

Knowledgeable, reliable drivers a necessity to ensure transport industry survival

With almost the entire economy in lockdown during 2020, trucks were often the only means of keeping the country's economy ticking - ensuring food and medical supplies reached people across the country. Without skilled, committed truck drivers capable of safely operating multi-ton machines, much of the commerce in South Africa would grind to a halt.

Driver training is arguably the single biggest intervention that can be made to reduce South Africa's high road accident rate. One wouldn't think this needs to be said to the transport industry itself - an industry which suffers the most from accidents, yet is often seen as being part of the problem.



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Unexperienced/untrained drivers lead to poor driving skills, lie at the heart of the problem, a tragedy which sees 16,000 people die on roads each year and 62% of the accidents involving trucks.

Arnoux Maré, founder and CEO of Innovative Solutions Group and Innovative Staffing Solutions which employs and outsources over 7,500 truck drivers, explains that the challenge in upgrading the driving skills of Code 14 professional drivers in South Africa lies in the shortage of such drivers.

Urgent need for driver training

"In 2021 there is a shortage of at least 3,000 truck and bus drivers in the South African transport sector, a shortage which leads to unskilled and illegal foreign drivers being recruited. Drivers are in such high demand that employers simply do not have the capacity to allow them time off to enhance their skills and improve their abilities. They are required to be behind the wheel every available moment," says Maré.

A further consequence of the shortage is that some employers may also be reluctant to train drivers as they become more marketable and can be poached by competitors.

This short-term view does the logistics sector no favours, argues Maré, pointing out that drivers are the custodians of what is a R480bn industry. Turning it from being 'part of the problem' to being 'part of the solution' requires inculcating industry-wide long-term thinking that values above all else expert driving skills.

As part of this long-term thinking, Innovative Learning Solutions (ILS) in June 2020 established a new driver training centre in Boksburg, Gauteng, aimed not only at South African Code 14 truck drivers, but training TETA accredited skills to a market including Code 10 drivers. Thousands of drivers now have access to invaluable skills development, advanced driving courses, and employability enhancement opportunities. The centre prides itself on offering both the hard and soft skills drivers desperately need.

Explaining the urgent need for driver training, Maré says Covid-19 was a wake-up call. With almost the entire economy in lockdown, trucks were in many instances the only means of keeping the country's economy ticking, ensuring food, medical supplies can still reach consumers.

"Consumers and businesses increasingly recognised that without skilled, committed truck drivers, most of the commerce in South Africa would grind to a halt. This has pushed driver training to the top of the priority list of the transport sector, where it justly belongs."

Development and career support

Maré says: "The TETA-accredited centre was established by ILS to give truck drivers and their employers easy and affordable access to training, development and career support, while making these drivers and our roads, safer. This adds tangible value to the companies that employ them. ILS believe forward-looking employers would be willing to fund special designed courses to fit their needs and benefit them by ensuring save delivery of all cargo without delays."

While the immediate focus of the centre is specific accredited certification and specialised developed skills for Code 14 level, accreditation is also being sought at the moment for full Certification in Professional driving from code 10 to 14, for which approval is expected by July 2021.

The courses go well beyond theoretical and practical driving experience and safety training, but also get unemployed drivers ready for the market with job interview and communication skills.

The centre offers certain courses that simultaneously put unemployed drivers through a full medical exam, polygraph, reference and criminal check and provides the trainee with these results as a hugely valuable CV 'add-on' that significantly enhances their job prospects. After working with these drivers, ILS also is able to share a skills and character reference letter – which further enhances the driver's job prospects.

"The training helps make drivers more aware of situations they may encounter on the road, such as heavy traffic, crime, bad weather conditions, fatigue and other drivers behaving irresponsibly, even faulty vehicle conditions. We help drivers understand how to respond to those conditions appropriately but ultimately provide logistics companies with the knowledge that drivers are adequately skilled for the South African roads," says Maré.

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