

How the logistics industry can make South African roads safer

South African roads are among the most dangerous in the world. Whether the authorities will ever be able to reduce the accident and death rates is unlikely. Many of us drive relatively short distances on a day-to-day basis, with less opportunity to refine our long distance driving skills.

Embarking on hour upon hour of consistent, tedious driving over the holiday seasons, we may be a potential danger to ourselves and others when exposed to the challenges which we are not accustomed to. These risks and challenges are what the long distance professional driver faces every day.

Chantal Walley, CEO of The CONFIDANT Group is very positive about the role which the logistics industry has in actually improving safety on our roads. She says: “The single largest group of drivers and road users are the long haul drivers. It stands to reason that an improvement in the performance of this influential group will have a very significant impact on road safety.”

Walley says, “In any enterprise, hiring the right talent is a critical element in executing the business plan. In the logistics business the performance of long distance drivers impacts directly on the bottom line. Driver education, rules and procedures and monitoring equipment are important business practices, however they do not guarantee driver adherence. Long distance driving requires specific talent – one which is “wired” to achieve clear, measureable performance standards while driving thousands of kilometres.

Examples of what these drivers may be required to deliver are:

- Zero driver caused accidents
- Zero traffic violations
- Achieving company standards measuring fuel and tyre usage and vehicle maintenance.

The drivers who will excel are extremely risk averse and respond positively to a highly structured and predictable environment relying heavily on their specialised training. They respond positively

to unambiguous leadership that acknowledges and rewards high standards.

The long haul driver's role typically demands talent which consistently is able to:

- Protect the company against risk
- Ensure compliance with safety regulations
- Handle repetitive work without becoming impatient
- Maintain a consistent work pace for long periods
- Do work which requires manual dexterity

Walley sums up the ideal long distance driver: "The most important attribute, while spending hour after hour in the cab of a truck, is to consistently anticipate problems, to always question, and to ask "what if?"

To prove her point The CONFIDANT Group compared the hiring effectiveness at three depots in the country:

- The top depot achieved 91% compliance with the critical hiring specification
- The next best depot scored 84%
- The poorest performing depot achieved 65%. This depot had the highest number of CCMA cases, the worst accident rate and the highest vehicle maintenance costs.

"Companies which align their hiring practices with their business objectives have the edge on their competitors – with every appointment, not just when appointing key personnel like long distance drivers, they are building capacity to deliver their plan. The logistics industry, because of its massive presence on our roads will be doing the country a huge service, not only by reducing fatalities and costs associated with accidents, but also by providing the role models to influence other drivers."