

An aerial photograph of a blue car driving on a two-lane asphalt road that curves through a lush green field. A white rectangular bounding box is drawn around the car, extending backwards along the road. The 'motive' logo is in the top left corner.

motive

Building Driver Trust

**Increasing Driver Retention
and Dashcam Adoption**

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Introduction

In August 2020, the National Surface Transportation Safety Center for Excellence published a study confirming what many fleet managers already knew: driver retention is a key driver of fleet safety performance. The study examined the individual driver risk of 21,000 drivers from a diverse range of fleet sizes. Ultimately, the study concluded that overall, drivers who had continuous employment were significantly less likely to be involved in future FMCSA reportable crashes or to receive a violation compared to those that left the carrier at any time.

There are significant safety benefits to retaining good drivers, not least of which is the high cost of hiring and training new drivers. Estimates vary but most put it somewhere between \$8,000 and \$15,000 for every driver that needs to be replaced.

Fleets across the country have been debating the best ways to retain drivers while working to develop a culture that promotes safety. What many are finding is that creating a positive safety culture is impossible without the trust of drivers. Driver trust is critical to implementing important safety programs and adopting proven safety technologies.

One such technology that, when fully adopted, has been proven to improve and promote safety culture is the in-cab dash cam. The dash cam is also one of the most contentious technological advances and one that some drivers have expressed reluctance to adopt believing a dual-facing, in-cab dash cam will infringe on their privacy. While the data clearly shows that dash cams improve safety and save lives, there is still a lack of trust among a minority of drivers.

Demonstrating the ways that drivers have control over their privacy is a great trust builder. For example, Motive dash cam users can activate Driver Privacy Mode to disable the driver-facing camera. Fleet admins can turn the camera on only while drivers are on the job to maintain their privacy when off-duty. Drivers can feel confident that they're not being recorded when the green LED turns on.

What follows are four more proven practices to build driver trust which can increase retention and improve safety.

¹Examining the Relationship Between Driver Retention and Safety, National Surface Transportation Safety Center for Excellence, Blacksburg, VA, August 2020, Available: https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/bitstream/handle/10919/99714/NSTSC_E_DriverRetention_Final.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Demonstrating your safety culture

A common refrain heard by drivers when they're onboarding at a new company is, "Safety is our top priority." Companies repeat the "safety is our top priority" line in an effort to impress upon drivers that creating and maintaining a safety culture is everyone's job. At the same time, drivers are being told that being on-time, providing professional customer service, or completing more deliveries in a day is as high of a priority. These somewhat contradictory messages can dilute the spirit of the "safety is our top priority" message. One way to reconcile this seeming dissonance is to exhibit the company's safety culture at all levels of the organization. This means safety starts at the top. No matter how thought out or well-funded a safety program may be, it's worthless if that program is ignored by leadership. A great safety program starts with – and must be implemented with – the support of the company's top brass. After all, safety is not a cost. Safety is an investment.

Company leaders, regardless of rank, must consistently begin their conversations with a safety message. Safety concerns must be on the agenda at every board meeting. Safety metrics must be tracked, shared and discussed at every reasonable opportunity. Top management must consistently deliver safety messages to all levels of the organization, especially to drivers and dispatchers, and need to reach out and commend drivers individually for a job well done. Of course, while safety starts at the top, it needs to be consistently demonstrated in the same way at all levels of the organization.

Another way to demonstrate a strong safety culture is through transparency. Companies must share safety goals with their drivers and update them on progress made toward, or away, from those goals. Enabling drivers to see how their behavior impacts company performance, and assess the value of their contributions toward the safety of the organization, motivates them to stay safe. With transparency comes accountability, which must also be shared. To the extent practical, accountability toward safety goals should be shared among operations and safety, management and drivers.

In addition to transparency, drivers need to know they have the backing and support of everyone in the company. As the frontline representatives of the organization, drivers are out on the road and rarely get to interact with their colleagues. This distance can sometimes produce feelings of isolation. Drivers need to know how critical they are to the company's success and that they are not alone or viewed as a commodity. Creating this environment will help to engender more driver trust and loyalty.

Using training and coaching to build driver trust

When done properly, training and coaching can be a valuable tool for building driver trust. To be effective, a training or coaching session needs to empower drivers, teach them the skills they need to improve their performance over time, and to present them with techniques or practices they can use to sustain those behaviors. While training and coaching topics should be, and often are, based on observed performance deficits, trainers need to present lessons in a manner that seems less like a punishment for bad behavior and more as an opportunity for improvement. Equally as important is to celebrate and share driver successes when drivers performed in an exemplary fashion. Drivers need to know the company sees them, supports them and will provide them with the necessary tools to succeed.

When there is an observed behavior from footage from an inward or outward facing dash cam, sharing the footage with drivers and allowing them an opportunity to provide their perspective and explanation for the event and their actions is critical. This should occur prior to management offering critique or guidance to the driver. The driver needs to know that they are being listened to, and that their point of view is important. Providing a driver with the opportunity to explain the situation and the actions they took will aid in understanding how to approach coaching the driver. These coachable moments should include an agreement on how to avoid the event in the future and on what future expectations are.

The goal of training and coaching should be to empower the driver to make good decisions and develop good habits in the future. It should also be an opportunity for the driver to explain their actions when appropriate and why things happened the way they did.

