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Question of the Day

Will opening the borders to more Mexican trucks and drivers to operate in the United States help ease the driver shortage?

Quote of the Day

"I am a man of fixed and unbending principles, the first of which is to be flexible at all times."

-- **Everett Dirksen** (U.S. senator from Illinois, who served in office from 1951 until his death in 1969)

Women In Trucking



Before you read this, take a few moments to look around your office. As you scan the rows of desks or cubicles, notice how many of them are occupied by women? If about half of your co-workers are female, then you are in a typical office environment.

Now, if you walk into your drivers' lounge, how does the ratio change? Can you count the number of women who drive for your company on one hand? If so, your driving force is probably typical of most carriers.

More than half of all women in this country work full time, but many of them have never considered becoming a professional driver. Why?

With less than five percent of professional driving jobs held by women, wouldn't it make sense to increase this number, especially with a driver shortage plaguing the industry? Why aren't there more women truck drivers?

The answer is most likely due to the fact that we just haven't opened our doors wide enough to invite them in. Sure, we need drivers, and we recruit women as well as men, but are we removing the obstacles that women face when they consider this industry as a career option?

Obstacles? What obstacles?

First, let's consider the image of a driver. In the past, the need for physical strength and endurance was a requirement for those who had to load and unload heavy freight. To be able to maneuver a big rig required more exertion in the past, and the facilities available for drivers often precluded women.

The industry has come a long way, and the trucks, the freight and the physical accommodations have progressed considerably. Power steering, ergonomically designed cabs, automated shifters and unisex showers have allowed both men and women to enjoy a level of comfort not available to our parents who drove big rigs.

Although we have created a better working environment for women, it could be better. More women's toiletries in the truck stops, better rest room accommodations at loading docks, smaller sized clothing and footwear in the stores, and the elimination of big belt buckles as safe driving awards would help in attracting and retaining female drivers.

Professional women drivers who share the road with their male counterparts have been the targets of CB harassment, even though they are doing the same job as the jerks that offend them. Women often experience ridicule from men who think that they are "taking away a good-paying job from a man." Diane, an owner-operator who runs solo, said that she has been called names so horrible she couldn't bring herself to repeat them.

How can your company attract and retain more women, both in and outside of the truck? Remove the obstacles. Do you have women trainers so that your female drivers will feel less intimidated during their lessons? Do you have rest rooms for women in your drivers' area? Are your trucks accommodating for women (as well as for men) with ergonomically designed seats, lower shelving areas, power steering and automated transmissions? What do you offer as awards for safe driving?

As a carrier, you can also influence the companies that serve our industry. Do your customers have rest rooms available for women on their loading docks? Does the truck stop chain you utilize offer women's items in their convenience store and do they have enough rest rooms and showers for females or are they all unisex?

There are many reasons why women should consider trucking as a career opportunity. Besides having equitable pay (what other industry can say that all women earn the same as men?), we have become more female friendly. We have better freight, less physically demanding job duties and more comfortable equipment. We have work available and there are jobs that allow drivers to be home more often, if not every night.

From inter-modal to LTL to dry freight to bulk delivery, there are opportunities for women to enter this industry and to become skilled in operating a truck, and to be paid well.

We need to get this message out to where women will see it. Have you ever placed an ad in a women's magazine or sponsored a women's event? Probably not. Why not?

Recently, an organization was formed to promote careers in the trucking industry to women. Women In Trucking, Inc. (www.WomenInTrucking.org) is a non-profit association whose mission is to encourage the employment of women in the trucking industry, promote their accomplishments and minimize obstacles faced by women in trucking. Join Women In Trucking (yes, men are welcome and encouraged to become members) and help us send a positive message to the 68 million women currently in the workforce and ask them to join us in the trucking industry.

Help us remove obstacles.

Ellen Voie (Ellen@WomenInTrucking.org) is chairwoman of the Board of Directors of Women In Trucking, Inc. based in Plover, WI.

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