

## Impacts of An Ageing Workforce in Transport & Logistics

Meet Trevor, a long-haul B-Double driver who at 58 years of age, is beginning to think towards retirement. With the physical demands of the job and the time away from home no longer appealing, Trevor plans to join the 12% of drivers across Australia who will walk away from the industry in the next 12 months. His employer knows they have a pending gap to fill, but faced with an ageing workforce, intense competition for skills from both within the industry and the often high paying mining sector, and the need for experienced staff to meet immediate demand, they are at a loss as to where to begin.

This scenario is not uncommon, and with a projected 10 000 increase in drivers employed expected by May 2015, combined with a workforce where 53.3% are aged 45 and over, the situation is set to become both increasingly frequent, and increasingly challenging.

Factor in the licensing variables between states which make the type of workforce mobility available to other industries very difficult, and the transport and logistics sector faces some serious issues indeed.

Unfortunately, there is no 'silver bullet' to resolving this issue at the speed the industry requires. Rather, an integrated set of activities is required which includes contribution from industry groups, government, the education and training sector and the recruitment and labour hire sector; as well as employers themselves.

### **Appealing to a younger generation.**

So much of the current and pending skills shortage issue for drivers stems from the perceived lack of attractiveness of the industry as a career choice for younger workers. Those seeking career potential may not see a job as a driver as a good long term prospect.

The reality though, is that there is a lot about the industry that is of appeal to a younger generation of workers, providing those aspects are communicated in the right way. Driver's roles today are somewhat different to the previous generation, particularly with respect to the technologies used, and requirements around licensing mean that often, ongoing training and development is on offer.

There is increased acceptability within the younger workforce of jobs that take you away from home for periods of time (such as fly-in, fly-out roles in the mining sector), and with improvements in workforce planning and use of flexible workforces, greater work/life balance is now attainable for those working in the road transport sector.

### **The role of safety in industry attractiveness.**

The Transport & Logistics Industry Skills Council 2010 Environmental Scan points to a community perception of the industry as a dangerous place to work, highlighting fatigue and the high media profile of workplace accidents or incidents, as damaging to the attractiveness of a career in transport.

In a fast-paced, skills short market it's all too tempting to push the barriers of safety through poor workforce planning, to provide inadequate induction or training, or to hire new employees whose propensity to performing their job safely is insufficient.

Regardless of any perceived short term gains, the long term damage to the industry – not to mention to the individuals who work within it – makes this practice untenable and unacceptable. Employers, industry groups, government bodies and suppliers of labour to the industry must all share this view, and act accordingly to ensure that Workplace safety in the industry is at a consistently high standard.

### **Training – how fast is fast enough?**

Another area requiring commitment from all stakeholders is training, ensuring that what's on offer (both formal and on-the-job) keeps pace with increasingly complex and variable legislation from state-to-state, as well as enabling the attainment of skills and licences in a timeframe sufficient to ensure the industry continues its momentum. Ongoing improvements in this area are critical in mitigating the risk of potential skills shortage as experienced drivers retire in greater numbers.

### **Considering flexible options.**

The composition of the workforce is also a mitigating factor. Almost all drivers (92%) are employed on a full-time basis, and many areas of the industry have lower than average use of flexible staffing practices.

Use of workforce planning and flexible workforce practices can extend the working life of older drivers by reducing their hours and therefore the physical and fatigue demands of the job. It can enable opportunities for older workers to act as trainers, mentors or buddies to their younger and less experienced colleagues, as well as catering for fluctuations in demand without excess overtime expenditure and risk. It can also provide opportunities for work/life balance demanded by younger employees with demands on their time beyond work – study, family, travel, etc.

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For more of Ken's views on the impacts of an ageing workforce in Transport & Logistics, download his podcast at <http://www.chandlermacleod.com/-223429/podcasts>.