

WHITE PAPER: SPIREON - IMPROVING DRIVER RECRUITMENT

The Undercover Trucker reveals how you can dramatically improve driver recruitment

Driver turnover is plaguing the trucking industry. Of course, you already knew that. If you're like many companies, you're spending a fortune to find and hire the new drivers necessary to operate your business. Well, we have good news. The Undercover Trucker has 19 years of gumshoe detective work under his belt—and he's sharing the key insights you need to recruit and retain the best talent.

Who is this Undercover Trucker? His name is Kelly Anderson and his transportation industry experience spans 30 years, ranging from federal law enforcement officer, professional driver, and driver trainer to driver recruiter, safety supervisor, and safety manager to a 1,700-truck fleet's recruiting department.

With deep insight into every facet of the trucking industry, Anderson now provides training and consulting services to trucking companies just like yours. And, to make sure he's got the inside scoop, he impersonates the prospective driver candidate any company would be pleased to hire—a driver with 19 years of experience with the same company and without any tickets, accidents, criminal history, or CSA violations. Anderson then completes a trucking company's recruiting processes and reports back with his discoveries and recommendations.

And, he's graciously sharing this knowledge with you.

What valuable lessons can you integrate into your own driver recruitment efforts?



FIRST AND FOREMOST, REMEMBER: PEOPLE COMMIT TO PEOPLE

At the end of the day, Anderson says people commit to other people, not to companies. He also notes it's not all about the money. Yes, you need to offer a competitive compensation plan, but what he sees often is that drivers who feel respected and appreciated will continue to work hard for their companies, even if they pay a little less.

And, building those relationships begins with the first recruiting phone call.

In Dale Carnegie's book, *How to Win Friends & Influence People*, he speaks to our psychological need to feel important. When you make people feel important, they'll commit to you—they'll walk through fire for you. Even when a competitor is waving money in their faces, they won't consider making the move.

So, how do you make your drivers feel important in the recruiting process?

- Focus on relationship-building right from the get-go
- Speak to drivers with respect—don't allow toxic baggage to influence new interactions
- Listen to drivers when they tell you what their needs are—and speak to them

We'll discuss the specifics shortly, but the long and short is you must show drivers you're interested, engaged, and that you care at every step. And, unfortunately, that's often not what Anderson experiences when he goes undercover.

Let's examine how demonstrating respect for drivers plays out across your recruiting process.

IMPLEMENT A RECRUITING PROCESS THAT SECURES THE BEST TALENT

A prospective driver's interactions with your recruiter are, most likely, their first experience with your company. So, it pays to engage in active listening and establish a positive, supportive tone. That's typically not what happens, however. What does a typical call with a recruiter look like?

In Anderson's vast experience, it looks a lot like this:

Driver: Hey, I was wondering if you're hiring drivers?

Recruiter: Yes, we sure are. [Long pause.]

Driver: Well, what can you tell me?

Recruiter: Well, where do you live? How much experience do you have? Do you have any tickets or a criminal record? Have you had any accidents?

The driver responds.

Recruiter: Well, if everything you're telling me is true, then I've got Job X.

These rote conversations, which could easily be replaced by an automated voice response system, do nothing to give the recruiter insight into the driver's needs—that first critical step in building a solid relationship.

What's more, after first interrogating the driver, the recruiter essentially calls that driver a liar when he or she says, "Well, if everything you're telling me is true."

Has this recruiter been lied to before? Most certainly, but recruiters must stop allowing past experiences to color the conversation they're having with the potentially outstanding driver on the phone right now.

IMPROVE YOUR CONVERSATION TECHNIQUE

There's a better way—and it begins with developing a better recruiting conversation technique, says Anderson.

In practice, it looks a little something like this:

Driver: Hi, there. I was wondering if you're hiring drivers?

Recruiter: We sure are. Who am I talking to?

Driver: Oh, this is John.

Recruiter: Hi, John. I'm Kathy; I appreciate the call. If you don't mind my asking, how did you hear about us?

Driver: Oh, I saw a post in The Trucker.

Recruiter: Okay, great—thanks. Well, John, tell me a little bit about yourself. Where have you been working and what you been doing?

Driver: Well, I've been driving for the last 12 years. Right now, I'm working at ABC Trucking and it's not working out.

Recruiter: Oh really? Well, how long have you been there? Why isn't it working out?

Driver: Well, I've been there about a year and a half, but the miles have been low. Then, last Monday, I really needed to get home to my family and they didn't get me there—that was the straw that broke the camel's back.

What did Kathy gain through this interaction? A number of things.



For starters, by simply using the driver's name right from the very beginning, she's demonstrated that she's listening and that she cares about the driver. Sadly, this is a big differentiator.

Next, she's just gained valuable insight into the advertising that's generating leads—enabling the company to shift its resources to the ads that are converting most.

Finally, and most importantly, she's identified John's specific needs; he has a family he's supporting, so he needs good pay and guaranteed home time. Given his family, medical benefits might also be a point of interest. Kathy's now equipped to demonstrate that her company is the perfect fit for this particular driver.

