

The calendar is a wonderful thing; a new calendar year allows us to reflect on the past twelve month's triumphs and failures. Each January we start anew if we choose to! We can and should reflect on these successes and failures in both our business and personal lives. I'm not just speaking of typical new years resolutions such as plans to lose weight and quit smoking, (although these are both very important decisions for your health) I'm speaking about a formal approach to being successful in every area of your life that is important to you.

I have had experiences at both ends of the spectrum in my career in the trucking industry. I've seen the world from the eyes of a small fleet of three trucks and I have also held responsibility for 350 people. When I reflect on the losses and wins in my career there are many similarities, irregardless of the size and scope of the operation, whether one or 300 power units.

An organized company who works their Mission Statement will plot a course and a 12-month plan that they think will achieve success. Fleet size, gross sales, fuel cost, equipment operating cost, revenue per mile and labour costs are just a few of the factors that this plan should take into consideration. A large company will set a budget by having senior managers from each department formulate a budget for their respective area. From there, they will develop both a business plan and a budget for the next 12 months. It's a formal process that repeats itself year over year and this also becomes their company's Vision Plan as they decide what they want to happen three or five years down the road. This model is repeated in many successful companies, so why should an individual

owner operator be any different? I have seen a lack of planning limit many different types of people. I have seen lazy people who failed and wondered why their future wasn't handed to them. I have also seen folks work their butts off with determination until they burned themselves out and still didn't get anywhere.

As an owner operator you run a small business with substantial assets and therefore, you have a need to plan both your long and short-term success. Begin by evaluating your bench strength; how did your support team do for you in the past 12 months? How did your mechanical support team perform? Were repairs done effectively the first time? Were they of help when you had an issue on the road and required to deal with other repair facilities? Did they ensure you recovered all of the warranty dollars available to you? If you had an issue with a repair they made did they correct the problem co-operatively or did they play the blame game? What was your total down time?

How did your financial advisor/bookkeeper do for you? Were all of your GST returns filed accurately and on time? Were you advised on the best approach to dealing with your taxes? Have you received advice about planning for your retirement? Do you have an accurate picture of how you stand financially (this can take the form of a profit and loss statement)? Were they there for you when you needed them?

The questions don't end there. How did your carrier do in providing the



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revenue per mile and the necessary miles needed for you to succeed? Are their statements easy to read and accurate? Are they interested and receptive if you approach them and suggest that you have a problem? Is their fuel surcharge fair? Are you treated fairly and honestly by the whole infrastructure of the company?

As the President, CEO and Chief Bottlesher of your small trucking enterprise... rank yourself on the following:

1. Controlling all variable expenses including fuel and maintenance.
2. Contribution to maximizing gross revenue
3. Achievement of your yearly budget
4. Contribution to your long-term goals (i.e. retirement)
5. Management of your support teams (i.e. repairs or financial advisor)
6. Carrier revenue stream
7. Innovation. (Yes, innovation. What did you do last year to ensure that you were aware of new opportunities to be more successful? Did you lower your operating cost or increase your revenue?)

Decide what your team's KPI's (Key Performance Indicators) are and then rank them from 1-10 on their performance over the past year. If you have a weakness in your team, how did you deal with it? Perhaps you didn't clearly explain what your expectation is of them. A good leader will never think people know what you want of them; it is up to you to explain your expectations. People don't know what they don't know, so spell it out for them. If you are convinced that you're not getting what you need from your teams to be successful then go find what you need.

A good practice is to write a list of each critical element required of each member of your team. Then, rate each individual on a scale from one to ten and deal with each failing grade accordingly. **If you don't deal with any of the failing grades, look in the mirror, for you have found the enemy and it is you!**

What have you done to ensure that you have done the best for you and yours? This is the hard question folks; it is the one that will have the most impact on your future. Last, but certainly not least, I ask that you look at the way you treat your family support system. How you rank yourself on this one is paramount! Without them, why are any of us beating our heads against the wall trying to make it? I've been through the good, bad and the ugly times and I have learned that regretting the past is a waste of spirit. In other words, each new day is a new opportunity. I've learned never to take those I love for granted; they need to know how much I need and appreciate them. I was rummaging through some of my children's old paperwork and found a piece I wrote for them a few years back I called "Why You're Special." I know it touched them both so after writing this article I have decided to touch it up and give it to them again.*

Feel free to drop me a line on this idea.

Safe driving!

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*PS. If you'd like to see what I sent my children I'll be happy to send it to you. 🍁