

The Ultimate Guide to Onboarding Truck Drivers




How Top Fleets Set Drivers Up for Long-Term Success

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Onboarding means more than you might think



Welcome to *The Ultimate Guide to Onboarding Truck Drivers*, where we'll share the secrets top fleets use to set their drivers up for long-term success. Let's start by defining what driver onboarding really is, because it's actually a lot of things rolled into one.

Onboarding is the process of introducing a new driver to your fleet in a manner that allows them to learn both the hard and soft skills needed to be a happy, productive member of your team.

It might also be the most important thing you can do to reduce driver turnover.

Studies show that good onboarding practices can increase retention rates by up to 82%.

A strong onboarding process can also increase employee productivity by 60%.

All this means that, despite the literal meaning of the word, onboarding never really ends. It may be front-loaded, but the process is ongoing.

Take a look at the major components of onboarding and you'll see what we mean:

- Marketing: establishing your reputation among potential drivers.
- Recruiting: building the relationship from day zero.
- Orientation: empowering your drivers with company knowledge.
- Ongoing development: ensuring your drivers keep pace with industry changes and offer them opportunities for growth.
- Fostering community: providing drivers with a sense of belonging.

When done well, onboarding helps you retain drivers for the long haul, stay ultra compliant, and build a strong community that everyone in your company wants to be a part of.

**So how do you deliver
best-in-class driver
onboarding? Let's get into it!**

Make a good impression in advance



It's never been easier for drivers to connect with one another, whether by good old CB or on social media. This also means that drivers probably already have a preconceived impression of you before they consider applying.

If you want to know what drivers really think about you, then it's vital to be part of the conversation. This means that your *marketing* needs to keep potential drivers in mind.

- Be active on social media at least once a day—ideally, more often.
- Ensure your social media posts encourage two-way dialogue between you and drivers.
- Make sure the positive aspects of driving for you shine through on social: your company culture, sense of community, and tangible benefits, of course.
- Monitor Google and Indeed reviews to see what current and former drivers are saying about you, and take their comments seriously.
- Be ready to respond to any negative feedback. This shows drivers that you take their concerns to heart.

To help shape the conversation around your fleet, you need to participate in it. This will help build your brand, and create a positive image of you before a driver ever reads one of your job posts. Speaking of which, keep reading and we'll talk more later about Employer Value Propositions and how top fleets use them to stay on message at every touchpoint...

Onboarding starts from day zero

Onboarding begins long before orientation.

It actually starts the moment you respond to a driver's application for the first time. From that moment, onboarding has begun, and it continues through recruiting, orientation and beyond.

That's why it's crucial to ensure each interaction is positive. A single bad experience early on can send the relationship in a negative direction. A driver may ghost you during recruiting, after a few weeks, or simply never be truly committed to the job.

Here's how to create a strong onboarding process, right from the recruiting phase.

Respond fast

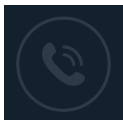
When you receive an application from a qualified driver, be sure to reply as quickly as you can.

This is crucial for new driver retention! Studies show that **the longer you wait to reply** to a prospective candidate, the more likely they are to ghost you during the onboarding process.

Be prompt and to the point. This way, drivers don't become impatient, or get scooped up by somebody else.

70% of people who ghosted during recruitment

did so after not hearing back within a week of their first interview.



Set clear expectations during the very first conversation.

Your first phone call will set the tone for a driver's experience with you, so make sure you get it right on the first try.



Get straight to the brass tacks.

Share what will happen during the recruiting process, when it will happen, and how it will happen. Describe what your runs look like, and be clear and honest on home time. Explain how pay and benefits will work. Remember, honesty and transparency are vital!



Relationship building begins right from the start.

It's a simple fact: people like to work with people they like.

This is why you should do more than list off your runs, your pay, and your hours. Drivers already know to expect that. What they want to know is who YOU are as a fleet, and why they'll enjoy being part of it.



Go into detail about what it's like to drive for you.

Explain your corporate values, and show, don't tell, how you see your drivers as people.

A great way to do this is to describe what success looks like at your fleet. This helps generate enthusiasm from your candidates, and helps rule out drivers who are a better fit elsewhere so you can both move on.

Be clear about what you expect from your drivers and what drivers should expect from you.

Interviewing for a great fit

It can be easy to fall into the “say and spray” routine during interviews: rattling off an endless list of how great you are to work for, while not asking the driver much about themselves.

Instead, it pays to have an empathic approach during recruiting. Do more than find out what the driver’s skills are – find out who they are as a person.

Here are our five rules for a foolproof interview process.

