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IT'S TIME TO DISCUSS SPRING DRIVING HAZARDS

Winter is nearly in the rearview mirror, which means it is time to start thinking about spring and the unique driving hazards this season brings. The operations staff is crucial to preventing vehicle crashes by being proactive and discussing springtime hazards with drivers and recommending the Essential 7 Driving Techniques as a defense.

Adverse Road Conditions

Potholes pose a significant risk to drivers and equipment. These hazards are created when melting snow and ice seep into the soil under the pavement. When the water freezes, it expands, causing the pavement to bend, crack and weaken. As the ice melts, the pavement contracts and leaves gaps or holes in the surface. If this continues, the pothole gets bigger. When a tire strikes a pothole and loses pressure through a slow leak or all at once due to a blowout, the result can be a loss of control crash and possibly a high-dollar loss.

Bad Weather

The spring months bring warmer temperatures and extreme weather systems, such as tornados, heavy rains, severe thunderstorms, flooding, and high winds. Operations staff should monitor weather forecasts, communicate when bad weather is approaching, and either reroute drivers away from these systems or find a place for the driver to safely pull over and wait the storm out.

Congested Traffic

Additional cars, motorcycles, pedestrians, and bicycles are on the road as the weather improves, and they create unique hazards for truck drivers. Likewise, slower-moving vehicles like farm equipment and holiday travelers are on the road more as well. Operations staff can help drivers by being a calming voice when drivers face frustrating traffic conditions. If feasible, route drivers away from congested areas – especially during peak rush hour times.

Road Construction

Road construction will increase in the spring months, slowing down traffic and increasing frustration levels. Route drivers away from construction zones or call the receiver if a shipment will be delayed due to construction. Either action can help ease the driver's stress so he or she can remain focused on driving.

Encourage drivers to utilize the Essential 7 Driving Techniques:

ESSENTIAL 7 DRIVING TECHNIQUES

- AVOID DISTRACTIONS
- OBSERVE PROPER SPEED FOR CONDITIONS
- MAINTAIN PROPER FOLLOWING DISTANCE
- BE ATTENTIVE TO THE ROAD AHEAD
- REACT PROPERLY TO HAZARDS
- YIELD THE RIGHT OF WAY
- MAINTAIN ONE LANE



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STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP IN A VUCA WORLD

Pandemic or not, we live in a VUCA world. VUCA is an acronym that stands for volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. This term is used to describe a situation or condition of constant, unpredictable change, and certainly those working in the transportation industry can relate. Adapting to change is a daily occurrence, so here are some strategic leadership tips to help you lead your company in today's VUCA world.

PAUSE FOR UNDERSTANDING

As you are thrown curveballs at the office, step back from the situation to seek clarity. New information may be confusing and lack specifics, so take time to collect the facts before responding. One method that could help is the five-second rule. Before responding, pause five seconds to gather your thoughts.

SEEK INPUT FROM OTHERS

The best leaders are able to adapt to change. Avoid a rigid mindset by adopting the antithesis of VUCA. Be understanding, agile, and clear of purpose when tackling adversity. Embrace an ideas culture that encourages input from everyone. Allow issues to be debated, and welcome dissent. This is healthy for the organization. Also, avoid a dictator style of leadership. Instead, seek a majority consensus on solutions before making the final call. This is a common approach with agile teams. You do not need unanimous consensus, but everyone in the group of decision makers should agree to support the majority's solution even if they disagree.

COMMUNICATE WITH CLARITY

Once a decision is made, clearly communicate the solution to employees. In VUCA situations, where an issue could be complex, help your people understand how the issue impacts them directly as well as how the issue impacts the company, then explain how you reached your decision. Lean on managers and supervisors to field unanswered questions and alleviate any lingering confusion.

SELF-REFLECT

After you make a decision, look back at the process. What could have been done differently or better? How will you or the organization act next time? Strategic planning can help the organization respond quickly and decisively in the midst of an emergency. Take time to consider future VUCA challenges and how best to respond.

CALL TO ACTION

- Practice the five second rule before responding to a situation or comment.
- Create an inner circle of mentors and coworkers with whom you can bounce ideas around.
- Be open to new ideas and allow push-back when considering solutions.
- Take time to reflect on your actions and look for ways to continually improve.

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HOW CAN I MAKE MY SAFETY MEETINGS MORE EFFECTIVE?

Gathering drivers, dispatchers, and other members of the operations team together for a safety meeting is an opportunity that cannot be squandered. The cost and logistics of getting everyone together is formidable, so using this time wisely is essential. Three keys to make your safety meetings more effective are preparation, engagement, and enthusiasm.

