

Transportation Safety

Training ADVISOR

October 2023

Customer Service

Your drivers are the shining
face of your company!

6 tips for managing an
under-performer

Dealing with unhappy
campers

Time to let the good ads roll

Information and resources to help your drivers operate safely



J. J. Keller
& Associates, Inc.
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MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

Time to turn on the charm and let the good ads roll

Today's business climate is incredibly competitive and motor carriers are always looking for ways to stand out. One of the best strategies to capitalize on is excellent customer service, especially from your drivers.

Although customer service is important at every stage of the customer's journey with your company, your drivers are usually the only person the customer will actually see face-to-face. Make sure that face is a good one that represents the company in a positive and competent light.

Operating the vehicle

How your driver operates and cares for their vehicle can make a lasting impression on current and potential customers. Your trucks may travel all over the country, and anyone who's been stuck on a multi-hour drive behind the same CMV for miles on end knows there's plenty of time to form an impression. Ever cursed a company's name because the driver was frustrating to share the road with? To avoid this, advise your drivers to:

- Keep a safe following distance;
- Stay in the right lane on upgrades, or use the slow travel lane;
- Avoiding caravanning and getting too close to other vehicles;
- Take extra caution in towns; and
- Be courteous with their headlights.

Driver appearance

A neat, well-groomed driver projects experience, capability, and authority — an excellent combination for your company. There's no need to dress to the nines, but clean clothing with no rips and tears goes a long way. Your drivers might also get better service at loading docks and more respect from the general public.

Equipment appearance

The vehicle should always be clean and well-maintained to create a good impression. Dirty vehicles, loose tarps, or dragging chains can send the message you and the driver don't care about the company or its equipment. Think of company trucks as cross-country rolling advertisements and:

- Display the company name on all four sides,
- Keep the wheel wells, windshields, and tarps clean,
- Clean the outer walls regularly during inspections, and
- Avoid dirty mudflaps. ♦



Lucero Truszkowski

Lucero Truszkowski joined J. J. Keller & Associates, Inc. as an Associate Editor in 2022. Lucero edits, writes, and researches content on a variety of topics, including transportation, human resources, and driver training. She is currently earning a Master of Science (MS) in Professional Writing from New York University.



TRAINING BLUEPRINT — CUSTOMER SERVICE

Drivers are the shining face of your company

In today's business world, the majority of contact between a company and its customers is done over the phone. For many of your company's customers, your driver is the only representative that has a face-to-face relationship with actual people.

Because of this, your driver's conduct, attitude, appearance, and attention to customer service all play an important role in how your company is viewed by current and potential customers.

TIP: Open your session to a discussion on the importance of positive image and good customer service. Make sure the conversation remains constructive and does not become a complaint session.

Conduct and image

Appearance: A neat appearance goes a long way in providing a professional and positive image.

Timeliness: Punctuality is also important, so drivers should always be on time. It's entirely possible that a customer may be organizing their schedule around when the driver arrives. If the driver is going to be late for an appointment, it's best practice to call the customer and let them know of the situation. In the long run, this can save time and potential problems for the driver, your company, and your customer.

Attention to detail: When making a delivery, the driver should make every effort to follow your customer's company rules, including any special delivery or pick-up instructions. The driver should carefully handle all cargo, making deliveries as easy and incident-free as possible.

Attitude: The driver should be courteous when dealing with all customer personnel, never taking out frustrations on or arguing with the customer. Extra caution should always be used when driving on a customer's property, which includes following posted speed limits and watching for pedestrians.

A lasting impression: Ultimately, the driver needs to remember that a customer's impression can lose or gain business for your company. Drivers should make every effort to be neat, courteous, punctual, and safe.

TIP: Make sure you distribute and discuss any policies that your company has addressing this issue during your training session.

Handling an angry customer

When a customer is angry, how the driver handles the situation can make or break your company's relationship with that customer.

The driver should:

- **Not take a customer's anger personally.** Advise your drivers to remain calm and courteous and to focus on fixing the problem that caused the customer's anger, even if the problem isn't your company's fault. Your driver will receive the brunt of the anger, but assure them ahead of time that the anger is likely misdirected.
- **Apologize for the situation.** The driver doesn't need to take blame but should still apologize to help foster good relations. Apologies can help quickly resolve a problem and help move toward a solution.
- **Express concern that things didn't go as planned.** It's okay to own up to mistakes, and most customers find this approach honest and transparent. However, be sure to avoid patronizing the customer.
- **Assure the customer that the company will do its best to make things right.** Even if there's nothing that can be done in the moment, this assurance can have a big impact on morale.
- **Determine what steps the company can take to make things right.** It never hurts to ask the customer how they would like to see a problem resolved.
- **Try to come up with a solution.** When possible, it's ideal to find a solution before leaving the customer. This ends the experience on a positive note.