Listen to what driver candidates have to say and truly get to know them.

You can do this by asking questions about the *person*, not just the *driver*. This will give you a clearer idea of what they’re looking for, and if you’re the right fit for one another.

- What do they enjoy? What makes them tick?
- What are their goals in life and at work?
- What’s their family life like?
- Do they prefer long runs or getting home daily?
- What do they really need from their career?

Find out why they’re on the job hunt.

It’s a good idea to find out why a candidate is looking for a new position. This will also help you determine if they’re the right fit for your fleet.

Ask questions like:

- Why are you leaving your current position?
- What could your current employer have done to make you want to stay?
- What caught your eye about our job opening?

Be honest and transparent.

Be sure to tell the whole truth about who you are as a fleet, even if you suspect it won't win over a particular candidate. What's it really like to drive for you?

- This will help ensure a great fit beyond just the driver's qualifications.
- You'll also be able to identify a bad fit, and to avoid hiring the wrong drivers.
- The driver can also be sure your fleet is the right place for them.

Maintain open and clear lines of communication.

Timely, clear communication can mean the difference between hiring and losing a star driver.

- It's a good idea to communicate in their preferred manner, whether it's text, phone, email or other.
- It bears repeating: respond within 24 hours every single time!
- Stay positive, energetic and sell the culture of your fleet.

Ensure you have full buy-in from the driver.

This will help you avoid ghosting later on. Ask leading questions that reveal their commitment level, such as:

- So, when can you start orientation?
- Which types of runs do you prefer?
- Where can we send you the login information for training?

If your candidate responds in detail and with enthusiasm, it's a good sign they 100% want to be a part of your fleet.

**Remember: drivers are
interviewing you as much as
you're interviewing them.**



Know thyourself

Do you know your fleet's employer value proposition, or EVP? Just as you have a value proposition for your customers, it's important to have one for employees and potential employees.

If you need help identifying your EVP, [this article can help](#). The exercise only takes a few hours, and it will forever help you identify the drivers who are the best fit, and the drivers who aren't—even if they're otherwise highly qualified. You'll get the right drivers in your trucks, and be ready for the next steps.

Once you know your EVP, there are two key components to bringing it to life:

Put your EVP in writing, then share it with the entire company.

This will help you get everyone (recruiters, safety team, etc.) on the same page, telling the same story.

Be consistent across all departments.

This will help ensure everyone is sharing the same story with new drivers. Doing this will help drive retention rates up.



Ace the early days



Once you've decided to bring on a new driver, onboarding begins in earnest. Here's how to make sure they stay engaged and excited during pre-boarding and orientation.

Be loud and clear: you're excited they're joining the team.

Carry over your energy and enthusiasm from the recruiting phase!

- A warm welcome email, text or phone call can set the tone for a positive experience.
- Provide drivers with a clear checklist of required documents, and a dedicated point of contact for any questions.
- Provide information on company-issued devices, and greenlight access to essential portals and apps.

Make orientation a breeze.

The active onboarding phase can get pretty hectic. Make everything as convenient as possible for the drivers. This shows you value their time.

- Be organized and efficient, eliminate multiple trips to your facility, and avoid long wait times between checkpoints during the process.
- Cut down multiple trips to your terminal by offering remote online training.
- Digital document signing and handling makes onboarding more efficient and convenient, and sets you up to be ultra compliant.
- Give your drivers a full tour of your facilities and introduce them to your support staff, including mechanics, driver managers, security officers, reception staff and so on.

Early impressions matter!

Before you invite new hires to your terminal, make sure the space is welcoming – especially the drivers' lounge, where they'll be spending a lot of their time.

- If these areas are dingy, poorly lit and full of broken furniture, drivers will assume you don't care much about them as human beings (the same goes for the hotel if you're putting them up for orientation!)
- A good rule of thumb? Ask yourself if you'd enjoy hosting a gathering in the driver's lounge. If the answer is no, then look into sprucing up the spaces your drivers use on a regular basis.

REMEMBER:
**“training” and “development”
are two different things.**

Training refers to the tools and procedures your drivers need to know for their jobs.

Development refers to supporting drivers throughout their careers, as they grow the hard and soft skills needed to thrive.

