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# Are you a professional truck driver?

**B**eing a truck driver is not just a job, it is a profession that requires a lot of different skills, even if the general public and the news media struggle to understand this at times. This sometimes negative perception of our industry is something that we all encounter on a daily basis. The important thing to remember is that each and every one of us has the power to change this perception by the way we behave on the road, by the way we react, interact, and engage with everyone we come into contact with.

When you are driving a truck down the road, you are basically driving a large mobile billboard that not only represents you as a person, but represents the business you contract to, or the client whose freight you have on board, or for that matter, the whole trucking industry. If you understand this concept, then chances are you are a professional driver. If you fail to understand this, then you are probably one of the minority that brings the image of the whole trucking industry down. As a professional driver, you have a responsibility to do your bit to help create a better public image for the whole trucking industry.

As a professional truck driver, one of the best ways to improve the trucking industry's image is to be a courteous and safe driver. We all know that most other road users struggle to understand the issues that you face on the road each day, including how hard it can be to negotiate your way down narrow roads that are barely big enough for your vehicle, let alone all the other road users that need to share the space with you, the issues you have at busy roundabouts, the people who pass you in the most

inappropriate places, and the people who cut you off and then slam on the brakes expecting you to stop in a ridiculously short distance.

We can put their behaviour down to ignorance and stupidity, but aren't some of us just as bad? How often have you seen a truck driver tailgating a slower vehicle, travelling too fast for the conditions, talking on their cell phone, not wearing a seatbelt, using their engine brakes when there is no real need, or making inappropriate comments over the CB radio?

So how do you become a professional truck driver?

- Being safe is a key factor. Being safe is a mindset that every professional driver needs each time they get into their truck. Safety plays a significant part in a driver's daily performance. Every day should start with the driver completing a pre-trip inspection of their truck/trailer and load; this will ensure that all



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equipment is functioning properly, and that you are not endangering yourself or other people.

- Present yourself as a professional. It's all in your attitude; leave your ego at home. Don't try to teach people a lesson, or it may be you who gets taught a lesson. Be professional and lead by example. You are driving a mobile billboard for your business, how do you want your business to be remembered? Be the better driver by driving patiently and sympathetically, this will make other people around you drive better as well. Being a professional driver requires skill and patience.
- Be a safe and courteous driver. Back off, it's not a race, slow down. If it takes you ten minutes longer on a trip, it's not the end of the world. But it may well be if you don't make it at all. If you can see that someone needs to get into the traffic, then let them in. One day they may return the favour. If someone lets you in, acknowledge them with a polite wave of thanks. You are driving a large truck, don't tailgate, and give other road users some room. Remember it takes you a lot longer to stop if you need to stop in a hurry. If you are holding up a line of vehicles, pull over when it is safe to let them past. Give them a break and they will get out of your road.
- Other road users are not mind readers. If you need to change lane or turn a corner, use your indicators, how else are other road users supposed to know your intentions? When visibility is low, turn on your lights so people can see you before it's too late. If you come across learner drivers, remember, everyone needs to learn sometime so give them a break with a bit of space and



patience, then they can learn by your example to be a good driver.

- Be a happy driver and relax. If you are stressed, angry or have something else on your mind, take a deep breath or go for a walk around the truck so that you can concentrate on the driving. Remember to forgive and forget. Other people don't set out to annoy you. If they make a mistake, let it go, it's not the end of the world. If they are a habitual idiot, it will catch up with them eventually. Acknowledge a good turn with a polite wave.
- Be fit for work. As a professional driver, it is

your responsibility to ensure that you are fit for work each day. If you have issues with your health, go and see a health professional and get some good advice to get you back on the road to recovery. Don't become another statistic. Allow enough time in your life to get at least six-to-eight hours of good quality sleep each night. If you think you are suffering from sleep apnoea or fatigue, visit your health professional. Driving sleep deprived or suffering from chronic fatigue is as dangerous as driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs. Don't drive impaired, if you have had a few too many drinks the

night before, don't get behind the wheel. If you are experiencing stress from family or personal relationships, don't bring it to work. If you are not coping with the situation then seek some assistance.

- Comply with the law. Are all your licences and endorsements up to date? Remember to renew these before they expire. Nearly all heavy truck drivers are required to maintain a log book and comply with the work time regulations. If you are not sure of these requirements, it may be time to book yourself in for a log book refresher course to make sure that you are compliant. ■