

Honest feedback provides roadmap for industry



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I recently asked WIRT's Facebook followers what they think about the training they get in the industry, how it could be improved, and whether no longer being able to take children on the job has had an impact on the future pool of drivers.

Well, I must say, there was no shortage of opinions, which was great to see. People are passionate about this industry and its future and there were some great insights.

Respondents identified the following issues when it comes to attracting new people into trucking:

- In order to expand our appeal, we have to modernise the old-fashioned mindsets still prevalent in our industry
- The lack of exposure to the industry is severely limiting young people from seeing a real career pathway driving trucks
- We have to nurture and involve young people as potential recruits
- We still don't sell our industry as a positive and a necessary part of today's society

Responses confirmed what I've long advocated for, that in many respects, this industry needs to modernise its thinking. We're quick to acknowledge the hard times, long hours, and at times difficult conditions we experience on the job, but this does not appeal to our potential workforce. We need to flip the narrative around and extol the modern driving experience—computer-aided vehicles and safety systems and the positive interactions our drivers have with their customers and the general public.

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Now, I can imagine some of you older guys coughing up your coffee at this, but the reality is that younger workers demand better conditions and to be better recognised as individuals with individual needs. Our customers also have to help us out. If a driver is going to be delayed for 30 minutes or more, it's not unreasonable to expect facilities for them to have a proper rest and toilet break away from their vehicle. Relaxing the brain and stretching the muscles relieves stress and helps wellbeing. It may be a small thing, but it makes a big difference.

The issue of having kids in trucks while on the job is a big can of worms. While there are heaps of positives that can come from it—and let's be honest it does bring a smile to my face when I see children riding along in the cab—there are also horror stories of kids being killed or seriously hurt in rollover situations and other accidents.

But perhaps there's a compromise? Feedback certainly supports bringing kids along in the cab as a positive way of involving family and promoting the next generation of truck drivers. Making sure kids only ride when they are old enough to fit in the seat and ensure they have somewhere safe to be picked up and dropped off could be ways to get around restrictions on a customer's site.

Training and skills are another area of concern for drivers, with many feeling as though they had to gain knowledge almost by osmosis and from other drivers who have helped them out.

The RTF new 'Road to Success' programme may well be an answer to our prayers. I'm pumped that the industry has taken on the task of achieving a nationwide solution to better training and greater uptake of qualifications in a bid to turn around our workforce shortage. I also applaud the desire to appeal to a wider cross-section of our young people, including women, and I know there are heaps of operators out there keen to be a part of the scheme.

Please go to rtfnz.co.nz/training-the-road-to-success/ to find out more.

Some great feedback WIRT received

“When I was a kid, I remember getting out and watching the loader put logs on (at a safe distance), helping my old man chain up. The industry has changed so much, I fear my son will never be able to come to work and experience what I did. Having the experience I did as a child fuelled my passion and love for real trucks.”

– Jesse Marcel Wright

“All drivers need to work their way up through weights/size of trucks. But far more important is better training of all drivers, including being a passenger in a truck for several days, to find out how to behave around other traffic.”

– Don Campbell

“There isn't enough encouragement into the trucking industry. This also isn't helped by most trucking firms not allowing passengers on trips and various sites not allowing anyone else other than the truck driver. Going for rides in trucks was exactly what fuelled my interest in them.”

– Colette Jackson

“Finding companies who are prepared to take on newly licenced Class 2 drivers with no experience is a hard one, wanting to gain the experience in the industry to move up through the classes but it's proving really difficult.”

– Kirsty Bailey