

SELLING SAFETY

TO EXECUTIVES, MANAGERS AND DRIVERS

By Don Osterberg

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INTRODUCTION

One of the hardest tasks a fleet faces when initiating a safety culture – or even a safety policy – is ensuring buy-in from throughout the fleet. From executives to managers to drivers, it's important that everyone understands why the program is being initiated and the expected results.

Transportation executive, Don Osterberg, recently shared his views and recommendations on fleetwide communications in the [SmartDrive blog](#). Collectively, these three blog posts – *Selling Safety Initiatives to Executives*, *Selling Safety Initiatives to Drivers* and *Doing the Right Thing* – will help you in communicating with your team.

No matter your message...

- Use a variety of communication methods – email, printed letters/memos, posters, meetings, texts, video conference, etc. You never know how someone likes to receive communications and which one will resonate.
- Repeat your message multiple times to ensure the recipient internalizes it.
- Maintain consistency in your messaging throughout your organization.
- Explain **WHY** you're implementing a new policy or procedure and how it will impact the individual and/or the organization.

If you're implementing a new video-based safety program, the SmartDrive team is available to help you with communications, training and deployment. We're with you throughout the process to help ensure a smooth implementation and successful results.

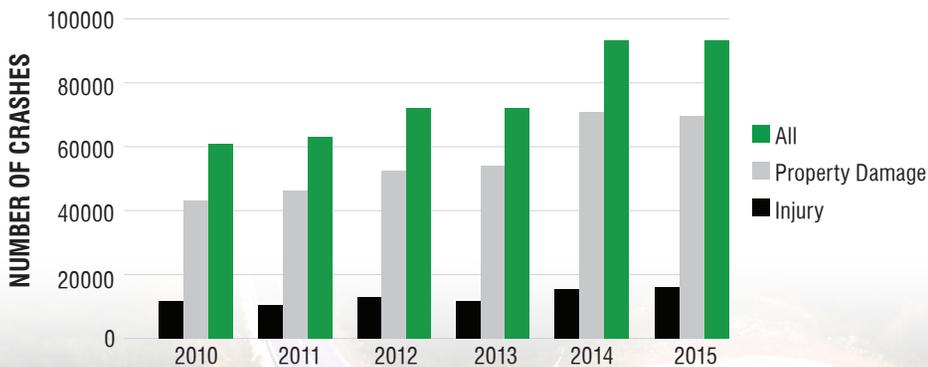
Contact your Customer Success Manager with questions or for more information.

1. SELLING SAFETY INITIATIVES TO EXECUTIVES

Motor carrier executives must view their fleet's safety through at least two lenses, both moral and financial.

- 1. Moral lens:** As transportation professionals, we have a moral obligation to both our professional drivers and, especially, to the motoring public with whom we share the roadway, to operate as safely as possible.
- 2. Financial lens:** Generally, all initiatives compete for finite capital dollars. Typically, the carrier's finance team will review competing requirements and make a return-on-investment (ROI) projection for each. The highest expected ROI projects get the dollars.

This makes perfect sense in for-profit businesses, who, after all, are in business to make money. However, when we blend the view through the moral lens into our capital investment prioritization process, safety-conscious carriers should see a different picture.



When the success of the proposed safety program is measured in lives saved and injuries prevented, decision making is rightly tipped in favor of the safety investment. The moral imperative reframes capital expenditure decision making. If we have reasonable confidence that the safety program investment will cover the cost of capital used, we default to GO. It's the "right thing to do." The downside is limited and the upside is significant. For most business decisions, I caution against allowing emotions to influence decision making; however, in the case of safety programs, it's imperative that we allow emotions to shape our decision making. That's not to say that safety programs should get a pass on the traditional ROI-driven prioritization processes, but the thought process should be different.

"Fleets spend between 15-20% on prevention and 80-85% on settling claims when they fail."

Selling safety programs to executives. I find a good starting point is to calculate what % of each risk dollar is spent on proactive preventive programs, versus reactive claims settlement (including post-crash litigation and insurance premiums). I've discovered that most carriers don't know, because they never ask and answer that critical question. If they do, most will discover that they spend between 15-20% on prevention and 80-85% on settling claims when they fail. No safety-conscious leader would draw the line there, but, that's where it's effectively drawn for most carriers.

1. SELLING SAFETY INITIATIVES TO EXECUTIVES

Further, if you look at the exponential growth rate in claims settlement and insurance costs over time, the only prudent decision for carrier executives to make while viewing their options through either a moral or financial lens is to invest in prevention (rather than reactively continuing to pay claims).

The litigation environment. For a host of reasons, the litigation environment for commercial drivers and motor carriers has become problematic. Contrary to everything we believe in our system of justice, in post-crash litigation, commercial drivers are considered guilty until they prove themselves innocent.