Driver reporting and feedback

Many fleets claim to have an open-door policy for drivers to bring concerns or complaints to management. Unfortunately, few fleets succeed in creating an environment that actively encourages drivers to walk through the so-called open door. The reasons why drivers might be reluctant to provide feedback range from not feeling trusted by their fleet managers to fear of reprisal for reporting their concerns. To address these concerns, many fleets have adopted communication channels that actively solicit feedback from drivers on a regular basis. These channels seek to communicate with drivers where they are, not require them to come to management when a problem arises. Many fleets model their communication methods on social media environments that encourage active collaboration among drivers and management. Whether that's a smartphone app or web forum, these communication channels assist drivers in reporting concerns, providing feedback, and sharing of best practices.

Acting on this feedback may be more important than soliciting it, however. If a driver offers a suggestion or raises a concern, it should be taken seriously and acted on in a timely fashion. No matter how trivial the communication may seem, the driver felt a situation was serious enough to bring it to management's attention, which deserves an honest response.

Some fleets even deploy voluntary admission policies that allow drivers to admit to a violation of company policy without fear of reprisal. These programs can be an effective way to build trust. A strong program will be structured with clear limitations that create space for drivers to correct their errors and receive training to improve their performance, but also have clear expectations on accountability that do not allow for repeated errors or violations. These programs can be an olive branch that kicks off a progressive disciplinary program.

Voluntary admissions programs demonstrate that the company is willing to support the driver through tough times and make extra effort to defend them when possible. Another way fleets can demonstrate this support is by helping drivers correct their records when roadside officials make mistakes or when crashes are not preventable according to FMCSA's Crash Preventability Determination Program. Management should routinely review these roadside interactions, and the results, with their drivers.

As part of this review, management should take time to help drivers understand how these roadside occurrences impact the company's safety record and be clear that others are watching this data including insurers, FMCSA and customers. It is also helpful to educate drivers on government programs that track their safety performance and make the data available to others. For instance, the Driver Safety Measurement System tracks driver performance just like CSA tracks motor carrier performance. It creates scores in several categories that law enforcement uses to prioritize drivers to investigate as part of motor carrier audits. Another example is the pre-employment screening program which makes a driver's violation and crash record available to prospective employers to help them make hiring decisions.

Explaining these programs will help drivers understand how negative roadside or crash data can impact their future opportunities. It will help drivers feel like management is looking out for the driver's best interest as well as the fleet's. If errors are found in the data, fleets can further bolster trust by helping a driver submit a request for data review through the DataQs system to correct inaccuracies.

Driver trust is built on constant communication and open, honest feedback across all levels of the organization. Managers must make communication a priority in order to create a healthy and collaborative work environment, ensure they practice what they preach, and follow through on feedback received from their drivers.

Safety incentive programs

Incentive programs come in many shapes and sizes ranging from monetary bonuses for operating accident free to those based on driver score cards using a customizable suite of metrics to reward those who follow that company's unique safety challenges. While monetary incentive programs are the most common, many companies have found greater success by motivating people through personal or public praise of desired behavior. This can mean public recognition programs or even sending a personalized note to the family of a top performer. What the best fleet managers in the industry understand is that most people want to perform well and that recognizing this performance can be more important than free company swag or a pay bonus. But it's not just drivers who benefit from safety incentive programs.

Fleets benefit through improved safety (fewer accidents) and improved CSA and Inspection Selection System scores. Programs can also provide benefits for cost saving and efficiency measures like idle time reduction or fuel efficiency improvements. The benefits from these initiatives can far outweigh the cost of providing the recognition and rewards. When structured properly, safety incentive programs empower and motivate drivers to contribute to the success of the company.

Another popular safety incentive is publishing data metrics. Publishing company safety performance metrics shows people how their contribution to overall company safety and builds stronger teams. For fleets with multiple locations, creating competitions among terminals also engenders a team environment and can be motivational. Publishing driver scorecard data helps drivers know where they stand among their peers and may motivate them to improve.

Conclusion

Building driver trust is critical to reducing turnover and improving safety, but it's no easy task. It starts by consistently demonstrating your safety culture as one that is looking out for the best interest of the fleet and the driver. The safety culture should be one aimed at providing drivers the tools they need to succeed and actively engages the driver to understand their point of view. This culture should pervade every aspect of their safety programs including training, coaching, driver reporting and feedback initiatives. In addition, safety incentive programs that recognize and reward exceptional achievements can demonstrate trust and support for drivers among management, creating strong and lasting relationships.

Drivers are the life's blood of any fleet and are key to success. Given the challenges recruiting and hiring good drivers in today's competitive market, fleet owners need to offer all drivers a safe, supportive environment that makes drivers feel appreciated. It is also incumbent on companies to provide drivers tools like Motive to make safety and compliance as easy as logging into an app. This will propel driver retention and trust, making the drivers the fleet's best recruiters. Having a robust communications strategy allows them to be part of the company team and empowers them to be safe and efficient. Above all, be nice. You would be surprised at how much that has an impact on your employees.

Unlock Potential



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About Motive

Motive builds technology to improve the safety, productivity, and profitability of businesses that power the physical economy. The Motive Automated Operations Platform combines IoT hardware with AI-powered applications to automate vehicle and equipment tracking, driver safety, compliance, maintenance, spend management, and more. Motive serves more than 120,000 businesses, across a wide range of industries including trucking and logistics, construction, oil and gas, food and beverages, field services, agriculture, passenger transit, and delivery. Visit gomotive.com to learn more.