If the driver needs to return to your company to work with management to correct the problem, have the driver assure the customer that a representative of the company will reach out as soon as possible. The driver should then follow-up to help build good relationships with that customer. ♦



TIP: Have your drivers practice being the angry customer and the driver who is dealing with them in role-playing sessions during your training. This can help build empathy and creative mitigation strategies.



TRAINING HANDOUT — CUSTOMER SERVICE

Your vehicle: Advertising on wheels

A first impression is a lasting one! The way you operate and care for your vehicle can make a long-term impression on current customers, potential customers, and the public.

Driving habits

Projecting a professional image on the road includes following all laws and regulations, as well as practicing good driving habits. These are some of the best habits to create a compelling rolling advertisement:

- Follow the posted speed limits;
- Maintain a safe distance between vehicles;
- Make sure there is a clear path when changing lanes;
- Signal at the appropriate time when planning to turn;
- Never use the vehicle's size to intimidate others; and
- Be aware of other drivers, vehicles, and the flow of traffic.



Vehicle appearance

The vehicle should be neat, clean, and well maintained. A dirty or poorly maintained vehicle, loose tarp, or dragging chains sends the message that your driver and your company don't care.

Factor in vehicle neatness and condition when performing regular vehicle inspections. ♦





TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE — CUSTOMER SERVICE

1. You don't need to look professional because all you do is drive the truck.
 - A. True
 - B. False

2. After dealing with an angry customer, you should:
 - A. Explain to the customer that their anger is misplaced
 - B. Ignore the customer and let the problem solve itself
 - C. Assure the customer that a representative of the company will reach out as soon as possible
 - D. Take the blame for all the customer's complaints

3. You should know the customer's company policies for deliveries and drop offs.
 - A. True
 - B. False

4. As a professional driver, you should:
 - A. Use your vehicle's size to intimidate others
 - B. Ignore the appearance of your vehicle
 - C. Be aware of other drivers and the flow of traffic
 - D. All of the above

5. If you are going to be late for a delivery, you should:
 - A. Call ahead to alert the customer
 - B. Continue to follow road rules, even if it increases the delay
 - C. Contact the carrier to explain the delay
 - D. Both B & C

NAME: _____ DATE: _____



6 tips for managing the performance of an under-performer

It is frustrating for a manager when an employee isn't performing up to potential. But in these times of high turnover and worker shortages, a manager may choose to accept mediocre performance rather than scare the employee away.



Statistics legitimize the risk of an employee quitting if second-rate performance is pointed out. In a survey of 1,000 full-time U.S. workers by the performance management software provider Reflektive, 85 percent of those questioned said they would consider leaving their company due to a negative performance review, with half reporting they were "very likely" or "extremely likely" to do so.

A manager might argue that an under-performing employee is more cost effective than having to fill an open position, but letting a poor performer coast isn't cost-free. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, the estimated cost of a poor performer can be at least 30 percent of the employee's first-year expected earnings. So, if a low performer earns \$100,000 per year, it's costing the employer \$30,000 to keep them.

Effectively managing an under-performer

When it comes time to meet with the employee in question, whether in a formal review or a simple one-on-one check-in, here are six steps that might help bring their performance closer to, or even beyond, expectations.

1. **Make the employee aware of their potential.** Just because you see their potential doesn't mean they do. A confidence boost can work wonders.
2. **Figure out if anything or anyone is in their way.** Is a team member being uncooperative? Is another

department not responding to requests and making it difficult for this employee to do their job? Try to discern what can be done to eliminate these roadblocks.

3. **Support their needs.** Additional training might get the employee up to speed. Or perhaps they are distracted by something externally and could benefit from counseling. While you don't want to pry into their personal life, you could provide information on your Employee Assistance Program (EAP).
4. **Look for opportunities where the under-performer can shine.** Build their confidence by assigning them to projects where they are most likely to succeed and then acknowledge those successes while making future assignments progressively more challenging.
5. **Look in the mirror.** Are you limiting this employee's performance? Maybe you are not being clear about expectations. Could you communicate goals better? Is micromanagement keeping them from growing?
6. **Consider the possibility that the problem is under-engagement, not under-performance.** Maybe the employee is simply bored. Ask them what would make work more meaningful or rewarding.

