

Why Won't My Drivers Do What I Need Them to Do?

By Matthew Betz, courtesy of automotivefleet.com



Drivers are often required to attend compliance training, but that training has rarely inspired positive change.

I have had thousands of conversations with people responsible for the management and safety of the world's largest fleets. Those conversations gave me insights into the fleet industry, and in some cases, I had an idea or two to share with the person facing a challenge.

My fleet career has spanned 50 years and though the content of these conversations has changed over time, one sentiment remains constant. Leaders at different levels and across industries often ask: "With everything I've implemented at this organization, why haven't I had a positive impact on my drivers' behavior?"

As a fleet professional, you try to use best and current practices to improve safety and behavior: You order the best safety equipment for vehicles, pay for the best

driver training, enroll the company in fleet safety programs, install in-cab cameras and telematics, and so on. But these efforts still don't always influence choices drivers make behind the wheel.

What More Can You Do?



Dr. Alison Betz

I've asked this question numerous times, and when I turned to my fleet colleagues for an answer, they were at a loss and had exhausted multiple solutions. So, I talked to my daughter. Dr. Alison Betz is a behavioral scientist who conducts research on driver safety and presents at the NETS, NAFA, and AFLA conferences and on webinars.

Alison and her colleagues at ABA Technologies analyze reasons why people behave the

way they do, how the environment encourages or discourages certain behaviors, and what managers can do to promote safe and productive driver behavior.

Common Mistakes Preventing Changes in Driver Behavior

Based on her learnings, she shared the following insights on common mistakes and actions managers can take to correct them:

- **A sole focus on compliance training.**

Drivers are often required to attend compliance training that covers the do's and don'ts of the job and what laws or regulations are enforceable. However, compliance training has rarely inspired positive change.

After compliance training ends, we still find drivers violating company policies or driving in ways that result in an incident.

- **Training without follow-up coaching.**

Most drivers need some level of training to learn their job, but it doesn't stop there: coaching, feedback conversations, and performance observations are essential to maintain positive change. Managers and supervisors are largely responsible for conducting regular coaching sessions, but many supervisors don't learn effective coaching strategies.

Instead, they learn methods for correcting unsafe behavior, rather than taking preventive action.

Training sometimes sends employees a different message about what is expected on the job than the reality.

For instance, during training, a pharmaceutical sales rep may learn safe driving practices they can't comply with once on the job. For instance, their managers ask them to visit an unreasonable number of doctors' offices per day and meet sales goals that promote unsafe behavior.

In other words, the message is, "If you plan to meet that goal, you'll have to cut corners."

Strategies That Get Results

Now that we've identified potential mistakes that are keeping you from getting through to your drivers, here are some strategies to drive behavioral change.



- Rather than taking a one size fits all approach, thoroughly assessing telematics data to pinpoint any concerning behaviors per department, region, area, etc.
- Don't assume each employee is the same and needs the same support. Tailor coaching sessions for field supervisors, empowering them to effectively address these behaviors and align driver actions with company safety objectives.
- Replace your quarterly or annual safety review with an active and continual evaluation. The company's safety culture, messaging, and actions enable us to craft messaging that fosters meaningful behavior change among employees.
- Conduct audits of training materials to identify necessary adjustments that resonate with drivers, sparking a genuine desire to adopt safer practices.

- Don't forget that change is needed at every level, not just with the drivers. Assist in aligning executive communication with the overarching goal of driver behavior improvement.
 - Finally, work with experts to implement and continuously refine the solution, driving enhanced driver performance, improved safety outcomes, and a positive company culture.
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About the Author: Over a 50-year career, **Matthew Betz** has had many fleet industry sales roles and recently retired as a fleet manager at DTE Energy.

Betz has served various roles with the AFLA and NAFA fleet associations and is a frequent presenter at NAFA's Institute and Expo. He is presently president of the AFLA board of directors and chair of the 2024 Global Fleet Conference.

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