

# Attracting and Retaining Truck Drivers Amid Labor Shortages



No matter the industry, employers of all sizes are struggling to attract and retain quality workers right now. This is particularly the case in the trucking sector. This article discusses potential factors contributing to the current driver shortage and offers tips to help employers attract and retain truck drivers.

## Labor Market Factors

One obvious culprit for the labor shortage is the COVID-19 pandemic for various reasons. During the height of the pandemic, many businesses laid off workers or closed temporarily. That wasn't the case for many trucking operations, as these companies

were essential for keeping supply chains moving. Yet, despite being one of the few sectors that weren't forced to shut down, the industry still lost a significant number of workers. In fact, the trucking industry is still approximately 33,000 workers short of pre-pandemic levels, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

However, COVID-19 isn't the only factor contributing to driver scarcity — the number of available drivers has been declining for years. According to the American Trucking Associations' (ATA) latest estimates, the trucking industry is experiencing a shortage of around 80,000 drivers. And that gap is expected to widen — so much so that the

ATA's chief economist, Bob Costello, warned that the driver shortage could rise to over 160,000 by 2030.

And the shortage could be worsened even further due to drivers aging out without replacement. The ATA estimated that the trucking industry must hire 1.1 million drivers over the next decade just to keep up with the economy and retiring drivers.

"The trucking industry needs to find ways to attract more and younger drivers," Costello said in a press release. "Right now, the average age of an over-the-road driver is 46 years old, and almost as alarming is that the average age of a new driver being trained is 35 years old."

With this in mind, it's critical that employers start strategizing methods for attracting and retaining the next generation of truck drivers right now. Putting off such planning could lead to significant setbacks in the near future.



### **Driver Attraction and Retention Tips**

Recruiting and holding onto drivers may not be as straightforward as it sounds. Sometimes drivers can be enticed by simply raising their base pay. However, that's not always enough. According to the ATA, the trucking industry has raised wages by nearly 18% over the last seven years, on average. Yet, the sector is still on pace to hemorrhage workers during the next decade.

This illustrates the complex issue facing employers: They might need to get creative with potential solutions. Beyond wage increases, below are some other methods for attracting and retaining truck drivers.

### **Target Expanded Talent Pools**

The average new driver is a male around the age of 35, but that doesn't mean that demographic is the only one worth targeting. Instead, employers might consider how their recruiting efforts can also attract underrepresented groups like female drivers, who comprise less than 10% of long-haul drivers, according to the ATA.

For instance, employers can consider how their offerings might help aide potential employees' caregiving responsibilities, which may open up career opportunities to a broader range of candidates, such as working parents. Allowing drivers to only work local routes or submit scheduling preferences are examples of benefits that may appeal to this demographic.

Additionally, employers can also look into recruiting younger drivers through training programs, mentorships or local outreach. Recruiting younger workers will be the key

to long-term success as older drivers retire.

More to the point, an 18-year-old can acquire a commercial driver's license in most states, and a 21-year-old can drive commercially across state lines. This means that drivers can be hired well before the current average age of 35.