Ensure training and development cover the following:

- Trucking regulations, such as
 - FMCSA regulations
 - Federal and local traffic laws
 - CVSA inspections, including roadside ones
 - Border crossing rules and protocol and, if applicable
 - International traffic laws, if applicable
- Hours of Service (HOS) regulations
- Cybersecurity
- Any technology the driver will have to use (ELD, telematic device, etc.)
- Compliance, and staying safe on the road
- Emergency preparedness training and handling unexpected situations
- Special freight handling protocols (tank, flatbed, reefer, hazmat, etc.)
- Your specific truck models, pre-trip inspections and maintenance best practices
- Your route-planning tools and software
- Customer service and building strong client relationships

For brand-new drivers, offer ample training in all of the above

Review essential policies, including:

- Company safety protocol
- Accident reporting procedures
- Company cybersecurity protocol
- Fair hiring practices
- Compensation and benefits
- All HR policies and expectations
- Breakdown and mechanical reporting

Avoid the firehose effect.

That is, unloading all your orientation information in a deluge, and in a short time span.

Too much information, too fast, is nearly impossible for a person to retain. Rolling orientation out over a longer period of time improves information retention, gives drivers time to process what they've learned, and ask questions for anything left unclear.

Here are some ways to make that happen.

- Roll out orientation over several sessions, with at least a day off in between each. Then there's no worry of rushing a driver out onto the road when they aren't fully prepped for their role.
- Orientation on demand via a digital platform can let drivers learn on their own time and pace.
- Remote training saves drivers time, money and a trip into your terminal.

Remember: consistency counts!

Once a driver has accepted a position, there's generally a handoff from the recruiter to other key people on your team, like the driver manager or trainer. This is where it becomes crucial that your messaging is consistent across the board, so there are no surprises or disappointments.

Make sure your driver is aware of this handoff, too, so they know exactly what to expect, or more precisely, who to expect!

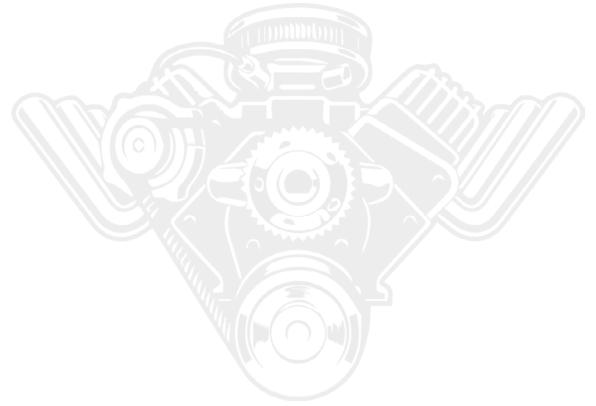
- It's worth repeating: keep messaging consistent, from recruiting to onboarding to on the road.
- Make sure your whole team is on the same page for messaging.
 - This goes back to your EVP
- If your message is disjointed or inconsistent, this can make drivers feel unsure. Always enforce key deadlines (and make sure they're known).
- Always acknowledge receipt of an item! You can automate replies for every time a driver has submitted onboarding information.

The road evaluation. One thing we see over and over again is that drivers are often highly experienced at driving, but have minimal training on how to interact with new people and customers. This can often cause friction early in someone's tenure, if they feel their driver trainer is too blunt or uncaring.

It goes back to what we said in the beginning: treat your drivers like human beings, and not just an item to be checked off a list.

- Empower your driver trainers with HR development sessions, to help them speak to drivers with empathy and understanding.
- Just like with recruiters, encourage driver trainers to ask open-ended questions, such as "What kind of loads have you hauled before?"

Keep their motors running



The first 90 days of a driver's career with you are the most crucial to your retention rates. 28% of recruits leave their job within 3 months.

That's why a good onboarding program lasts for months (or in our opinions, forever).

Even once a driver is on the road for you, there's still a ghosting risk. We see this happen all too often at fleets. And it's not just a trucking-specific problem: 37% of job seekers have admitted to ghosting an employer in the past!

Keep in mind:

- If a driver ghosts mid-run, an abandoned truck can be a huge cost and effort to recover
- If a driver is a no-show due to ghosting, you'll have loads that can't be dispatched
- If deliveries can't be made (or completed), it can have a negative impact on your reputation with clients

Here's the good news: **Drivers who feel appreciated are more likely to stick with you for the long haul.**

That's why we like to say that onboarding never truly ends. The best fleets make sure their drivers always know they're now valued members of a hardworking team. Here's how you make it happen.

Introduce them to the entire company

- Put an announcement in your newsletter and all-points bulletins.
- Create a welcome post for all your social media channels.
- Share a little something about new drivers with your team.

This shows drivers that you're excited to have them on board, and helps humanize the person behind the face – or the wheel.

Immerse your new drivers in your company's unique culture

Remember that employer value proposition we talked about? That's how you ensure your company culture is welcoming, not insular, and easy for new drivers to become a part of.

Start by sharing-and living-these three things:

- Your mission – what makes your fleet tick?
- Your vision – what does your fleet want to become?
- Your values – how will you treat the drivers who will get you there?

