



GREENROAD™

Delivering the best drivers on the road

How's My Driving?

How to Really Create A Safety Culture

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Based on work with more than 100 fleets across the globe to improve driving safety, we have identified the key principles to guide your fleet's efforts to creating a culture of safety.

We all know how high the stakes can be when it comes to driving safety. Traffic accidents cost more than \$230 billion a year in the U.S. alone, and for fleets, the associated insurance, maintenance and new vehicle costs can significantly hinder business growth.

Although billions of dollars have been spent on vehicle safety technology, fleet managers and CFOs alike are finding that one of the most effective safety investments is to create a safety "ethos."

Historically, road safety has been viewed as an issue to be addressed by automotive and civil engineers and/or policy makers. As a result, enormous resources have been put toward improving life-saving features in vehicles – from seat belts to anti-lock brakes to airbags – as the key to reducing injury. While beneficial, still, over 40,000 people die each year in crashes in the U.S. alone, 3 million go to the hospital, and 75% of work related deaths result from vehicle crashes. And driving is actually the No. 1 cause of workplace death in the United States, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. While these technologies may make some crashes less lethal, they don't focus on prevention. And, when safety technology has failed to prevent or significantly diminish accidents, legislators have stepped in, regulating everything from the speed limit to how you use your cellular phone.

But recent evidence suggests that these costly financial efforts might be trumped by a simple idea. The key to improving safety might come down to simply facilitating the right culture. And instilling a safety ethos is actually good business – saving thousands of dollars per year per driver. This is a clear case of where an ounce of prevention can save lives and money.

A recent groundbreaking study by the Highway Loss Data Institute (HLDI) and the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety found that states that banned the use of hand-held cell phones saw no reduction in accidents. While the results of this study rattled the conventionally accepted wisdom, the underlying theme was probably not a surprise to most fleet risk managers: mandating driver behavior rarely works.

Instead, more and more fleet risk managers are finding that real improvements to safety come from addressing the factors that most impact the driving culture -- attitude and knowledge. Starting here provides the basis for a safety ethos: shared principles that guide and inspire permanent changes in safety performance.

So how exactly are fleets creating a safety ethos and what are the benefits?

Attitude

It starts by changing the way safety is valued. The default response is often to be most concerned about safety after something goes wrong. Instead, what if safety were a daily or hourly or even constant occupation? Companies that provide modest incentives and reward drivers regularly for high safety scores elevate its importance. When a U.S. petroleum transporter implemented the GreenRoad driving decision system to complement its existing safety programs, managers wanted to instill a cultural change across the company. The company decided to focus on the positive. For the first several months of using the GreenRoad service, the company recognized the safest, or green, drivers in a variety of ways, including praising them at monthly driver meetings and distributing gift cards to thank them for their safe driving. Managers received weekly emails recognizing significant milestones, such as a driver obtaining a green score for the first time or an entire depot consistently driving green. GreenRoad provides a set of tools and best practices to make it easy to implement incentive programs, and dedicated account managers work directly with managers to help them accomplish company goals.

The fleet also tapped into the power of peer influence by asking their safest drivers to compile a “cheat sheet” of ways to address common driving safety issues.

Within about six months, the majority of the company's drivers were green. Today, almost two years after the service was implemented, the company has continued to incorporate incentives for safe driving into the way they do business every day. Drivers who maintain safe, green driving levels receive a monthly safety bonus and receive recognition in front of their peers. For those drivers who do not maintain green levels, the company provides counseling and gives them the opportunity to change their own driving behavior before even considering progressive disciplinary actions.

Knowledge

While few people think of themselves as bad drivers, the fact of the matter is everyone has room for improvement. But too often, drivers are unaware of the high-risk decisions they make -- management ride-alongs that have been the norm in fleets for years to address the problem of driver awareness have been enhanced and often replaced by automated driver feedback solutions that provide real-time behavior guidance. And, while some initially report trepidation that such programs infringe on privacy, once instituted drivers, welcome consistent, trustworthy feedback.

For example, Ryder Trucks found that many of their drivers were unaware of the high-risk maneuvers they were making – because without a comprehensive visibility into driving behavior it was impossible to detect.

Kent Wiles, a driver trainer at Ryder notes: “A lot of us never realized what kind of G-force we were putting on the vehicle with curves and lane changes. Once we introduce [GreenRoad's driver decision system] to drivers and get it out there, it opens their eyes. It helps you become more aware of your surroundings and the effect you're having on traffic around you.”

Best Practices

But knowledge alone, of course, is not enough to permanently change performance. It must also be shared. Fleets that develop channels and forums to share and exchange best practices note that it can have a contagious effect.

IDM Trucking, a transportation company that serves small to large sized businesses in the Mid-Atlantic region, has been experimenting with encouraging its employees who receive the highest safety scores to share tips for safe and efficient driving with their peers. The result is a constant dialogue among employees, motivating the staff to always think about what they can improve.

This leads not only to reduced crashes and lower fuel costs, but also permeates into non-driving aspects of the job. For example, many fleets report that after implementing safety programs they saw a reduction in worker compensation claims. A leading specialty contractor for communications companies, utilities and governments throughout the United States found that their customer satisfaction ratings actually increased for those served by drivers who were driving safely. The safety culture instilled in the vehicles had spilled over into other areas of their jobs. Indeed, improvements in the quality of installation work were associated with improvements in driving safety for these drivers.

In the end, while there is no silver bullet to guaranteeing the highest level of safety, supporting drivers is the best place to start. Safety programs that prevent crashes will save employees lives or livelihoods, can be low-cost, and can deliver savings across multiple expense categories – making it a win-win for all involved.

Based on work with more than 100 fleets across the globe to improve driving safety, here are four principles to guide your fleet's efforts to create a culture of safety:

- **Take a balanced approach:** Are your safety efforts focused solely on punishing or removing poorly performing drivers? In motivating behavioral improvement, keep in mind that positive reinforcement for a job well done is as important as punitive measures. Avoid approaches that focus primarily on 'claims and blames'.
- **Competition is a motivator:** Professional drivers are, by their nature, competitive -- they want to be the best at what they do. Fleet managers who create a healthy environment of healthy competition (e.g. safety driven, not who can shave the most time off their route) can create a culture that values safety. Some innovative ideas that fleet companies have started to employ include providing monthly rankings of driver performance to competing against other fleets for safety performance.
- **Real rewards matter:** A gold star for best driver simply doesn't cut it in the professional arena. Fleet managers need to offer rewards and incentives that encourage safety. Monetary rewards are a good place to start. Since fleets that improve their safety also improve their bottom line (e.g. reduced crash costs, insurance, fuel costs, wear and tear, etc), passing along some of the savings can be a great motivator.

- **Understand the route:** No matter how good the driver, some intersections, turns, etc. are simply unsafe. Collecting internal data, as well as reviewing external data, on the location of accidents can quickly illuminate “high risk” routes to avoid whenever possible.

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