

I have long been a critic of our government's system which I feel is based on threats and intimidation. The automatic \$50,000.00 fine for a wheel-off with no defense under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms is an example of this system at work. Who thinks this stuff up? I believe that not allowing a trucker their day in court is criminal and a disgrace in a free society. What do you think? I encourage both good and bad feedback, so don't be afraid to share your thoughts with me. I'm happy to say that of the responses I've received thus far, the number of people who agree with my ideas has far outweighed those opposed.

That being said, I have been working with some industry stakeholders and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities for some time now to develop an apprenticeship for truck drivers in Ontario. I believe that such a program is long overdue and would be a tremendous benefit to new drivers entering our industry. I have always believed that training and education are key ingredients to success in any long-term endeavour, whether in a private company or in a governance position. Education is an investment in people; a better-educated workforce is a stable workforce. People who have better tools when they enter a profession have a better chance of success. This, my friends, is a proven fact, not just ramblings from an old trucker.

Being asked to participate in this new effort has helped renew my faith in

our system. I'm not doing cartwheels just yet but I am feeling somewhat satisfied with our group's effort and the co-operation we have received from the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities thus far. We have proposed a voluntary training program that we feel will adequately prepare a newly-licensed driver to better cope with the pressures and technicalities of operating proficiently behind the wheel of a tractor-trailer. So far the Ministry's co-operation and assistance has been nothing less than stellar. I hope I am not going too far out on a limb here, but I believe this is finally going to happen.

Why an apprenticeship program and why now? For far too long a large number of sub-standard training schools have been allowed to train Class A drivers to a level that accomplished only one benchmark; to allow that driver to pass the Ministry of Transport's Driver Test and obtain an AZ license. Graduates have had a difficult time finding employment because of restrictions imposed by insurance companies who recognize the inability of many of these new drivers to operate safely on our highways. Only companies with stellar insurance records and good mentoring programs have been exempted from these restrictions. I doubt many of the drivers we're speaking of could pass a decent road test and many of those who have passed don't last long in the



The Apprenticeship Effort

industry because they haven't been provided with the appropriate tools or training to be successful.

Statistics suggest that there are 600,000 AZ-licensed drivers in Canada, yet only 250,000 are actually driving. Where then, have the remaining 350,000 gone? My guess would be that they became frustrated and went on to other careers. An apprenticeship program will provide these people with an option to obtain extended training and a higher level of proficiency. Let's face it; if they are dedicated to working in this industry they will take advantage of these opportunities. I believe that a large number of potential drivers have been sitting on the fence wondering if trucking is the career for them. A government endorsement through this program will help make trucking their chosen career.

Like many other industries, ours has gone through significant changes over the past few decades and the list of talents that a driver needs to be proficient at in order to be successful has grown tremendously. In my driving days, a reliable piece of equipment and a decent map would take me pretty much anywhere in North America. This is still true today but now add satellite communication training and knowledge, drug and alcohol compliance, FAST and C-TPAT qualifications, border crossing knowledge, fuel efficiency techniques, defensive driving tactics, greenhouse gas emissions and new Hours of Service rules to the list, just to name a few. Many orientation programs last between two

and four days and assume the participants have a minimum of two years' experience. Someone new to the industry with nothing but a new license in their hands from a sub-standard training facility won't stand a fair chance in today's trucking.

When I look at a new program such as this I usually give it what I call "The Smell Test" and this program passes with flying colours. I can't see who wouldn't be onside for this program. Many stakeholders from the industry are involved with this effort and everyone involved including truckers, insurance brokers, unions, various areas of government, OBAC and OTA members and training schools are very excited that we are this close.

Now we want to hear from you. Over the Road has developed a web site to provide information for all who are interested in learning what the apprenticeship program is all about. Thanks to Ed Novoa for his efforts here. Please visit the web site at www.drive4apprenticeship.com

Please review the posted information and offer your comments on this effort. Let's all get behind this idea and move the whole profession up a notch in Ontario and then watch the rest of Canada fall into line.

Take Good Care and Safe Driving,

Ray Haight

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