When you encourage new drivers to become part of a unique culture:

- It makes your relationship strong, real, and lasting.
- It keeps communication open and helps you keep listening.
- It makes drivers feel like MVPs and that they're part of something great.

Shifting your mindset from *Company Culture* to *Company as a Community.*

Stay tuned for more content about this important topic in the near future.

Offer branded swag

- Make sure they can sport your brand from the very start.
- Create pieces drivers actually want to wear! Hoodies, hats, toques (any Canadian will tell you that's the right word!) and even car blankets.

Show your support

- Make your terminals comfortable: free WIFI, clean facilities, easy chairs and couches in the driver lounge.
- Show thoughtfulness: things like a covered area for tarping loads and doing pre-inspections make drivers' lives easier and more efficient.

Assign everybody a driver mentor

- Younger drivers can get a lot from a driver mentor in the early weeks and months.
- More experienced drivers can still lean on a designated colleague to learn your ways of working.
- Both can learn the “hidden team knowledge” that drives up everyone’s performance: the best parking, routes, fuel stations, and tricks for driving for you.
- Passing along experience and your company’s authentic truth is valuable to everyone, no matter how experienced or inexperienced the driver may be.
- This encourages open dialogue and knowledge-sharing among your drivers, and builds team knowledge.

Make compliance easy

- Self-serve document uploads and policy renewals can save them time.
- Automated alerts for documents coming due can make sure they don’t miss any key dates.
- Avoiding paperwork fits drivers’ lives. The more they can do on their ELD, tablet or phone, the better!

Support ongoing development

We’ve all heard the expression: learning never stops. For truck drivers, it’s no different. Make sure they have access to the courses they need to keep up and keep growing.

- Offer courses at regular intervals so drivers can maintain their skills.
- Whenever relevant new laws and regulations are passed, be sure to create mandatory learning sessions.
- Cybersecurity is quickly becoming a top issue, so be sure to offer regular training sessions!
- Include managerial and leadership courses, for drivers who are looking to move out from behind the wheel.

Keep communicating once they're hired – and forever!

It can be easy to let communication fall off once your new driver is rolling. This can leave new drivers feeling disillusioned about all the “teamwork” promises you made during recruiting. Here's some simple ways to keep the lines of communication open.

- Put yourself in your drivers' shoes: what news would you like to hear if you were them? What kind of recognition would you like to receive?
- Celebrate your drivers' professional and personal milestones. This shows you care about them as humans, and not just drivers.
- Send Happy Birthday messages to your drivers. If they're on the road that day, it can make a huge difference.
- Send out holiday greetings for all major holidays.

Regular check-ins

We've found it pays to be proactive with a driver's progress. If you're checking in regularly to see how they're doing, both on and off the road, your drivers will feel more valued.

- Schedule regular check-in calls to monitor their trips, interactions with clients, and so on.
- Encourage your drivers to share any issues they'd like to address, and then make sure your team looks into them.
- Provide ongoing support with follow-up meetings, weekly reviews, and just to ask how they're doing.

Bring back the driver meeting

This used to be a thing. And it still should be! What does the good old driver meeting mean for your fleet? Your veteran drivers will know, and they can help you craft a driver meeting that works for you and your team.

Thanks to modern technology, virtual driver meetings are a possibility that

could work for your drivers. Remember, it's easier to get everyone in one place, no matter where they are.

By keeping the lines of communication open, new drivers feel like valued members of your fleet, and are more likely to want to stay with you for many years to come.

So how do you make onboarding great?

Onboarding a new driver begins with the very first moment you make contact, or even before that.

And for fleets with great driver retention rates, onboarding never truly ends.

01 Onboarding is all about making things easy, making the driver feel a sense of belonging, and helping the driver feel valued.

02 Finding the right fit, for them and for you, is vital.

03 A smooth and efficient onboarding process is a massive contributor to long-term retention.

04 Drivers talk, so stellar onboarding will build your reputation as a stellar employer.

Give drivers a great onboarding experience with TruckRight software.

It was built by truckers to provide a stellar driver experience from recruitment to retirement, with a strong focus on retention.

- Get them off to a great start with remote onboarding they can complete from anywhere.
- Documents can be completed, signed and submitted by drivers electronically.
- Automated text and email messages help keep them informed and engaged.
- A seamless learning management system (LMS) lets them take training from anywhere.
- Ensure airtight compliance from the recruiting phase onwards.
- Manage many key recruiting, onboarding and compliance tasks “automagically.”



Learn more or book a no-obligation demo at
truckright.com

