

Transport Topics

SPECIAL REPORT:

Recruitment and Retention

A3 Column: Finding the Right Driver

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A14 Keeping an Eye on Diversity



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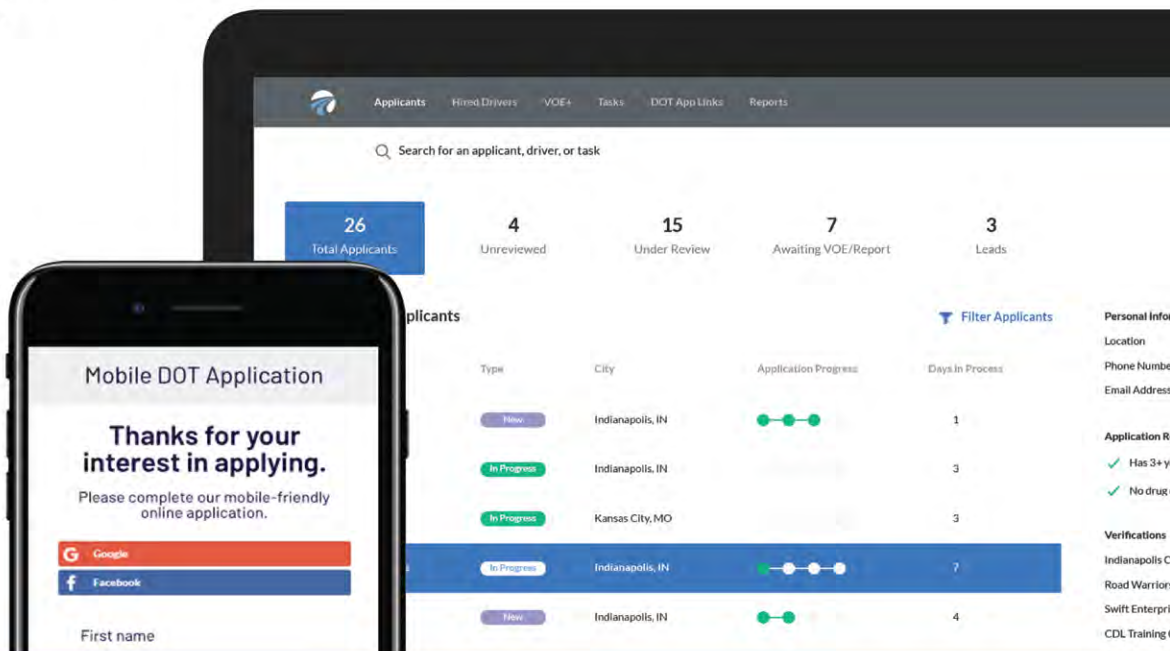
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Finding the Right Driver



By Michael Freeze,
Features Editor

Suffice to say, there are plenty of issues that keep fleet executives up at night, and a good chunk of these concerns — like the ones on the American Transportation Research Institute’s annual Top Industry Issues list — have the word “driver” in them. As the ATRI list shows, the industry has been struggling with the task of employing, paying and keeping drivers. The other issues listed deal with either the service, safety or legal liability of the driver.

With that in mind, Transport Topics presents this special report about the drivers — more specifically, driver recruitment and retention. The current labor environment in trucking is a driver’s market. Akin to the glory days of the steel industry when a worker could easily leave one mill, walk across the block and find work at another plant, commercial truck drivers are finding themselves with similar leverage. Fleets are finding creative ways to attract those drivers with signing bonuses and attractive work shifts. We ask some of the top fleets in the

country what factors they consider as they work to bring in new drivers.

In addition, we look into how these fleets are retaining these talented drivers. While pay, safety and performance play a major role in employment, fleets are also learning the intricacies of driver satisfaction and using that knowledge to improve retention rates. We ask the top fleets and experts what efforts keep the good drivers in the fold, and what issues make them head for the exits.

This driver recruitment and retention special report serves as a wide net to show what makes this issue a top concern for fleets, identify where the pain points may lie and capture how the top trucking companies are addressing it. It’s our desire that you not only learn what these trucking companies are accomplishing and implementing to combat the driver shortage, but begin to understand the complexity of this persistent challenge from every angle and perspective — driver and employer.

Cover design by Getty Images and Brian Kelly

Inside



Illustration by Getty Images and Brian Kelly

See story, page A4

Recruit and Retain

What are fleets doing to attract drivers and keep them in the fold?



