

Drivers: The gender agenda

// BY PETER MACKAY ON 20 SEP 2024

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The persistent driver shortage can be tackled by attracting the half of the population who aren't men. Chemical Express' Francesco Mattozzi explains how

The global economy relies heavily on the efficient movement of goods, and truck drivers play a crucial role in keeping supply chains moving. However, in recent years, many countries have faced a growing crisis: a shortage of truck drivers, particularly in the heavy-duty vehicle sector. This issue, once seen as a temporary challenge, is now becoming a long-term problem with significant implications for industries, businesses, and consumers alike.

The reasons behind this situation are many and varied. One of the primary factors is the ageing workforce. In many countries, the average age of truck drivers is rising, with

fewer young people entering the profession. This is due to a combination of factors, including:

- **Perception of the Job:** Truck driving is often seen as a demanding and unattractive career, with long hours on the road, isolation, and physical strain. This has discouraged younger generations from considering it as a viable option.
- **Regulatory challenges:** Strict licensing requirements and lengthy training periods in some regions make it difficult for potential drivers to enter the industry quickly. The costs associated with obtaining a commercial driver's license (CDL) can also be prohibitive.
- **Work-life balance:** Trucking often requires drivers to spend long periods away from home, which can disrupt family life, leading to high turnover rates.
- **Compensation issues:** Many drivers feel wages do not adequately reflect the challenges and risks of the profession, leading experienced drivers to leave the industry.

GETTING ENGAGED

One of the most promising solutions to the truck driver shortage lies in greater inclusion of women in the transport industry. Historically, trucking has been a male-dominated field, but this narrative is slowly changing. Increasing the number of female drivers could help address the chronic shortage of labour while also bringing a new perspective and dynamic to the profession.

Chemical Express, a leading company in the logistics and transport of chemical goods, is actively championing female drivers as a key part of its strategy to tackle the shortage. By recruiting and training more women, Chemical Express is setting a powerful example for the industry. Female drivers not only bring valuable skills to the role, but they have also been shown to improve safety records, reduce vehicle wear and tear, and enhance operational efficiency.

Chemical Express is breaking barriers by focusing on gender diversity, creating tailored initiatives to attract more women into the profession. These efforts include providing flexible work schedules, mentorship programmes, and ensuring better working conditions on the road, helping to make the career more appealing and accessible to women.

Encouraging women to join the trucking industry not only helps fill the labour gap but also contributes to changing the perception of the profession itself. Women in trucking can bring a fresh perspective, often prioritizing safety and precision, which are critical factors in the transport of hazardous materials like chemicals. By fostering a more inclusive culture, Chemical Express is not just addressing an immediate shortage but is also setting the foundation for a more diverse and sustainable future workforce.

FAMILY TEAMS

In addition to its focus on gender diversity, Chemical Express is also pioneering an innovative solution by promoting husband-and-wife driving teams. This model allows both partners to share driving responsibilities while staying together on long-haul routes. It's a strategy that aligns with the company's commitment to maintaining a healthy work-life balance for its drivers.

By employing family teams, Chemical Express is able to keep vehicles on the road for longer periods without sacrificing the well-being of its workforce. With two drivers working together, trucks can operate almost continuously, reaching distant destinations faster and more efficiently. This approach not only maximises productivity but also offers couples the unique opportunity to spend time together while working — a significant benefit in an industry where long absences from home are common.

Family teams are particularly well-suited for Chemical Express, which handles the transport of sensitive and hazardous materials. The company places a strong emphasis on safety, and the family team model allows for seamless coordination and trust between drivers, enhancing overall performance and compliance with strict regulations.

THE ROAD AHEAD

Chemical Express's approach, focusing on promoting gender diversity and supporting family teams, is part of a broader industry effort to tackle the truck driver shortage through innovative workforce solutions. By improving working conditions, offering competitive compensation, and providing greater flexibility, companies like Chemical Express are not only attracting new talent but also retaining experienced drivers.

While technology and automation may eventually play a role in easing the strain on the trucking industry, immediate solutions like embracing women drivers and family teams are essential for bridging the current gap. This approach is proving to be highly effective, as it addresses both the professional and personal challenges that often discourage people from pursuing or staying in the profession.

The truck driver shortage is a complex issue with far-reaching consequences. However, by tapping into the underutilised potential of women and fostering a more inclusive workforce, as demonstrated by Chemical Express, the trucking industry has a unique opportunity to transform itself. Paired with innovative approaches like family teams and ongoing improvements to working conditions, this strategy can help build a more sustainable and resilient industry for the future.

Chemical Express is leading by example, showing that through strategic inclusion and family-friendly policies, the trucking industry can not only overcome its current challenges but also create a more diverse, efficient, and balanced workforce. This model offers a roadmap for other companies seeking to resolve the driver shortage while promoting gender equality and family unity in a demanding but essential profession.

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