The 10 Tricks of a Successful Trucker

THE DOTTED LINE by Timothy D. Brady

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When we think of a trick, we think of pranks we played on unsuspecting individuals when we were young (or maybe it's something we pulled yesterday), but the context in which we want to talk about 'Tricks' here is techniques or actions that can improve a person's life. Trucking tricks are kept under wraps because of the solitary nature of the business—a trucker is provided with a truck, a set of keys, a product or item to haul, a place to load and a location where he needs to deliver the load. All of this creates an atmosphere where the ability to share knowledge with others is limited. So here is a list of ten tricks which can help make the job of picking up, driving and delivering, simpler and more financially beneficial to the trucker, the shipper, the receiver and the trucking company.

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Ten Tricks of a Successful Trucker:

1. Always have a plan. This includes the obvious route and time plan to pick up and deliver loads. You also need to include plans for maintaining your equipment, plans for staying healthy on the road, and plans to get the right amount of home time. And most of all, a plan on how to reach your goals, both personal and business.
2. Know what it costs you to operate on a daily, weekly, monthly and quarterly basis. You can't control what you don't know. Reducing unnecessary expenses is necessary for any trucking operation regardless of whether it's a lease operation or you're a company driver.
3. Develop a program where you pay yourself first. This means including a salary as one of your fixed expenses, which helps you create a visual goal which you can achieve. If you wait for the leftovers on the financial side of your operation, what you'll end up with is the crumbs. If you're a company driver, you still need to set daily and weekly income goals, because company drivers are usually paid by the mile, like lease operators. Since most trucking companies don't guarantee company drivers a specific set salary each week, it is up to the driver to be sure he's maximizing his earning potential through setting and achieving financial goals.
4. Schedule Preventive Maintenance. Remember a truck or trailer whose maintenance needs are ignored will stop your forward progress at the most inopportune time. Making sure your equipment is in top-notch condition at all times means you can achieve your other goals. Ignore its maintenance and the truck will make sure you're driven to financial failure.
5. Stay with it! The biggest problem in the trucking industry is the excessive driver turnover situation. There are many contributing factors to the problem, one being truckers expecting too much too soon when coming on board with a new motor carrier. Be sure and do your homework on any carrier with which you are thinking of aligning yourself. Spend the time investigating the trucking company's way of doing business, and ask questions during the recruiting process—lots of tough questions. Then, once you've made your decision which company to go with, stick with them for a minimum of one year. It's all in the investigation and effort you apply in the beginning before you've signed on the dotted line.
6. Communication, communication, communication. This is not just what is said or heard. You need to maintain a paper trail on all aspects of your trucking business. If it's said and it's important, write it down: who you talked with, when you talked with them, what was said by all parties, what was the final agreement, and if it's extremely important, have everyone sign the document. Just because it's spoken doesn't mean it will be remembered. Don't assume everyone is on top of any situation. If circumstances change, whether it's concerning delivery or pick up times, repairs required on equipment, solutions to situations, or a personal dilemma, be sure it's communicated to anyone with a need to know.
7. Teamwork is multi-tiered when it comes to trucking. There's the obvious team of driver, dispatch, maintenance department and safety, where team work can make everyone's life more financially rewarding and less stressful, working to provide the best logistics service to the company's customers. But don't forget the other team members, the major reason you're out there doing what you do: your family. Work with your spouse to develop your Must Be At Home list and set family goals, which will be compatible with your trucking goals.
8. The trucker is king when it comes to Customer Service. Treating 'your' shippers and receivers as royalty is the first step to your success. The second step is to remember whether you're a company driver or lease operator, the trucking company is the 'Other Customer' to which you need to provide stellar customer service.
9. Personal care means take care of yourself, in mind, body, and soul. Take the time to stop and smell the roses. Don't allow yourself to become isolated from others by the sheer nature of your work. Be sure to exercise, even if it's nothing more than a good brisk walk. Think twice, eat once; look at what you're about to eat. Is it going to be nourishing? Is it something that will cause you problems later? If the answer is yes to the first question and no to the second, enjoy it; if not, consider something else. Each day spend a few moments in spiritual contemplation to refresh your soul.
10. Recreation is needed too. All work and no play makes for an irritable trucker. Schedule a hobby or activity which has nothing to do with trucking. This is your escape from your day-to-day responsibilities as a trucker. Make a plan to do this at least once a week.

The real trick to being a successful trucker is good old common sense. For a trucker, life goes by at sixty-five miles per hour. Don't forget to engage the Jake every so often to see what the rest of the world is up to. Follow these ten *tricks* and success will be your *treat*.

Remember, it's your company, your truck.

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