Crash forensics remains an imperfect science. Eye witness testimony is often inaccurate. Determining what really happened is difficult. If there were safety programs available that could both enhance driver performance AND provide visibility to what really happened in a crash, would you invest in that program? Of course, you would! Well, that capability exists today in the form of video-based safety systems. The question of what really happened is quickly and clearly answered. If the commercial driver WAS NOT at fault in the crash, the video becomes a powerful tool for exoneration. If the commercial driver WAS at fault, knowing that early in the investigation serves to accelerate the claims settlement process (and litigation claims rarely get better with age).

So, whether you view safety primarily through a moral lens or a financial lens, in the end, the answer is the same. **Proactive safety is the “right thing to do” and safety pays!**



2. SELLING SAFETY INITIATIVES TO DRIVERS

During my many years in the trucking industry, I found most commercial drivers are dedicated, conscientious professionals, who take their responsibility to operate safely very seriously. I've also determined that the best way to communicate with professional drivers is in a frank, honest and transparent way. They want and deserve to know, not only what is being proposed, but WHY.

“Our disagreements are normally communication breakdowns, NOT philosophical differences.”

Previously we discussed that safety performance needs to be viewed through both moral and financial lenses. It's important to keep in mind that drivers also need to view safety performance (new safety initiatives) through the same lenses.



The Great American Rule

I had a boss many years ago, while I was in the military, who espoused what he called “The Great American Rule” when referring to our soldiers. He explained that all of our soldiers (and their leaders) are Great Americans, dedicated to doing the best job they can for our country. I've observed that commercial drivers are the same. They understand the role they play in our economy and they do their very best to conscientiously and safely do their job. My boss often explained that while “Great Americans” may disagree from time-to-time, generally when we disagree, it's because:

- They know something I don't know ...
- I know something they don't know OR ...
- Something got garbled in our communication

Said another way, our disagreements are normally communication breakdowns, NOT philosophical differences.

When contemplating new safety initiatives, carrier safety leaders and executives have access to fleet performance data that paints a pretty clear picture of what the safety issues and opportunities are. They perform data analytics to determine causal factors for crashes and they have access to safety programs and/or technologies that have demonstrated effectiveness in addressing the issues (and opportunities) they see.

Drivers, on the other hand, only see what can be seen from the seat of their truck (but they see it with great regularity and clarity). They too, develop a sense for safety issues and crash causation. In short, carrier executives know something their drivers don't know and their drivers know something they don't know. As a result, disagreements may occur.

2. SELLING SAFETY INITIATIVES TO DRIVERS

Unclogging the Lines of Communication

The answer is quite simple. Unclog the lines of communications. Listen actively to your drivers' perspectives and recommendations, and proactively communicate both the **WHAT** **and the WHY** behind each new safety initiative. Drivers spend hours in the solitude of their truck, thinking about things, and filling in the blanks of what hasn't been explained to them with what they think – based upon their observations (a perspective from a different lens). In my experience, once I shared with drivers what I knew and solicited their perspective on what they know, our disagreements faded away.

“Proactively communicate both the WHAT and the WHY behind each new safety initiative.”

When communicating with your drivers, it's OK (and even essential) to play the emotion card. I'd explain our empathic program to our drivers and then describe a time when we had a crash for which the new initiative was designed to avoid/mitigate. I'd ask our drivers, if you were me, how would you answer the question asked by a grieving family member—*“were you aware that there are safety programs or technologies that have demonstrated the potential to have prevented this crash?”* Can I answer that I was aware of that fact, but was concerned that our drivers would balk at implementing the program or that the program costs too much to implement? Of course, I couldn't!

A Safety Collaboration

Achieving sustainable safety excellence is a collaboration between leaders and drivers. It's not a top-down, shut-up-and-color command. By opening the lines of communications and actively listening to my drivers' perspectives and

then explaining in detail my perspective, disagreement morphed into support. Bottom line, a relationship based upon mutual respect and open, transparent communications is preconditional to alignment between conscientious, professional drivers and caring leaders.

“When communicating with your drivers, it's OK (and even essential) to play the emotion card.”

I've learned throughout my professional career that leadership is leadership. Soldiers and professional drivers expect and deserve the same things from their leaders: open, honest, transparent communications and credibility earned through mutual respect based on consistency between words and actions.



