



Owner-Operator's Business
Association of Canada

Association professionnelle des
routiers autonomes du Canada

*...from the
director's chair*

Get a real job...and keep it real

Back in 1982, I was hauling steel across Newfoundland from St. John's to Corner Brook for some modifications that were being done at the paper mill.

It was a regular run, so I got myself into a routine that had me holed up at the Gander Hotel at least one night a week.

On one such occasion, a waitress named Mary asked me the question: "Why do guys drive trucks?"

I thought about it for a minute, and told her it wasn't a bad job at all, to which she replied, "I don't see why they can't get a real job."

Mary's remark bugged me then, and 23 years later, whenever I'm sitting around (unpaid) pondering what exactly a "job" is, it still bugs me.

The way I figure it, there are all kinds of reasons to enter any profession. Most of us have modest expectations about our life's work – we want to earn a living, support our families, improve our lot in life and hopefully advance in our career through promotions based on personal accomplishments.

If we're running a small business, it would be nice to build enough equity so that we can retire someday.

That's how I saw my job back then, and I meant it when I told Mary that trucking wasn't a bad job.

So why do we have so much trouble, today, attracting quality people to the transportation industry?

I have to admit, it's a different industry today, and if I was looking at trucking as a career choice, I might be inclined to share

Mary's puzzlement – it seems that there really isn't much an owner/operator can do anymore to influence the success of his or her business.

Let's look at an owner/operator's job today.

Deciding to buy the truck will probably be the last decision you will ever have to make on your own. Once you find a carrier to work for, the carrier will tell you what you'll get paid, what colour to paint your truck, where to go, what time to be there and when you can start the trip.

Before you leave, you'll be provided with a pre-trip checklist to ensure that your equipment is in good working order. There are rules in place to tell you how much weight you can haul, how fast you can drive, how long you can drive and how often you need to rest.

For your convenience, there are inspection stations along the way where someone will have a good look at your equipment and tell you if you've missed something during your pre-trip inspection.

You never need to worry about feeling tired.

Your government has contracted experts on your behalf, to tell them what you're capable of, so they, in turn, can tell you when you need to go to bed and how long you have to sleep.

For your comfort, the new HOS rules will even tell you how big a sleeper you'll need, and even how thick your mattress must be.

Where will you park to sleep? Most truck stops provide parking areas for trucks, but you'll likely be told – by the private owners –



Jon
Summers
President
NLITA

that you can stay only a few hours. Some major highways have designated rest areas, but these are few and far between.

Here in my neck of the woods - literally – pull-over areas are almost non-existent.

Maybe you can find a section of highway that will allow you to get off the road far enough so you won't interfere with other traffic. When you're ordered by a police officer to get moving, you'll have two options – neither one of them much of a choice: move, and be guilty of a logbook infraction, or don't move, and get a ticket for illegal parking.

With so much being done for owner/operators today, it's little wonder we have difficulty improving our bottom line – we're too busy doing as we're told.

And while we're working our tails off to keep the freight moving, low rates, combined with rising costs, are driving a lot of us straight to the poor house.

Maybe it's time for all of us to take a good hard look why we're in this business, and to start making some decisions of our own before it's too late.

We need to get a handle on our costs, and we need to decide what kind of rates we need to make a modest profit – then we've got to stop dragging freight around for less than what it costs to run the truck.

We – and I mean ALL owner/operators – must start getting paid what we need to sustain a living in the transportation industry. Barring this our only alternative may be to do as Mary suggested back in 1982: "Get a real job."