

Licensed vs professional

It takes more than a licence to be a pro

EDMONTON, Alta. – Although allowed to get behind the wheel of a big rig, the holder of a Class 1 licence is not necessarily a professional.

The difference between being a professional driver and having a Class 1 licence will differ depending on whether the question is posed to a driver or a fleet operator.

“One of the most important questions is where are the gaps?” noted Mark Murrell, president of CarriersEdge. “Because most drivers don’t know, what it is they don’t know.”

“There’s an arrogance, that if a driver has a licence they must know what they’re doing,” added Doug Fulgham, president of CayCan Safety Consulting. “Training is a tough sell because nobody feels like they need it.”

Fulgham founded CayCan in the spring of 2000 to aid the transport industry in achieving, maintaining and measuring compliance with the National Safety Code and related legislation.

His experience as a mechanic, driver, dispatcher, owner/operator and a transport officer, has led to a no-nonsense approach for tackling compliance issues, program development and performance monitoring.

“One area that is kind of a thorn in my side, or my soapbox of choice, is pre-trip inspections,” explained Fulgham. “I can’t tell you how many times I do inspections and find brakes out of adjustment and the driver has no clue how to check for that. Our drivers either don’t know how, or don’t think it’s their job to know how; and I find it really scary.”

Another aspect of being a professional driver that requires constant attention, is keeping up with current regulations and the required paperwork.

“I do logbook classes for the new hours-of-service rules and I can’t fill them up; and it’s not because everybody knows it, they just don’t care to know,” Fulgham told *Truck West*.

“A guy is learning how to fill out a logbook from the guy sitting across from him in the coffee shop, regardless of how he’s trained or what officers tell him.”

As important as regulations are, Murrell noted that the fine details are all part of a larger picture.

“Regulations and safety are important,” said Murrell. “There’s also the broader aspect of having a successful business as a driver, even if you’re part of a fleet, you

are in the business of driving a truck. There are some things that fall through the cracks because people are so busy keeping up with regulations and they don’t keep up with all the day-to-day business aspects.”

In addition to offering safety and regulation courses, CarriersEdge recently partnered with Humber College to provide classes for drivers to focus on the business aspect of the profession.

Additional training for drivers is beneficial for both the driver and the carrier, Murrell pointed out.

“The driver makes money when they’re on the road delivering freight, they don’t really make money doing anything else,” noted Murrell.

“People get benefits when they eliminate anything that prevents them from driving.”

From trip planning to accidents, time spent at weigh stations to damaged goods claims, there are a number of different little things which can prevent a driver and a company from making money.

“If you’re able to understand all the business of trucking and the safety, you’ll be able to make more money,” added Murrell. “You make more money being better at your job.”

The better a professional driver is at their job, the safer they are as well; and so is everyone else sharing the road.

“The bottom line is the due diligence, so the driver doesn’t run over a bus full of nuns and children,” said Fulgham.

“He might be great at changing lanes and shifting gears, but does he know how to do a pre-trip, fill out a logbook, or do proper tie-downs?”

Knowing regulations and the expected way to perform the truck driving job in the eyes of enforcement is good for safety, but will also be rewarding financially.

“Monetarily, the simple fact of not paying fines and knowing all the rules should be enough incentive, when you tell them they’re subject to a \$2,000 fine, they wake up,” Fulgham added.

Saving money on fines and saving time by not being held up at the weigh station are bonuses of additional training and keeping up to date on regulations. Taking the extra time to thoroughly know the ins and outs of the job also contribute to the overall image of a carrier.

“The carrier profile really takes a beating when drivers start rack-



UP TO DATE?: Ongoing training is necessary to keep up with ever-evolving regulations such as load securement rules.

ing up tickets and out-of-service incidents,” explained Fulgham. “It’s like a driver’s abstract on a trucking company and everything is kept on record in the home jurisdiction.”

Fulgham noted transport officers have started using carrier profiles more and more in the recent past, to identify problem carriers.

“In the last couple of years they’ve started imposing more sanctions on carriers,” he explained.

“It’s a lot easier to stay ahead of the game, rather than have imposed deadlines.”

As well, other industry stakeholders have started viewing carrier profiles before deciding where to do business.

“With the company profile, insurance companies have woken up and realized it’s a good tool to determine rates; and shippers are starting to look at profiles as well, to see the carrier’s profile before hiring them to haul their goods,” said Fulgham.

Along with the advancement of training regimes has come the advancement of truck driving as a profession. The changes during the past few decades have changed the face of the occupation and the training that accompanies the job.

“Not just driver training, but the professional development of the driver,” said Murrell. “You need to start off as a junior and develop into a professional. That mentality has changed over the years and the training has evolved with it. Relating to that, over the past 20 years the pace of industry change and regulatory change has increased exponentially; so training has had to keep pace.”

The continuing changes in regulations governing the industry has required driver training to keep pace. As regulations change, training becomes more temporary and

constant updates are required, but flexibility in the training process is also important.

“The individual and the company should always be looking at ways to improve. If there’s one thing someone is not sure of, you should deal with it right away and close those gaps,” explained Murrell.

“There are some things that suit once a year training because they’re seasonal, like in winter talking about adverse conditions or in the summer talking about driving around construction sites.”

Technological advances have also helped the training process and have allowed trainers to develop different techniques based on their current students.

“Definitely the online tools or anything that is self-paced works better in the driving community because drivers like to go at their own pace,” said Murrell. “The classroom works well if you have six to 10 people in the same room who are all at the same level, it can be an awesome experience. But in the trucking industry you will be hard-pressed to get that many people in the same room and if you do, they won’t be at the same level.”

In a training world full of simulators, DVDs and classroom lectures, actually getting outside and into the cab of a truck is still one of the best training tools.

“Definitely getting behind the wheel is important. There’s a lot to learn, but it’s important to get in the truck and shift gears,” said Murrell.

“By and large, there’s no one solution that works in every situation and a combination usually is the best way. Maybe you need to read more magazines or talk to more drivers. You don’t always need to sit in a class, there’s lots of ways of doing it.” □