

# DRIVER TURNOVER

## How to Stop the Revolving Door for Good

# Motorcoach Operators

Summary of Live Presentation Given at the  
UMA/United Motorcoach Association  
EXPO 2019  
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Presented by



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## Executive Summary

Thank you for attending the UMA presentation on driver retention and recruiting for coach operators at the UMA conference in Fort Lauderdale. There were over 200 people in attendance, so it is clear that the interest level in learning how to hire fewer drivers and keep more is quite high.

In the live presentation I covered four main topics that gave you the essential tools to fine-tune your recruiting efforts. If you are serious about rethinking how you get and keep drivers, you will be able to use this information to make a significant difference in the growth of your driver pool, your service level, your revenue growth trajectory and you will enjoy higher profits.

The areas we covered are 1) learning **why drivers really leave your company**, 2) **understanding how to train and/or retrain your recruiter(s)** to learn to adapt to the needs and wants of today's coach drivers and prospective drivers that are new to the business.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> topic is **understanding the need to create a more formal process** to bring in new drivers who are a true "fit" for your company and will stay longer and lower your overall turnover. You should understand the value of no longer hiring your turnover.

Finally, you learned several significant action steps that you can take to identify and **remove threats to retention**.

I want to emphasize that what you learned about making the necessary adjustments in your business to better manage the hiring and retention system requires developing a plan, making a commitment to learning new skills, getting everyone involved in your company who comes in contact with drivers to become part of the solution and devoting the time and resources necessary to make the adjustments to create a new culture with required processes and sustainable actions.

It is important to understand these requirements. The first step is to decide to do something. Attending conferences and educational sessions already cost time and money. What are you going to do to make it worthwhile?

Let us review the presentation content.

### Reasons for Leaving – Understanding Turnover

Coach operators and their operations people are used to hearing many different reasons why drivers leave. Some leave during orientation or shortly thereafter or after a few days or even weeks. The key question is why.

What changed from the early part of the interview process when a driver was comfortable enough to come to work for your company and then shortly thereafter leave? There are a number of usual and customary reasons that drivers give for leaving but experience has shown that CEOs and their executives, directors, managers, team leaders, recruiters, dispatchers and others really don't know what they don't know about why drivers leave. Is it money? Home time? Poor or no benefits? Is it the way drivers are treated?

Probably all of these and many more factor in to retention but whether the reasons stated from drivers are part of an internal or external exit survey or some other method of finding out why a driver is leaving; the real reasons are seldom revealed.

What is obvious is that the drivers who leave are unhappy working for you especially if they are going to a competitor. That is a very significant conclusion; they are unhappy and you may not know the real reason why.

It may be mismatched expectations from what they have been told at various levels as compared to what they have been doing since starting with your company.

If drivers are told early on that they will be home weekends and that is not the case or they have to work holidays or spend more time waiting than driving or they are not being paid what they were promised, then you probably have real reasons to consider. It is vital to work to avoid situations that create these misunderstandings and, consequently, unhappy drivers

The simplest method to reduce drivers leaving, especially new hires, is to hire them properly and treat them properly. What does that mean? You have to take your existing recruiter and recruiting methodology and make adjustments to be relevant to the needs and wants of drivers today.

As stated, it is important for coach operators to know why drivers are leaving. In our years of working with driver issues one strategy that works well is creating an early warning system for “at risk of leaving” drivers. The usual way most companies employ this technique is by exit interviews, whether conducted using internal staff or a 3<sup>rd</sup> party. This process is only marginally successful but always comes after a driver leaves or decides to leave. A better process is to train all staff to listen with a “3<sup>rd</sup> ear “to identify a driver that is angry, disappointed or expressing some emotion about being unhappy. This comes before a driver actually leaves but (s)he may be considering that action. This requires proper training and skill in identifying these situations and then proper approaches to a driver to determine the issue(s) and how to resolve the problem and get the driver back on track.

Whatever the real reason, drivers usually leave because of a breakdown in the fundamentals of motorcoach operations. It most probably originates from improper or ineffective recruiting. This leads us to retraining recruiters or having a proper process for training new ones.

### **Retraining Recruiters and Training New Ones**

Take a giant step – upgrade your approach to recruiting. The heart of this is to retrain recruiters. They have to go back to the basics of advertising, marketing, screening, interviewing and hiring differently. They need to understand how to interview a prospective driver with approaches that are relevant today.

There are essential skills for best-in-class recruiters. These people are proactive, organized, set priorities and are computer literate. They act friendly at all times, are great communicators, industry experts and they know how to ask probing open-ended questions. They have a written process and written questions they want to ask.

Companies that have one person recruiting or several doing it as part of their overall duties or even several specific recruiters need to learn the “modern” way of recruiting and hiring. This is not intended to be a commercial, but we are probably the only company that provides formal recruiter training for coach

driver recruiters. We do it onsite and remotely over a period of weeks to help companies retrain their existing recruiters or help hire new ones that have not had real training.

Development of a written process covering all the essentials from attracting qualified drivers to onboarding will go a long way to understanding how to hire smarter and have drivers who will join your company.

### **A Written Recruiting Process**

It takes several weeks to learn and sustain new habits. We have developed a seven (7) step training program that starts at the fundamentals of getting and keeping drivers. Here are just a few of the topics that are part of this robust recruiter training program leading to improved results for hiring new inexperienced coach drivers or seasoned drivers looking for a new opportunity who are a “fit” for your company

- Attracting Drivers
- Answering the Phone
- Establishing Rapport
- Interviewing Skills
- Finding Needs and Wants
- Sales Skills
- Handling Objections
- Closing the Sale
- Building a Prospect Funnel
- Follow-Up Procedures

The best-in-class recruiting process helps build a sales funnel, focuses on quality (not quantity), avoids hiring your turnover and emphasizes follow-up with drivers.