Preparing for the meeting includes creating the agenda; setting up the location; communicating the logistics to attendees; and most importantly, developing the curriculum. Depending on the subjects to be covered, the training should include a mixture of presentation techniques. Each attendee learns differently, so presenting the material in multiple formats has a better chance of reaching everyone and keeping the audience engaged. Try to avoid standing in front of the room and lecturing. Instead, facilitate a discussion that involves interacting with attendees. Additionally, once the classroom portion is completed (which can include videos, PowerPoints, etc.), engage the audience with hands-on instruction. If the topic involves driving, get the audience behind the wheel of the truck and have them demonstrate their proficiency. The same goes for activities outside the truck or in the shop and loading dock. Adults learn best by knowing how the training affects their jobs directly and by having an opportunity to practice what is being taught.

As previously mentioned, engage the audience as much as possible using facilitation. There is nothing worse than having an instructor read slides to an audience or lecture 100% of the time. This delivery method may be necessary when reading a new regulation, company policy, or work procedure to the audience, but balance this by asking attendees to interpret what was covered or share stories that can help others relate to the material. Again, any time the audience can be actively involved in the training, the more likely they are to retain the knowledge and apply it to their jobs.

Lastly, bring the energy! Make the meeting fun and show some enthusiasm. Do this by greeting the participants and avoiding

speaking in monotone. You do not have to be Shakespeare, but practice your delivery ahead of time to get comfortable with the material and anticipate questions. Additionally, there are always one or two disgruntled attendees who would rather be doing something other than attending a mandatory training, especially if the meeting is being held during their off-duty time.

Presenters must win the audience over, so make your safety meeting the place to be. Do this by greeting attendees when they arrive and by thanking them for showing up. Next, consider opening the meeting with introductions and, if not available beforehand, ask audience members to share their years of experience and time with the company. Identifying audience demographics is a good way for the presenter to gauge how detailed the presentation needs to be, what topics may be irrelevant, and which delivery style might be most effective.

CALL TO ACTION

- **Schedule regular safety meetings that cover crash and injury prevention.**
- **Prepare safety meeting agendas in advance and include representatives from all departments.**
- **Practice the flow and delivery of safety topics, including facilitation techniques.**



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TIME TO DISCUSS RAILROAD CROSSINGS

A person or vehicle is hit by a train every three hours in North America, according to Operation Lifesaver®, a non-profit organization that specializes in rail safety education. This troubling statistic is one motor carriers should pay close attention to because it impacts operations in multiple ways. First and foremost, railroad crossings represent a significant hazard to truck driver safety as well as to employees who drive personal and company vehicles. No company can afford to lose its greatest assets, so please use the following talking points to guide your discussion with employees about the risks associated with railroad crossings.

LOCATION

The location and physical makeup of a railroad crossing contain several hazards to address with drivers. From inoperable warning lights and missing crossing arms to steep grades and obstructions that block the driver's view, each railroad crossing is unique. Teach drivers how to assess each situation. Before attempting to cross, they should also verify there is enough clearance on the opposite side of the tracks to clear the area immediately. Once they commit to crossing, they cannot stop.

TRAIN CHARACTERISTICS

It is not uncommon for drivers to misjudge the hazards at a railroad crossing. For example, trains are quieter and faster than people might think. They cannot stop on a dime, either. Operation Lifesaver® found that the average freight train traveling at 90 KM/H can take up to one mile or more to stop. That is the length of 18 football fields. Truck drivers cannot afford to try to beat the train hoping it will yield. Trains always have the right of way.

EQUIPMENT AND CARGO

The type of equipment being used and cargo being hauled need to be considered when a vehicle is crossing a railroad track. Drivers should comply with all laws and regulations. For example, hazardous materials (HM) haulers are required to stop at all railroad crossings. Additionally, lowboy trailers or trailers with skirts installed could get stuck on the tracks due to low ground clearance. Drivers need to be mindful of their vehicles' characteristics and how long it would take to cross the tracks from startup.

DRIVER BEHAVIOR

The decisions a driver makes before, during, and after crossing the tracks are key to preventing truck-train collisions, so motor carriers should use training to reinforce safe behaviors.

CALL TO ACTION

- Watch the 'Low Clearance' public service announcement on the Operation Lifesaver® website at oli.org.
- Accompany drivers on ride-alongs to practice safely crossing railroad tracks.
- Train all drivers on the hazards associated with railroad crossings.

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