

SAFETY SPOTLIGHT

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Our newest feature to The Green Light shines the spotlight on Safety Directors throughout our programs to gain insight into not only their background, but also their thoughts and ideas on safety in our industry.

Meet Gary Smith, Safety Manager for Perdido Trucking Service, a Mobile, Alabama-based truckload carrier with locations in Alabama, Mississippi, and Florida. Gary joined Perdido in August 2011. He is also the co-chair for the ATA Comp Fund Risk Management Advisory Committee (RMAC), a panel of representatives from all over the industry that meet to discuss trends and changes in safety.



How did you get started in Safety?

I have been involved with operations and safety since 1986. Back then you told everyone to “be careful” and hoped for the best. Best practices have changed quite a bit through the years and safety has pivoted from being mostly reactive to proactive planning with the aim of prevention.

What advice do you wish you had received early in your career in Safety that you would pass on to someone just getting started?

Something that I learned through the years - be ready for continuous change. Good communication is the key to a successful safety program.

What do you view as the main duties of a Safety Director?

Providing and promoting a culture of safety throughout the company. The main goal each day is for our employees to get home safely to their families. You need “buy in” from the whole company. Everyone’s commitment is the key to a successful safety program. It starts at the top and must be promoted each and every day, holding everyone accountable.

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What has been the most challenging task in your career as a Safety Director?

The installation and training on the camera system in our trucks was very challenging. Developing our program, making sure our drivers understood how the cameras worked, helping them see the benefits and why we implemented them was a real challenge in the beginning. ELD implementation was also very challenging.

What do you find most effective in getting existing and new truck drivers to buy in to safety?

The best way to get drivers to “buy in” to our safety program has been through clear and concise communication. They need to know the policies and procedures, as well as why we have them. We accomplish this by having a simple orientation package and continuous training. Weekly and monthly safety topics are communicated to the drivers and we give remedial training when there is an incident. Safety bonuses are awarded to our drivers quarterly and yearly for being incident free and we include our driver managers in that bonus package.

Why is safety important to you?

Safety is very important to me because it affects people’s lives and the wellbeing of the company. Safety demands continuous improvement with daily changes in the workplace.

If you could give any advice or message to the general public about the trucking industry, what would it be?

I would say to the public, trucking companies and their drivers are not the bad guys as portrayed in the media. Trucking affects every person and business and it’s the industry most Americans take for granted. Other sectors are essential to the economy and daily life, but none as intricately as trucking.

What would be your “safety quote” or “safety message” that you want to share?

Promote the 5 C’s in road safety: Care, Caution, Consideration, Common Sense, and Courtesy.