly enough new drivers to keep up.

The driver shortage is also directly tied to high industry turnover. Today, driver turnover hovers between 82 and 90 percent for the average company employing long haul drivers. Although it has dropped in the past year due to a soft freight market, that number is expected to increase over the next two years.

For the past decade and a half, those who predicted the driver shortage have offered their advice on curbing the shortage. While an abundance of information like this exists, it lacks one of the main insights companies can use to overcome the shortage and high turnover – the voice of truck drivers.

*In this report, the second in the Voice of the Professional Truck Driver series, you'll learn how driver surveys, exit interviews, and conversations with current drivers, can improve recruiting and retention strategies in today's labor market.*



1. US Bureau of Labor Statistics



## Finding and Recruiting Drivers in the Millennial Era

Retiring Baby Boomers are one of the leading factors of the driver shortage. Currently, the average age of professional drivers is 52. Additionally, over 60 percent of drivers are older than 45, and just six percent are younger than 35.<sup>2</sup>

Competition from other industries has also swayed potential drivers who instead are going to work in the construction, oil, and energy industries. Stricter regulations are also playing a role in making the talent pool shallower.

As the industry deals with the aging workforce and stricter regulations, companies have to look at millennials to fill the vacancies. According to Pew Research Center, millennials have surpassed Baby Boomers as the nation's largest living generation. The question remains, how can the industry add millennials to its talent pool.

The first way is to understand how the budding population look at their careers. **A recent survey by Fleet Owner tracked factors that matter to millennials and showed:**

- **23% indicated that the ability to make an impact on the business mattered most**
- **20% wanted a clear path to advancement**
- **16% would be interested in a company that provided development and on-going feedback**
- **13% listed income as their top priority**

While one key is understanding the new workforce, the second is finding and enticing them. Millennials grew up in a digital world on mobile platforms and social networking. That's where companies need to be to recruit them.

<sup>2</sup>. US Bureau of Labor Statistics

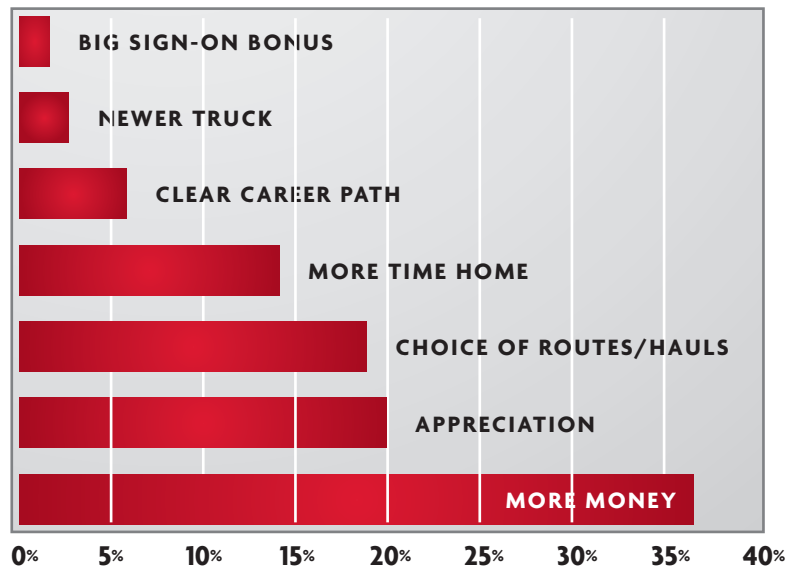
Secondly, while some claim advanced vehicle technology has deterred drivers, it can be used to recruit new talent to the industry – especially millennials. Increased road safety regulations have played a large role in driving advancements in onboard vehicle technologies, many of which assist drivers or even automatically intervene to prevent a collision before it happens. Adaptive cruise control, forward-looking radar, collision-avoidance and lane-departure warning systems are examples of technologies’ increasing automation, which is currently available and in use in many commercial fleets.

These technologies actually change the commercial driver profile of who to recruit and what level of sophistication they have around technology and the industry in general. The increased focus on technology, environment, and innovation all act as attracters for the new generation of drivers. When combining connectivity, telematics, safety features and automated manual transmission, all are leading to semi-automated and eventually fully automated trucks that a younger generation of drivers would be more inclined to operate as a career.

Many companies are developing a creative list of ideas to attract drivers, in addition to the obvious approach of simply offering more money. As pointed out in ***Voice of the Truck Driver: New Ideas to Ease the Shortage***, drivers said increased pay is just as important to them as respect from managers, predictable home time, and reliable equipment.