Illustration by Peter Pencil via Getty Images

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An Eye on Diversity

Trucking companies understand inclusion plays a major role in a strong workforce.

The Search for Drivers And the Fight to Keep Them

By Michael Freeze, Features Editor

For people like Ryan Hollinger and Gary Gentry, truck driving is what they have always known since they were young boys. Both grew up watching their fathers drive Class 8 trucks, and decades later, Hollinger and Gentry have found solid careers in the trucking industry.

"For me, it's the freedom when it comes to employment and having a steady stream of income coming in," said Hollinger, who drives for a liquor distributor. "[It's] just you in the cabin and you're just alone in your space. It's cool. You're not stuck in a cubicle or even a warehouse."

Gentry's path to trucking was born from sharing his father's interest.

"It was trucks, the railroad and the Navy," said Gentry, a retired U.S. Navy veteran. He is an owner-operator of 3G Trucking. "I was getting closer to retirement [from the Navy], and I figured I'd either become a Merchant Marine [or] work at an embassy, but I love trucks, so I just got my license."

Hollinger and Gentry — drivers for more than two decades — are enjoying successful trucking careers. Despite the stories they can share of experiences with toxic employers, both know they work in an industry where their services are in high demand and they are paid competitively.

Although the career opportunities in trucking are abundant, the driver shortage has been a thorn in the industry's side for years, and it has only become more severe as freight demand has surged amid the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

In fact, the driver shortage has ranked No. 1 on the American Transportation Research Institute's annual Top Industry Issues list in each of the past four years.

While there isn't a quick-fix solution, getting to the root of the problem is the first line of attack for many fleets. Some use the recruitment process as an introduction to their company.

"We're a trucking company run by truckers," Chad England, CEO of refrigerated carrier C.R. England, said of his fleet's story. "I'm the oldest of four brothers that run the business. We want all of our executives to know what

For as long as Class 8 trucks have been roaming the highways, fleets have been constantly searching for the right professional drivers to operate them. Hiring drivers has consistently remained a top challenge for trucking companies. Why has it been such a struggle to bring enough drivers into the industry? And what are fleets doing not only to better recruit them, but to keep them in the fold?



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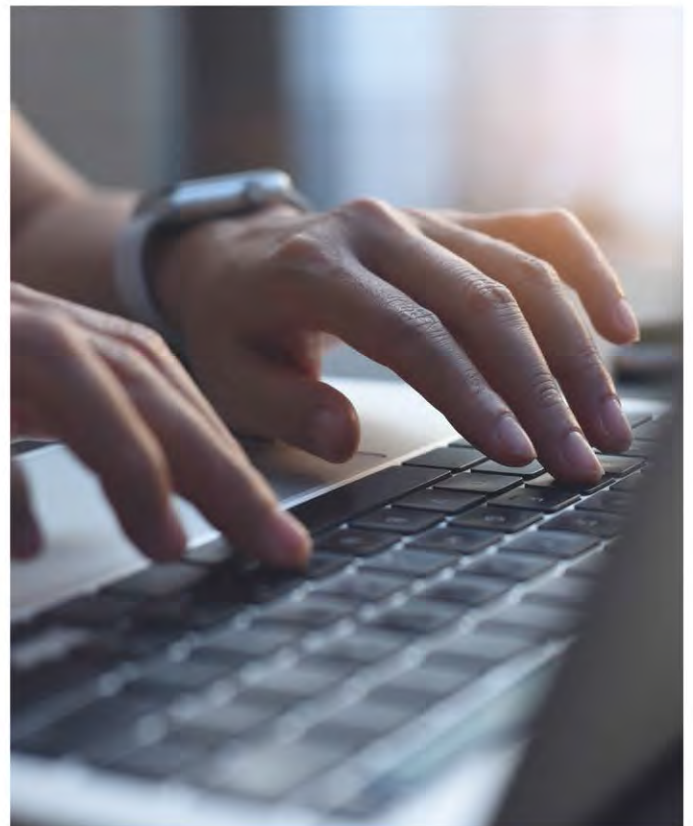
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XPO Logistics

To properly train drivers, fleets use mentoring programs to build relationships with new drivers and also lean into their driver training. For instance, C.R. England reviewed its partnered schools list to ensure new potential drivers are coming from top-tier training programs.



C.R. England

it's like to be a truck driver."

England said that experience behind the wheel helps him and his trucking company better relate to drivers, but he — and the drivers — also realize that it's important to have realistic expectations.