Too often, Anderson encounters recruiters who take a “benefits vomit” approach to their pitch—even when some benefits are clearly not relevant. The better approach is for the recruiter to demonstrate they've been actively listening—and that the company can meet the driver's needs. You're asking people to trust you with everything they've got, after all; they're trusting you with their ability to provide for their family. With a clear understanding of what they need, your recruiter can communicate that they have a future with you and that they'll be safe and cared for.

That conversation might look a little something like this.

Recruiter: John, I understand as a driver you sacrifice a lot and there will be times when you absolutely, positively need to be home. You need a company that's going to do its level-best to get you there.

Driver: Yes, that's what I'm looking for.

Recruiter: That's what we are, John; that's exactly what we try to do. I can also tell you that drivers who live in your area are averaging \$1,165 a week.

Driver: Wow, Kathy, that's a whole lot better than what I'm pulling in right now.

Here, Kathy is demonstrating that she's actively listening to John, validating his experience on the road, and offering up the benefits that will matter most to him. She's also sharing average pay per week as opposed to pay per mile. Why? Because it's not about the miles, says Anderson, it's about the money—it's about this driver's ability to support his family.

CREATE A CLEAR PLAN OF ACTION

There's a lot of competition for highly-qualified drivers—and creating a plan of action during the initial call can help recruiters seal the deal.

Unfortunately, that's not how it usually plays out in the real world.

With the initial call completed, recruiters instead direct drivers to a company website, says Anderson—instructing them to fill out the application with a promise they'll call back. This introduces friction into the recruiting process. What's more, recruiters very rarely call back. In fact, in Anderson's 19 years of investigation, he's been called back by a recruiter twice. That's not to

say recruiters are bad people, they simply get too busy answering the phone and following up on internet leads.

What should recruiters do instead?

First, if the information they've received over the phone suggests the driver has a safe driving record, they should trust in that until they have reason to believe otherwise—and create a plan.

That message will look something like this:



Recruiter: John, based on what I'm seeing here, I don't see any reason that we couldn't take this to the next step. As a matter of fact, it sounds like with a two weeks' notice, you'd probably want to be here for our next orientation on the 17th. Is that right?

What has our recruiter, Kathy, done here?

She's established a sense of trust and respect—and she's most likely taken this driver off the market. Rather than closing the phone call with an ambiguous prompt to complete an application and leaving the driver unsure if he's qualified in the eyes of the company, she's created a plan of action that gives him confidence in her—and the company.

Next step: Make the process of completing the application as simple and clear as possible.

Recruiter: Great, so here's what we need to do, John. I need to send you a link to our full-blown application. So, I'll need your email address. Then, I'm going to ask you to fill it out. Can you do that tonight?

Driver: Absolutely, Kathy. I'll get that done tonight.

Recruiter: Great, I'll be looking for it. If I don't get it before I go home tonight, I'll look for it as soon as I get in in the morning. Then, why don't you call me tomorrow at one o'clock.

An approach like this will not only increase the quantity and quality of drivers Kathy recruits, but will also help her company reduce turnover; rather than settling for the drivers left on the market, the company is enabled to hire or contract the cream-of-the-crop drivers it really wants. What's more, since she's loading her phone with incoming calls from motivated drivers, she only needs to follow-up with those who don't call her back—reducing her workload.

BEGIN BUILDING CRITICAL RELATIONSHIPS EARLY TO CLOSE THE DEAL

All the outstanding recruiting in the world won't do you any good if you can't get those drivers to orientation. And, no-shows are an issue. In fact, most fleets confirm that about 20 percent of their driver recruits won't walk through the door on orientation day. The good news: Anderson has the silver bullet—and it's really simple to implement.

We all face anxiety when taking a new job. A driver will be wondering, "Is this company everything the recruiter said it was going to be? Who's going to be my dispatcher? Will I like the people?"

With the driver's anxiety in mind, Anderson recommends you have the driver's dispatcher make an introductory call a few days before orientation begins.

The call doesn't need to be long, but the dispatcher's tone should be welcoming and supportive, like this.

Dispatcher: Hi there, John. My name's Carlos and I'm going to be your dispatcher. Kathy over in recruiting tells me you're going to be here on Monday, so I just wanted to give you a call to introduce myself and see if you had any questions.



Of course, for this call to be successful, recruiting and dispatch must be aligned, so that the driver hears the same message from both parties.

With John's questions answered, Carlos can simply say he's looking forward to meeting him at orientation.

In the end, interactions like this go a long way toward alleviating a driver's anxiety. In fact, Valley Transportation has adopted this approach and the request drivers most often make when arriving for onboarding is to meet their dispatcher, shares Anderson.

This is powerful.

These dispatchers have started to develop relationships and foster commitment before day one, ensuring the company's recruiting efforts are truly fruitful.

INVEST IN RELATIONSHIPS AND YOU'LL DRIVE GREATER RECRUITING SUCCESS

Driver turnover is frequently cited as one of the single greatest challenges trucking companies face when it comes to operating safely and profitably. Yet, the solution is really quite simple when you get to the heart of it.

It's about people. It's about listening and making connections.

So, examine your recruiting process at every driver touchpoint—and explore how you might deliver a better driver experience. As you implement these changes, you'll find drivers will not only be more likely to show up, but to stick with you for the long haul.

Adapted from a webinar hosted by Spireon and presented to the public on November 16, 2017, "Driver Retention: The Undercover Trucker Reports."