



Kansas RTAP Fact Sheet

A Service of The University of Kansas Transportation Center for Rural Transit Providers

Retaining and Recruiting Quality Bus Drivers

by Brandon Garrison

It can be challenging to find and retain quality drivers in an industry that typically doesn't pay high wages. But by providing a quality working environment, recruiting effectively, and asking the right questions in interviews, you can hire drivers who will join your organization to stay.

Recruiting

Before you can hire anyone you need to attract quality applicants. One way to find new employees is to increase the amount of applicants to your hiring pool. A larger hiring pool increases your chances of having high quality applicants, but you may have to work harder to find them. Advertising in local newspapers is a typical way to seek applicants; you can increase the number of applicants by posting job opportunities on local career Web sites or your own transit Web site.

Some transit employers have made the move towards attracting quality and not quantity by adopting an employee referral program. Your field-tested employees know the demands of the job and know what it takes to last as a driver—this gives them the ability to judge whether anyone they know would fit your organization. You can help make sure your employees recommend good workers by giving your employees a referral bonus after the new-hires prove themselves. The Emerald Center Multi-County Board for Disabilities and Special Needs in South Carolina, for example, offers a

bonus to full-time employees after the person they refer has worked full time for six months.

The interview process

Another method of attracting quality employees is to conduct background checks and screen applicants through temp agencies and career centers. You can get an idea of whether employees will be good workers by asking temp agencies about their work ethic, attendance and abilities. When you conduct a background check, always check a potential employee's driving and criminal records, and don't forget about work history. Employees that have worked in positions for extended periods of time will probably do the same if they work for you. However, it is a mistake to automatically pass over an applicant that has worked a series of jobs for short periods of time. Look at the reasons why he or she left; if the split was on good terms, there is no reason not to consider him or her for a position.

After you have narrowed down the number of applicants, you can begin to schedule interviews. Interviews can be misleading because sometimes the applicants who

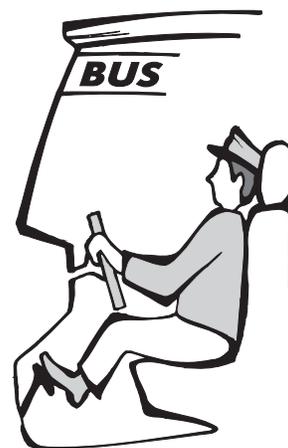
“perform” best in interviews don't make good employees. If you want to prevent this from happening, take control and conduct a structured interview. Develop a list of questions to ask in all of the interviews. This makes it easier to compare the different candidates. Ask questions about hypothetical on-the-job scenarios and

judge each applicant's response. Focus your questions on assessing personal character more the job skills because you can always train someone how to drive a bus, but you can't train them to have the right attitude for the job. Never form an opinion about someone until you finish interviewing him or her. A snap judgment normally is based on characteristics that have nothing to do with

someone's quality of work.

Retaining good drivers

Now that you have finished the hiring process, you must do your part to make sure new drivers enjoy the job enough to stick around. You probably won't be able to negotiate a whole lot on wages and benefits, but try to make wages and benefits competitive. Instead of focusing on money, you can retain your drivers by providing training and an enjoyable, fulfilling work environment.



One of the best ways to retain drivers is to eliminate unnecessary job stress. Bus-driving, by nature, can be stressful, but there are some small changes you can make to help retain employees. Bus drivers normally work long shifts so anything you can do to make them more comfortable will make them happier. Don't make schedules so tight that drivers are unable to properly assist customers with special needs and stay on schedule. You can make drivers more comfortable by installing more comfortable seats or making sure the air-conditioning works. Also, you could give drivers a little more time between routes to grab a snack or use the restroom.

While climate control and comfortable seats can make your employees content, there is much more involved in creating a low-stress work environment. There are many steps you can take to improve working conditions that cost little or nothing. By simply being respectful and fair to your employees you can help make sure they work with you for a long time. Continuous training rather than short-term, intensive training when an employee is first hired is another way to retain workers. If you give your employees the opportunity to be creative and learn new skills, they will think of their jobs as an opportunity for advancement instead of stagnation.

You can use this advice as a starting point to improve your transit agency and increase the quality of your employees. Your best bet is to be creative and open minded—just like the employees you want to work in your organization.

Sources:

TCRP Synthesis 40: *A Challenged Employment System: Hiring, Training, Performance Evaluation, and Retention of Bus Operators*, available at the Transportation Research Board of the National Academies Web site http://trb.org/news/blurb_detail.asp?id=561

The Emerald Center Multi-County Board for Disabilities and Special Needs in South Carolina <http://www.schsp.org/emeraldcenter/sm01news.htm>

“Tools for Hiring, Training, and

Retaining,” available at the Metro South Chamber of Commerce Web site <http://www.metroouthchamber.com/htr.html#Hiring>

Reprinted from the October 2006 issue of the *Kansas TransReporter*, a publication of the Kansas Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) at the Kansas University Transportation Center.