"[Some drivers] get into it not really understanding what's involved in being a driver," Gentry said from his experiences. "They quit because they think they're not making any money and then those drivers will work for a different company."

Gentry said fleets that are honest and straightforward have the edge in attracting well-qualified drivers.

England explained his fleet made a pivot to hiring more experienced drivers, and through that transition, learned that a competitive pay package is the driving factor. The fleet announced a pay rate increase earlier this year.

"You've just got to have something good to sell, it's also about being able to attract great people," he said. "And you can't do that without a top-flight pay package with a great home time. We try and avoid anything that can be confusing or deceptive practices."

C.R. England, based in Salt Lake City, ranks No. 25 on the TRANSPORT TOPICS Top 100 list of the largest for-hire carriers in North America.

XPO Logistics feels well positioned to attract top-tier drivers by offering professional growth opportunities, especially in a tight labor market, said Josephine Berisha, chief human resources officer at the less-than-truckload carrier.

"We've streamlined our hourly pay structure to reduce the time it takes to reach top pay. We're also hiring at the top rung of pay for positions and locations that meet certain criteria," she said. "We're offering attractive sign-on bonuses for drivers that vary by market and merit increases. All of our benefits kick in on day one; there's no qualification period for health coverage and many of our other benefits."

XPO, headquartered in Greenwich, Conn., ranks No. 3 on the TT Top 100 list of for-hire carriers.

The data shows that fleets are offering more generous compensation packages to entice and keep drivers like Hollinger and Gentry. Driver compensation, which was the No. 2 concern among professional drivers in ATRI's 2020 Top Industry Issues list, has increased along with other forms of compensation, according to ATRI's most recent Operational Costs of Trucking analysis, released in November 2020.

"In that analysis, we found that the average retention bonus paid to a driver was up 81.3%



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*Brian Matthews, VP of Operations,
American Central Transport*



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*Nick Wakefield, VP of HR,
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— Brett Bennett,
Director of Business Development

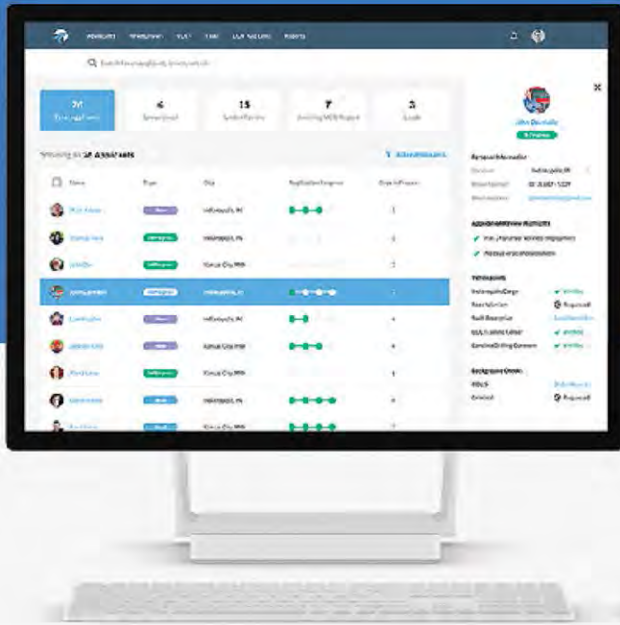
Jeremy Reymer
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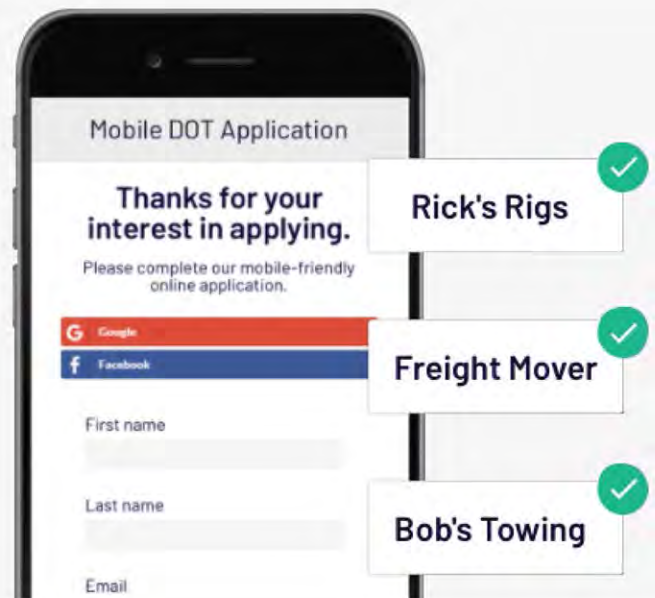
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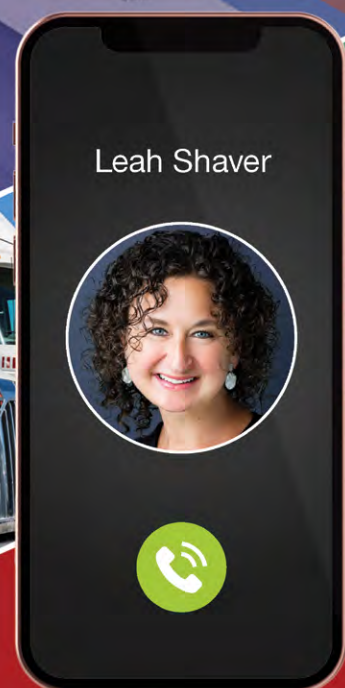
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over the previous year, for an annual average amount of \$1,218,” said ATRI President Rebecca Brewster. “We point out in the research that fleets are turning to the other forms of compensation — starting, retention and safety bonuses — as a way to increase overall driver compensation to improve retention.”