These steps should culminate in the creation of a plan. Outline what each of you will do, figure out a time frame for implementing the plan, and schedule check-ins to monitor the employee's progress. ♦



Key to remember: A poor performer shouldn't be ignored simply because a manager is afraid to rock the boat and risk them leaving. A bad attitude can be contagious. Other team members could begin copying the work habits of the poor performer, which could affect the whole team's productivity, quality of work, and morale.

Driver training: Dealing with unhappy campers

Most driver-trainers have had to deal with this at some point in their career —unhappy campers. These are the drivers who don't want to attend your training session and use a certain degree of hostility to express their feelings.

Preparation can go a long way in making sure your training session is constructive and stays on track, resulting in a productive session for those in attendance.

The following are a few tips you can use to deal with an unhappy camper.

- **Stay cool.** Becoming angry or defensive affects your authority and credibility with your students.
- **Never respond with sarcasm.** Again, this affects your authority and credibility.

- If interrupted, it is acceptable to ask that the **remark or question be held** until you finish what you are saying.
- **Do not suppress hostile comments** from an attendee, but try to keep them to a minimum. If the attendee's hostile comments start to take over the session, explain to the attendee that their actions are preventing others from receiving this information.
- **Always be honest** — tell the truth. Attendees can see through a falsehood. Your authority and credibility can be affected if you do not tell the truth.
- **Pay attention** to your body language.
 - Pointing at your students or placing your hands on your hips are non-verbal signs that you are scolding your students.
 - Folding your arms across your chest is a nonverbal signal that you are on the defense and are trying to protect yourself.
- If all else fails, call for a short break and **directly address the hostile attendee**. Reference your company policy regarding employee conduct. If necessary, involve your human resources department. ♦



Key to remember: Being prepared can assist when dealing with someone who doesn't want to attend a training session.



Next Month's Topic: Dock and Warehouse Safety

Docks and warehouses can be busy and dangerous places. It's essential that your drivers understand the unique hazards of working in these places and how to proceed safely. ♦



Expert Help: Questions of the Month

Question: *Are there laws for having our trucks clean/washed?*

Answer: Typically, this issue (washing/cleanliness of vehicle) isn't specifically addressed in state law or regulation. A motor carrier and driver are expected to ensure that all information on the vehicle (license plate, placards, USDOT number, etc.) is clearly visible to law enforcement and the general public.

Question: *Are there regulations surrounding mud flaps?*

Answer: Mudflaps are a state issue, so there are no federal regulations for them. Because of this, the regulations vary from state to state. Most states simply say the vehicle must have mudflaps/splashguards on the rear of the vehicle that are adequate to keep spray and debris tossed up by the tires from hitting the windshields of following traffic. Some states have specific measurements, some don't. For interstate operations, there are a few states that provide specific measurements for mudflaps, and these are the ones that "set the standards" that interstate trucks usually follow. The most common standard is that the mud flaps must reach to within eight inches of the ground.



Question: *Any idea on where I can come up with something for my company policy that covers hygiene and truck cleanliness?*

Answer: . A good starting point might be: "...All drivers for the Company are expected to dress, look, and act like professionals. Maintaining a positive, professional, and safe public image is extremely important. Our drivers are our most visible company representatives to the general public and to our customers, and need to maintain the highest personal appearance and conduct standards..." ♦

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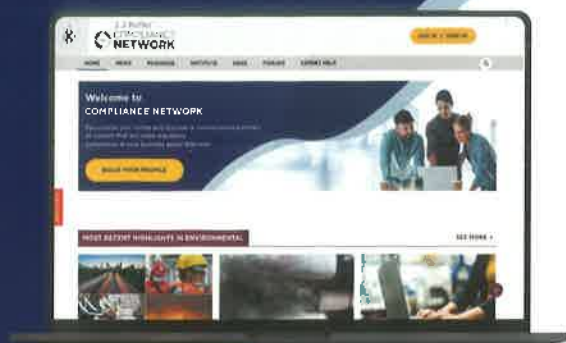
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