Recruiters need to know what their drivers are saying about their company wherever they are and regardless of who they are talking to. This is part of the company brand. Your brand is the ultimate source of attracting or losing drivers. It is important that recruiters encourage their drivers to write positive reviews on Google reviews and Glassdoor, Indeed and other job board sites to get no-cost advertising and the basis for creating a robust driver referral program.

Part of your recruiting process requires that recruiters fine-tune the way they hire. They should engage a prospective driver in a conversation, not an interview. They should establish rapport and talk about the driver, not the job. An effective recruiting process is a pre-qualification and not a disqualification conversation. Probing a driver to determine a mutual “fit” for the company and the driver is an essential part of reducing the number of drivers who leave shortly after being hired. Knowing what the driver is looking for makes it easier for the recruiter to close the deal.

Recruiters should be process driven and not avoid the hard questions such as asking about objections in order to pre-empt them. Deal with them honestly. Here is where you hire your turnover or create a long-term relationship. The recruiting process requires active listening and not talking, asking questions and then asking a follow-up question. Key questions such as “What does your ideal job look like?” or “What benefits or perks are you looking for?” are examples of important questions to ask.

Make sure your recruiting and hiring process is tech-friendly. Take an application after you have the initial in-bound call. Get a conversation going first. Drivers will like your unique approach that is about

them, not about the company. This will change the game; don't make them work to have a conversation first. Try to avoid voice mail and avoid keeping a prospective driver on hold.

The use of driver personality assessments is necessary to determine how well the driver will be your brand ambassador and provide excellent customer service. It will help you understand the driver's temperament and lead you towards situational and behavioral interview questions.

Road tests are essential and a phone interview/conversation and face-to-face interview (use Facetime or Skype or equivalent) help you to develop a good sense of the driver's personality. Make sure you are compliant with federal and state laws of hiring when using these procedures. Use live chat on your website and make sure it is mobile friendly. Give drivers an option to contact a recruiter quickly. Be sure to discuss your robust training program as part of your hiring process and orientation.

Finally, do not recruit with sign-on bonuses. They only encourage turnover.

### **Threats to Retention**

Our final topic is avoiding threats to retention. If you can't keep existing drivers and attract sufficient new qualified drivers, then what you are doing is not working. First you should consider creating the position of driver retention manager. This should be a full-time position if you have a significant size company and could be someone already with the company for smaller companies. The focus is to have a driver advocate, someone that can help drivers route issues to the right person at the company or talk to all drivers routinely. This position can pay for itself if done correctly. You should create a job description for the position so that everyone in the company knows what the retention manager does and what cooperation they need to keep drivers.

How drivers are treated **AT EVERY INTERACTION OR TOUCHPOINT WITH COMPANY PERSONNEL** is an essential part of driver retention. "Be Nice" is the order of the day, every day. Drivers who can't get along need to be worked with or leave the company. Employees who are a threat to retention need to have behavior modified or placed in a different position.

Excellent internal customer service as well as customer service with external customers, vendors and cooperation with law enforcement is essential, Be Nice. Everyone.

Here is a sample tool that can make a huge difference in your company culture. "I Appreciate You".

Give it to everyone to use when appropriate. Make people feel good and watch the driver turnover needle move towards a very positive direction.

Special Recognition **Your Motorcoach Co.**

⊕ I Appreciate: John Driver

Because: you are awesome

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*John I want to thank you for your support and the professionalism you show every day.*

*Thank you,*

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Bob Doyle, Operations 12-29-18

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**POWERED BY** 

**“I Appreciate You”**

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**Three Valuable Words to Help Solve the Coach Driver Retention Problem**

Promote a “Drivers Are First” Culture because “Drivers Are Really Everything” (DARE).

Finally, guard against dispatch, safety and payroll becoming part of the turnover problem. Some simple prior planning will go a long way to not creating unhappy drivers.

- Dispatchers should call new drivers and say hello before their first trip
- Verify driver roles and responsibilities and make sure they are aligned with what the driver was told by the recruiter, orientation and safety
- Dispatchers should know who wants to work holidays
- Dispatchers need to listen for problems, unhappiness with drivers and say something to management or the driver manager
- Have a database of driver anniversaries, birthdays of families - acknowledge these and be aware of time off needs in advance
- Be honest with drivers about trip requirements, overnight, delays, etc.
- Payroll should make sure that pay rates are aligned with driver expectations based on hire and orientation information that is given
- When a pay problem surfaces, make sure that the driver knows it is getting attention
- Work out differences and potential misunderstandings in advance
- Safety should review driver performance routinely and help make corrections
- Provide coaching, training and collaboration in a friendly non-confrontational way

How much money are you spending for driver turnover, recruiting, bonuses and lost opportunity costs by having a retention program that does not incorporate all these strategies and action steps to give you a best-in-class company? Are you losing business, having to work with partners that have capacity when you don't? Are your customers going elsewhere because you don't have enough drivers to service them?

Do something extraordinary. Think about the contents of this summary and ask yourself what you can do internally, how do you get started and what do you need outside help with.

First thing to do is to create a quick plan incorporating 5-7 outcomes that you would like to accomplish by a future date. Then meet with your key team members and create a robust plan that gets buy-in.

Plan for a 3-4-month timeframe initially. Take one step at a time for each department. Put the plan in writing with roles and responsibilities, deadlines and weekly meetings for everyone. Have it facilitated by someone who everyone will be accountable to. (Accountability officer)

Get rid of silos – departments that don't talk to each other. Create a driver advisory council to find out what is really going on with your drivers, not what you think is going on. Set guidelines so that the advice stays within restrictions.

How can we help? Call or email me to see how we can use our experience with other companies to help you.

Norris