

I thought taxes might be a timely subject to bring up for a couple of reasons. One is obvious in that we are quickly approaching personal tax filing deadlines and the other is that it is time to lay to rest the age old adage that tax season is upon us. If you are an owner operator the tax man is here twelve months each year and this bad boy needs to be managed every single day.

If you happen to be one of those owner operators who only thinks about dealing with this evil necessity once each year I guarantee that you are missing valuable tax deductions that can undoubtedly minimize your tax bill. I will also bet that if you are not handling this part of your business properly, there is a good likelihood that some other areas of your business need attention also. It's all part of the discipline of running a small business, the same discipline I discuss almost every month in this column.

How do I know? Well, I was one of these people when I drove. Been there, done that, paid the tax man! During the first few years of my driving career I hated paperwork. In fact, hated is far too gentle a term...despised is a much more accurate adjective. I was fairly good at some of it though. For instance, I knew my border crossing documents had to be filled out correctly or else I would be delayed, so I became good at filling out these forms. I knew what I needed and made sure I had it right before I got there.

I also became good at ensuring that Bills of Lading were signed cleanly

and clearly because I knew that problems could slow down my cashflow and cause problems for the shipper or receiver and catch me in the middle of the mix.

I could, however, never seem to get around to the rest of the day-to-day paperwork and if or when I did get to it, I had usually lost some of it or stepped on it so it couldn't be read. Sometimes it simply blew out the window; receipts must have been printed on flash paper because they often evaporated into thin air.

What finally scared me straight was when the one thing that I knew was inevitable but wished would never happen, happened. The Tax Man came looking for me. I was summonsed to the local office and awarded with my just desserts, that being an audit and a demand for returns. I knew full well that it was me who was at fault for creating this situation. What surprised me was the fact that as humbled as I was at the situation, they were equally as aggressive and felt no sympathy for my serious lack of talent when it came to satisfying their needs.

I explained my flash paper theory, I told them that I was dyslexic and that it wasn't my fault. I told them the wind took the paper and guess what? They didn't laugh and they didn't blink. They had been there and heard that BS before. They then went about telling me what they were about to do



## The Tax Man Commeth

to me. I knew it was going to hurt... and it did!

As soon as I learned what the consequences of my ineptitude towards the taxman was going to cost me I sought out the services of a professional to help me out and their advice sounded a lot like common sense. I set up a good system to collect my receipts and surrender them monthly to my new found accounting friend so I would not put myself in that same situation again.

I then set myself up with a budget to look after my current year's tax liability and cut a deal with the Feds to look after what I owed them. I recall that it took me about two years to complete, but I paid them in full. I haven't been in the same situation since and do not intend to let that happen again, because it's not any fun.

I don't mean to sound like a broken record here, but I can't stress enough that you have to decide what you're good at and what you're not good at. Then you have to realize that you don't need to be good at all things to be successful. But you do need to be able to recognize good talent when you must have it.

I was very good at driving and I had driven for ten years without ever having a reportable accident; I was good at it because I loved it. In ten years of driving the total damage I had incurred consisted of one bent front bumper, one damaged trailer door and one bent front hood. I am proud of my safety record; I drove defensively

without taking a course. I came very close to having an accident in my first couple years on the road and then I suddenly realized that every vehicle I shared the road with was out to get me and I was ready for them. I was good at maintaining my truck; I did all of my own services and minor repairs. I carried a good assortment of tools with me at all times and there wasn't much I couldn't limp home from the road to fix. I had a good relationship with most of my customers' shippers and receivers. I respected them and always showed up with clean equipment and a clean appearance; I knew who paid the bills!

What I was not good at was paperwork so I looked around, asked a lot of questions and found someone who could do the job for me. I then followed their advice and the system they set up for me and found piece of mind.

Understand that you're only in this thing all alone if that's the way you want it to be. The smart way to run your small business is to build your team with the right people and services. You CAN'T be good at everything but you can still find the best people to create a winning team.

Feel free to drop me a line on this idea.

Safe driving!

Ray J. Haight  
Email: ray@otr.on.ca 🍁