### **Update Recruitment Tactics**

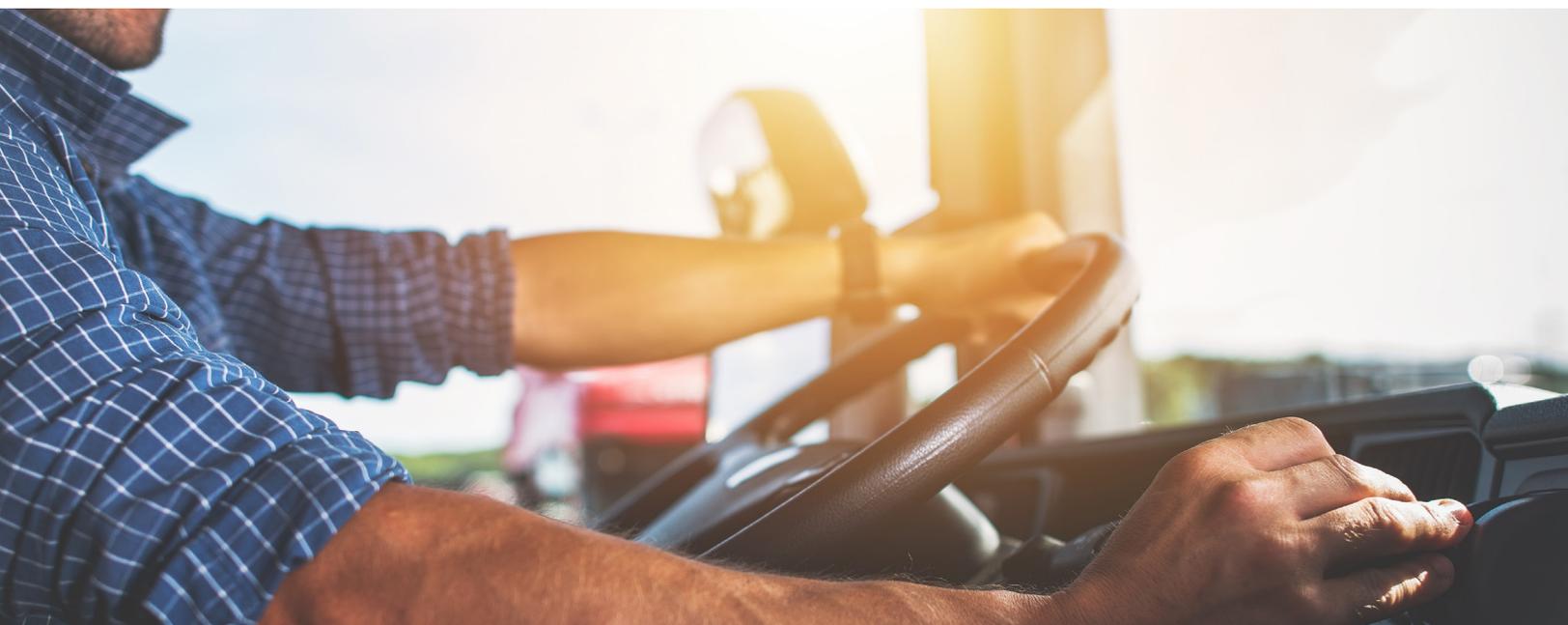
Finding the right drivers can be difficult. Employers need to put out feelers in the right places, or their efforts might be missed by their target audience. Knowing this, employers can think about the best methods for reaching the right people. This could mean utilizing social media, reaching out directly to trucking schools, sponsoring commercial drivers in training or attending job fairs. Basically, if recruitment efforts only amount to posting on a job board, there's more that can be done.

### **Offer Enhanced Employee Perks**

The trucking industry has a huge problem with retention. In the first quarter of 2021, large trucking companies (\$30 million or more in revenue) saw an 83% turnover rate, according to the ATA. Smaller trucking companies' turnover rate was 73% during the same period.

One way to potentially decrease turnover is through enhanced benefits. As the ATA has pointed out, many truck drivers are over the age of 40. And, with the way many insurance policies work, the older someone gets, the more they typically pay for their benefits. In turn, these workers sometimes leave smaller businesses for larger ones with lower cost-sharing burdens. Employers looking to retain middle-aged and older drivers can consider adjusting their benefits plans' rates to help reduce these costs and better compete for these workers.

Additionally, employers can think about providing more meaningful benefits to employees. Holistic offerings such as mental health resources, weight-loss programs and smoking-cessation plans can demonstrate an employer's commitment to their drivers' health and well-being. Fostering such an employer-employee relationship can go a long way toward helping retention. However, employee benefits aren't the only perks drivers say they want. According to a Commercial Carrier Journal survey, the following are three changes that would most influence drivers to change fleets or jobs:





- 1) Greater compensation (35%)
- 2) More time at home (17%)
- 3) More control over routes (17%)

The survey also called out respect as a major factor in driver job satisfaction. Nearly 70% of drivers agreed with the statement, “Fleets don’t respect drivers and the job they do.” With this in mind, catering employee perks to meet driver desires can go a long way toward attraction and retention efforts.

## **Summary**

Attracting and retaining truck drivers has never been easy, but the problem has only worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic. Employers will need to get creative with their efforts to compete in the current tight labor market.

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