As fleets ramp up their campaigns to attract experienced drivers, they also keep an eye toward new drivers and train them to not only learn, but hone their craft.

“When it comes to growing our fleet, we look at all channels for recruiting drivers — including schools,” said Ron Martin, vice president of driver recruiting at Canada-based transportation provider Day & Ross. “We also have trainers who mentor graduates, and we’ve built close relationships with driving schools to help us conduct road testing.”

Day & Ross ranks No. 31 on the TT for-hire Top 100 list.

While some fleets have internal driver training programs, others prefer to build rapport with CDL driving schools to acquire the latest talent entering the industry.

“We reach out to those local driving schools for that relationship, and it’s amazing,” said Dee Dee Cox,



To retain their drivers, fleets are making sure to add new trucks regularly to enhance the driver in-cab experience. In addition, trucking companies are providing flexible shift options and incentive pay.

vice president of human resources at LTL carrier Old Dominion Freight Line. "When we first go in there, we talk about who ODFL is and how we operate. They are willing to partner with us and try to get drivers in there."

Cox said ODFL also reaches out to high schools to meet youth who might aspire to a career in trucking.

"We try to get into the hiring events or the career fairs that local high schools offer," she said. "And we offer a great dock-to-driver program. We just feel like transportation ... is a great career path."

ODFL, based in Thomasville, N.C., ranks No. 10 on the TT for-hire Top 100 list.

In its push to attract experienced drivers, C.R. England made the decision to focus its efforts.

moment, I was doing my best for us, but here I am 17 years later and I'm glad I made that choice."

Hollinger remembers places where he felt his hard work was taken advantage of, or he was simply not being heard. Before landing his current position, he was searching for a place where he would feel appreciated.

"Where I'm at, there's an open-door policy 24/7. If I have a problem, it's addressed and fixed," he said. "My manager and my supervisor were both drivers before they took those positions, so they've been out on the road and they know what we deal with."

At a large fleet, some employees may feel overlooked, but it's up to the company to foster strong relationships with its drivers, ODFL's Cox said.

"They want to be appreciated. Those are the things that keep the employees here and at any company," she said. "If drivers don't feel appreciated or they don't feel a part of the company, I think that has a lot to do with them wanting to leave and go to another company, and be a part of something."

Providing the proper feedback loop for employees may not be the easiest thing to do in some cases. However, having that line of communication helps fleets better understand their drivers.

"It's a starting point for how to create a habit of empathy," said Max Farrell, co-founder and CEO of WorkHound, a communication platform that supports real-time feedback for frontline workers. "The act of listening to your people is not just a one-time initiative. It's not just a one-time annual survey or one-step surveying. You have to have a commitment to continuously listen and continue to get better because situations

are changing constantly."

WorkHound's platform enables drivers to provide anonymous feedback on their current job experience. From there, managers review and work with employees to assuage any concerns and take appropriate action. Several fleets credit Farrell's firm for helping to reduce employee turnover.

"Over time, trust is built between companies and their drivers," he said. "Drivers see the company respect their anonymity and that increases confidence. This has actually led to more direct outreach from drivers to the company after they have started to build trust."



