Is The Grass Really Greener?

THE DOTTED LINE by Timothy D. Brady

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Wanting to have a better life is an honorable desire. In the trucking industry it isn't wanting the better life that's the problem, it's drivers who want to believe things will be different on the greener side of the fence. But in a lot of cases the drivers take the leap of faith, jumping over the fence only to discover they've landed in a pile of manure; or at least that's how it seems to them, in just a few short months of driving for the next trucking company. The problem lies in drivers doing the same thing the same way while expecting different results. But wait a minute—aren't trucking companies doing the same thing?

So let's approach this issue from a completely different angle. Instead of trying to place blame on the drivers or the drivers placing fault on the companies, each company and driver needs to work on the problem as a team.

Stephen Covey stated in his book, ***Seven Habits of Highly Effective People***, "If you treated your employees the way you expected your customers to be treated, you'd never have to worry how your customers are being handled." To define who the customer is in the trucking industry requires a broad definition. So, 'Who's the customer?'

To the trucking company, the customer can be a manufacturer, retailer, wholesaler, broker, or another trucking company. To the truck driver, the obvious answer is that his shippers and receivers are customers.

What about the *'other'* customers the trucking company and trucker have? That's right, each other. The trucking company provides services to the trucker in the form of finding and dispatching loads, handling payment collection, and auditing safety concerns, along with many other services. The trucker, whether company employee or leased operator, provides the services of hauling products to the trucking company's customer base, maintaining equipment for the trucking company, and providing important customer service to the trucking company's shippers and receivers.

Now let's take Stephen Covey's idea a bit further. If both trucking companies and truckers were to look at each other as their best customer, and spend their time working on this bi-directional approach of service provider to customer and vice-versa, a lot of this 'greener grass' job-hopping would cease.

This paradigm shift would be beneficial in several ways. Just like a company spends its energy and time figuring out ways to provide a higher quality of service to its best customers, now trucker and trucking company are working on developing greater value in the services they provide each other. This would lead to the end customer receiving a higher quality of hauling service because of this new effort. To keep a customer you need to give him or her service that is of a greater value than any of your competitors. That value, as we know, is not in how low the price is they pay for our services, but in the value they receive for the price.

For a trucking company to keep a driver, or for a driver to remain with a company, requires the same value approach. Example: a large majority of LTL truckers drive the most basic of equipment; small sleepers with a minimum of creature comforts, yet they have a driver turnover rate almost 1/10th of the truckload side of the industry. What value does LTL provide their drivers from which the rest of the industry could learn? In a word, *"Consistency,"* meaning LTL companies are providing value in what their drivers need by providing them what they want. What do the majority of truckers want? According to Professors Delany and Gupta of the University of Arkansas in their study of driver retention issues, truckers want *"consistency"* in weekly pay and *"consistency"* in time home. These LTL drivers know what their pay is going to be every week, and they know when and how long they'll be at home. (Obviously, it is also important to match the pay amount and home time to the driver's needs.)

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That same level of *"consistency"* is both wanted and needed by the trucking company from its drivers. Not mediocre, almost-there-on-time consistency, but high-end, beyond expectation consistency. By truckers concentrating on providing the highest quality of service in a consistent manner, the company increases its value to shippers and receivers. When a trucker's customers: shippers, receivers and trucking company, are receiving the highest quality in service, the value of the service increases in a monetary fashion for all involved; a win, win, win for everyone.

So just like understanding the need in providing value that is higher than expectation with our shipping and receiving customers, we need to use the same approach of added value when truckers are hauling for a trucking company and when that trucking company is providing loads for truck drivers.

Trucking companies and drivers need to concentrate on making their highest quality service a habit. As with developing and growing a customer, trucking companies and drivers need to approach their relationship in the same manner: know what each needs and fulfill those needs by providing what each wants. In the spirit of customer service which goes beyond satisfaction to raving fan status, motor carriers and truckers need to develop the same level of 'Raving Fan' spirit with each other. All of these result in higher-paying loads, putting more money in everyone's pocket and the satisfaction of doing a great job: meaning you'll like your drivers and they'll actually like you. What a concept! Therefore the grass will always be greener on your side of the fence, without the bull.

Remember, it's your company, your truck.

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