Source: HireRight



One strategy companies can use to entice new drivers is to target high unemployment areas and offer to relocate recruits where they are needed. Companies can also expand their search parameters looking to bring in women, veterans, and retirees.

When recruiting, partnerships with organizations can lead to a specialized talent pool. One of these groups is Hiring our Heroes, an organization that assists veterans and transitioning service members to find employment. Many trucking firms are successful in hiring returning veterans. They are in the job market, and may already have the training and experience needed to drive. Veterans possess many of the invaluable skills and qualities that are essential to be drivers. Through specialized training, recruits can become key employees in the trucking industry.

A second organization, Women in Trucking, is promoting the truck driving profession to women. Through a partnership with this organization, trucking companies are focusing on positively changing the ergonomics of their trucks to recruit women. Adding women to the driver pool is not just something to be done simply to fill a need; it is something that should be done because there is an opportunity to utilize under-represented potential.

**Along with expanding the talent pool, companies can offer creative benefits such as:**

- **Tickets to sporting events after a certain time of service**
- **Tuition reimbursement**
- **Military leave with no vacation time required**
- **More paid vacation**
- **Bonus and incentive plans**

## Retaining New and Experienced Drivers

Driver retention efforts must begin on a new driver's first day. And the efforts should not end. A recent driver survey reveals 60 to 70 percent of drivers say they have no allegiance to the company they work for. However, that changes after being with the company for over 180 days, as retention rates triple for drivers after six months of employment. The truth is loyalty begins during the on-boarding process on the first day of employment.

Often, drivers have said their expectations for the job don't always match the job description. Clear and detailed job descriptions help manage outlooks, and help drivers understand where they fit into the big picture. Regular communication between the manager and driver will help answer any questions and level set expectations.

Managers should have daily contact with local drivers whenever possible. For remote drivers, speak to them once per week on the phone and have a meeting once per month. Assigning a mentor (senior driver) to newly hired drivers can help with on-boarding and retention. Having a mentor allows the new driver to voice their concerns with someone, who can in-turn speak to the managers. However, a mentor should not be a substitute for daily communication between the new driver and manager.

*As one driver said, “At my current employer, when I arrive it’s ‘Hello Rick, how are you doing?’ At my last company it was ‘Hello 81976.’ That makes a huge difference in making drivers feel welcome and respected.”*



These tactics will ensure expectations are met for both the driver and the manager. Regular communication also allows the manager to work on correcting issues including diminishing downtime for the driver, while giving them more say, including the possibility of picking their own routes.

**Other retention best practices include:**

**Develop a career path** with progressive pay raises available based on longevity, and offer opportunities to those drivers who are inclined to move into dispatch and management.

**Provide better equipment**, and more comfortable cabs for drivers. Also spec equipment with women and younger drivers in mind (e.g. automatic transmission).

**Find a way to get drivers home more often.** Transportation planning and engineering can develop optimal schedules for drivers. Forty-one percent of drivers say getting home more often is the biggest factor to get them to stay with a company. Drivers who have a local route allowing them to be home every day have a lower turnover rate (approximately 30 percent or less than one fourth of over-the-road drivers). Also, it’s important to make sure that drivers have a convenient way to communicate with their families when they are on the road.

**Collaborate.** Companies and their transportation providers should work together to identify ways that shipments can be optimized to allow drivers to have single-day routes and find ways to reduce the total number of shipments so a lower number of drivers are required across the network.

# The Voice of the Driver Can Help Solve the Shortage

Any company that employs drivers needs to develop a formal plan to address their driver shortage and turnover issues. To be effective, the strategy should be developed by talking with your drivers and benchmarking best-in-class solutions that others are employing.

At Ryder, we have found through driver surveys, exit interviews, and the formation of a driver's council that lifestyle flexibility, dignity, respect, and honesty are just as valuable to drivers. And we strive every day to give this to them. However, the definitions of all those terms are broader than you may think.

That is why opening the lines of communications with your new and veteran drivers will ensure expectations are met and concerns are addressed. Ultimately, this will deepen your talent pool of qualified drivers and lower your turnover rates.



## Why Ryder?

BEST IN CLASS DRIVER RETENTION STRATEGIES.



With best in class driver management, let us navigate through the driver shortage for you.  
Call **888-793-3702** to learn more.



## About Ryder

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