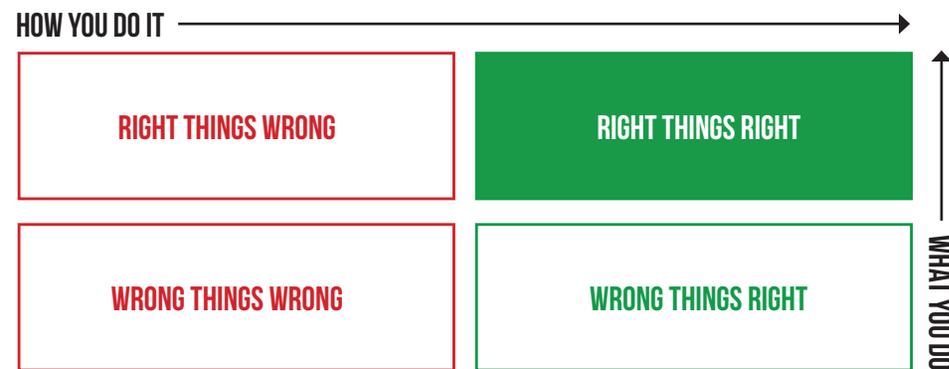
3. DOING THE RIGHT THINGS RIGHT

In my previous post I discussed the importance of viewing safety through both a moral and a financial lens when making capital investment prioritization decisions. I also took the opportunity to highlight the emerging reality in post-crash litigation, that motor carriers and commercial drivers are often guilty until they prove themselves innocent. Finally, I tried to simplify all of the noise that characterizes discussions about moral and financial imperatives by suggesting, when in doubt— “do what’s right.”

Let me expand on that simple guiding principle in the context of selling safety to drivers and operations leaders. During my 15 years with Schneider, we were guided by an enduring credo that “**nothing we do is worth harming ourselves or others.**” Eight simple words that had the power to influence everything we did. When drivers and leaders confronted tension between the competing demands they faced, this simple phrase instructed them how to reconcile the tension.

“*Nothing we do is worth harming ourselves or others.*”

Our CEO also expanded on the “do what’s right” theme by adding “**do the right things right.**” During my military career, we recognized the importance of commanders communicating their **intent** for every operation, such that soldiers were empowered to take actions in combat, even without specific orders. Understanding the commander’s intent enabled initiative and agility at every level. In trucking, the guidance to “do the right things right” communicates a powerful leader’s intent, influencing the planning and execution of our dynamic business every day.



Do the Right Things Right

Last time we discussed doing *what’s right*. Today let’s focus on *doing things right*. The words appear subtly different, but the meaning is significantly so.

Doing things right is a qualitative statement that guides us to strive for operational excellence in everything we do. We are currently in the midst of the football season. I could draw many similarities between football and trucking. Both require dedicated, hard-working professionals to perform with discipline and precision.

Whether you’re a football team or a motor carrier, excellence is achieved and sustained through critically and continuously assessing your individual and collective performance. In football, every play is videotaped. Today, when the quarterback gets to the sideline, a coach is there with a tablet reviewing the previous series. Following each game, coaches review the videotape and critique every player and every play, all with the intent to “do things right.”



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Doing Things Right ... in Commercial Transportation

In commercial transportation, our drivers are the players and our leaders are the coaches. Fortunately, today, tools are available that enable near-real-time performance monitoring that provide the basis for focused, positive and constructive coaching and recognition. With the right tools in the hands of skillful coaches and embraced by drivers as an essential way to continuously improve their performance, we are better able to consistently “do things right.”

By making a habit of doing things right, over time, we have fewer crashes and incidents that consume the valuable time of our task-saturated operations leaders. Time spent coaching to enable success is better than time spent investigating instances when we fail.

Doing the right things requires investments in safety technologies and proactive programs that enable us to do things right. The role trucking plays for our economy dwarfs the importance of the game of football. In football, if excellence isn't achieved, a game is lost. When commercial drivers and carriers fail to achieve excellence, people are injured or killed. The stakes are simply too high to allow our performance to be passively managed. So, as I mentioned last time—when in doubt, do the right things (*and do them right*).



Don Osterberg

Safety advisor, formerly served as Senior Vice President of Safety, Security and Driver Training for Schneider

His distinguished career in commercial transportation spans several decades, and he is a recognized authority on carrier safety, having held leadership roles with organizations including the National Safety Council, FMCSA Motor Carrier Safety Advisory Committee, American Trucking Association's Safety Policy Committee and American Transportation Research Institute's Research Advisory Committee. Osterberg is a retired Airborne and Ranger qualified US Army Infantry Colonel. Prior to entering into the commercial transportation industry, he held many leadership positions during his military career including Chief Plans Officer for the 1st Infantry Division (The Big Red One) during Operation Desert Storm and an appointment as the strategic advisor to the President and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff while serving on the National Airborne Operations Center staff.

Read more from Don Osterberg and other industry leaders in the [SmartDrive Beat](#).



SmartDrive Systems, the recipient of Frost & Sullivan's Customer Value Leadership Award for Video Safety Solutions, gives fleets and drivers unprecedented driving performance insight and analysis, helping save fuel, expenses and lives. Its video analysis, predictive analytics and personalized performance program help fleets improve driving skills, lower operating costs and deliver significant ROI. With an easy-to-use managed service, fleets and drivers can access and self-manage driving performance anytime, anywhere. The company, which is ranked as one of the fastest growing companies by Deloitte's Technology Fast 500™, has compiled the world's largest storehouse of more than 200 million analyzed risky-driving events. SmartDrive Systems is based in San Diego, and employs over 650 people worldwide.

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