Fleet owners and managers agree that although driver pay is a major factor, feeling appreciated and being heard when issues arise goes a long way in retaining experienced drivers.

"We audited many of [our partnering schools] and found that some were cutting corners," England said. "So we drastically reduced the schools that we're partnering with to really make sure that we were only working with the top of the top class."

Improving Driver Retention

Despite being surrounded by the industry as a child, Hollinger initially didn't think that driving a truck would be a long-term career path.

"At the time, it was a job. I just got married and needed something consistent," he said. "I never really thought it would turn into a career. At the

Day & Ross, which uses WorkHound to gauge driver satisfaction, also connects with staff via regular one-on-one and team meetings, and continuously meets with its safety and operations teams for updates.

"We take driver feedback seriously and implement it where possible, whether it's offering better routes or evaluating driver pay," said Shawn McMahon, chief operating officer at Day & Ross. "From the very beginning, we believed it's important to put the right drivers in the right positions to match their unique skills and needs, and we have a great recruiting team who helps make this possible."

England takes a hands-on approach to communicating with his drivers. For several years, the fleet has held a monthly town hall meeting with its drivers.

"We have hundreds that get on every month. It's basically just an open Q&A," he explained. "We have our entire executive team on the call. It's intended to be a safe place to be able to bring up feedback and questions and to talk about things together. And that's been an outstanding process."

Although good employee relationships are key, there are other benefits and attributes that employers keep in focus to address drivers' concerns.

According to the 2020 Driver Recruiting and Retention Annual Report, produced jointly by Professional Driver Agency and Conversion Interactive Agency, the drivers surveyed listed equipment as their top issue of concern, followed by driver pay and operations. That data parallels the feedback received by WorkHound.

"The top feedback themes in 2020 were logistics, equipment, people and pay," Farrell said. "Drivers want a smooth process when moving freight. They want reliable equipment to do the job. They want empathetic staff to support them. When it comes to pay, they want simple and predictable pay."

On the equipment front, XPO continually adds new trucks to its fleet to enhance the driver in-cab experience.

The fleet also provides flexible shift options to enable its drivers to return home from a same-day shift.

In addition, XPO documents and recognizes its drivers' safety data. The fleet recently recognized



C.R. England

230 of its LTL drivers for achieving more than 1 million accident-free miles.

With its in-house safety training and coaching programs, XPO realized a 28% decrease in distracted driving and 19% decrease in lost work days in the past year.

Although feeling wanted and having the right resources are key ingredients in the recipe for success in any work environment, pay often remains the difference between retention and turnover.

England suggested that the quest for the perfect, qualified employee in what is currently a driver's market will force fleets to tangibly value the commercial driver.

"When you get to a certain level of pay, I don't think we're going to be able to go back. The market will not allow it," England said.

He added that the current business environment will help fleets attract and keep experienced drivers.

"For too long, our industry has been in a situation where we are undercompensated for the type of work that we do and we are getting closer to where we need to be. I think we still have a long way to go," England said, "but I hope that this market, this capacity crunch that our customers are seeing, lasts a while. Because that will allow all of the drivers and all the people in our industry to be compensated more closely to the value they're providing."

From the professional driver's perspective, fleets that are honest and straightforward have the edge in attracting well-qualified talent.

Keeping an Eye on Diversity

By Michael Freeze, Features Editor

As trucking companies address factors such as driver pay and employee satisfaction to boost recruitment and retention, many also are placing a greater emphasis on inclusion and diversity — in terms of color, gender, orientation and veteran status.

Of the 3.5 million professional drivers working in the U.S. trucking industry, just over 40% are minorities and about 6% are women, according to a 2018 American Trucking Associations report.

In efforts to reach out to different groups of people, it's important to meet them where they are at and communicate the benefits of having a career in trucking, said Dee Dee Cox, vice president of human resources at Old Dominion Freight Line.

"We've been a big proponent of that," Cox said. "I don't know that someone is saying, 'Hey, take a look at transportation.' But once people find out through high school or through the college career fairs, then that opens their eyes. You want a career as a supervisor, we can offer that. You want a career in driving, we can offer that."

In addition to outreach efforts, fleets are also taking steps to involve themselves in communities of color. For instance, last year Schneider provided grants to non-profit organizations that promoted

diversity, equality and inclusion in their communities.

"For example, one of the really cool programs is a mentorship program of young African-American boys down in Dallas," said Rob Reich, executive vice president and chief administrative officer at Schneider. "We have some of our folks who are those mentors, and now we've got some funding along with that to support that program."

In the competition to acquire new drivers in a tight labor market, fleets are realizing that building a robust pipeline of diverse talent is a must.

XPO Logistics, for one, aims to think outside the

box when searching for employees, said Josephine Berisha, XPO's chief human resources officer.

"We're looking beyond the traditional sources for talent in adjacent industries such as supply chain, logistics, retail and technology," she said. "We're also building relationships with veteran support groups, historically Black colleges and universities, support organizations for differently-abled people and LGBTQ+ allies to attract talent with diverse backgrounds and perspectives."

In the trucking industry, diversity in the professional driver workforce and in managerial positions continues to grow.

However, that growth has not necessarily translated to the board rooms of most trucking companies, where a small percentage of women are included in upper management, said Ellen Voie, founder and CEO of the Women In Trucking association.

"In regard to management, I'm seeing more women as dispatchers. In fact, in some companies, more than half of their dispatchers are women, and that is a huge advancement. I'm seeing more women as safety directors," Voie said. "I am seeing more women in leadership roles. But we still have a way to go. And we know that. We recognize that. But we just have to figure out how to get more women in these higher levels."

Chad England, CEO of refrigerated carrier C.R. England, said his fleet has recognized inclusion as a means to strengthen the company as a whole. C.R. England recently announced its new female vice president of sales, Lori Eakins, on International Women's Day.

"We like to see people of all types rise within the organization and outside the organization that are capable of playing those roles," he said. "We value the perspective of people who come from different backgrounds; it's the strengths that come with inclusion."

England stressed the importance of having diversity throughout the ranks of any trucking company. However, the inclusion process should not become half-hearted or forced, he said.

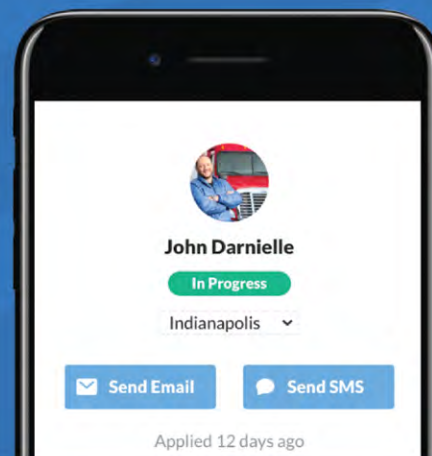
"We want to create a climate that's welcoming and crack down on any variance from a culture that would be inclusive," he said. "I think it's just the way that you live. We don't have quotas or anything like that, but we definitely feel it's part of our culture to bring in the best people regardless of those things."



Learn more about how diversity and inclusion are playing a role in the trucking industry by listening to Transport Topics' RoadSigns podcast. In this episode, host Michael Freeze wonders what industry leaders are doing to increase the percentages of POC/women in driving roles, leadership positions and entrepreneurial opportunities. Turns out, it has a lot to do with being in the right room at the right time, but who is opening those doors? RoadSigns speaks to two trucking industry experts who have implemented their own practices that are contributing to a more diverse work community. Visit <https://bit.ly/3v8tf6h> for more insight.

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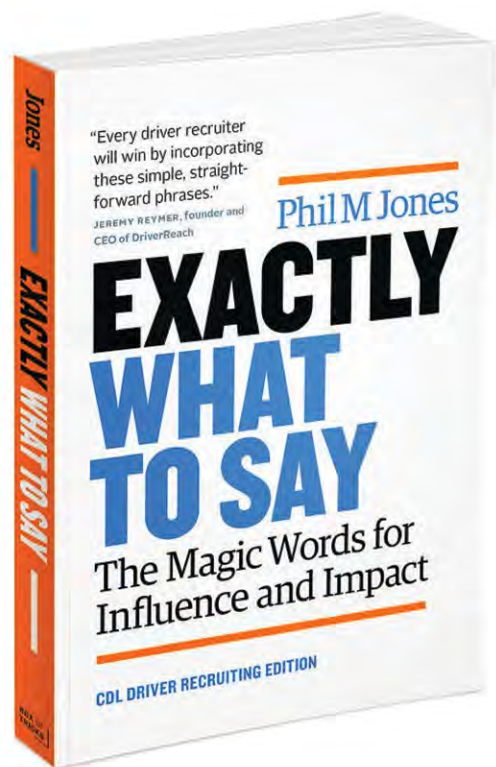
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