

# DfBB Women in Transport Podcast: Astrid Van Der Burgt

**Anne-Marie:**

Welcome to the Driving for Better Business podcast. In this series we're celebrating women working in transport, fleet management, and road safety and today I'm very pleased to introduce Astrid Van Der Burgt, Head of Road Safety at Holcim.

Astrid, welcome to the podcast. You have an interesting career history. How did you get into transport safety?

**Astrid:**

Thanks so much for having me. I worked in logistics all my working life and married into logistics – this resulted me working as a transport manager, maintenance manager, customer service and also as a driver. This meant I learned what a difference safety awareness makes to drivers. If you give drivers the tools to make the right decision behind the wheel, this makes a difference to them – makes sure they go home to their families at the end of the working day. This gives me really a lot of job satisfaction. This mantra of giving drivers the tools to make the right decisions has been my guide all through my career.

**Anne-Marie:**

You've talked about giving drivers the tools – what has worked well for you?

**Astrid:**

Certainly, in Holcim we operate in such a diverse market, and we take it for granted in the UK and in Europe that people know how to drive a truck, but that is not always the case in other markets like Sub Saharan Africa or India so it's been a 3 pronged approach. We train drivers to make sure they have the knowledge and the skills to operate the vehicle and tackle the road situations, we have telematics installed in vehicles so we can monitor driving behaviour, and then the most crucial point, we give feedback to the drivers. We talk to them – 'okay you had harsh braking, speeding – what happened and how could you prevent this happening in the future?' They have this awareness that they can have an influence on the outcome of their driving day.

**Anne-Marie:**

Interesting – it's not about catching people out and I think you're right – that feedback bit is just about trying to raise their knowledge and understanding on the influence they have on that road space

### Astrid

Absolutely, we celebrate successes as well. If a driver does well it's recognised, and if a driver does exceptionally well it's rewarded – driver of the month, driver of the year programme, with some financial rewards. Even a good student likes to hear they're doing well, it's not just pulling up those that are underperforming.

### Anne-Marie:

As well as creating job, opportunities, and growth, tell us about the Women on Wheels project.

### Astrid

Yes, this project has been so interesting. It was very much an idea for sustainability and innovation, and we had an inaugural programme in Uganda to increase diversity in driver population. They had decided they wanted to operate their own fleet, and right from the beginning they said let's create parity and diversity. It's been a huge success. The aim is not just to influence country management teams, so they understand women are an option, but also to make it a global approach where we embed search, hire and retention of women drivers into our recruitment strategy

Really, we are trying to fight the myth – there's no reason why women shouldn't be truck drivers. The days are over when trucks were unwieldy beasts to operate. We need to be aware there are still some challenges. There is safety and security – safe parking, rest houses, that we have 'home at night' trips, and in terms of emergencies so we know if there's an adequate response time – and work/life balance. Flexibility for childcare, family commitments, and my personal number one is hygiene, decent bathrooms for women to use on the road. It is the logical way forward for us at Holcim. We have the programme in a number of countries, and we hope to double the number of female drivers by the end of the year. In Uganda they have moved to phase 2 – not just gender parity in their fleet but also with their major transport partners - having the same in their fleet. The business case is there – apart from the safety aspect – a 7% increase in kilometres without any violations such as speeding, harsh braking, but they have also seen 6% better fuel consumption 15% lower maintenance, 12% better turnaround times and the customers love it – they are requesting our female drivers because they know it will arrive on time and with a smile.

### Anne-Marie:

Alongside Women on Wheels, partnership and collaboration is a big part of your role...

### Astrid

You can't do yourselves – working with the experts has helped us, particularly in the Women on Wheels programme. We have to work with other organisations to build the credibility of the programme – the training schools, truck manufacturers, government bodies, NGOs to create this partnership. It makes it more sustainable when each party

has a vested interest. In South Africa we work with a truck manufacturer and a training school. At the end of the driving training, they then receive business acumen training and we help them to set up business with favourable truck financing, they get a contract for a couple of years work to get their business started. All parties win – we have reliable transporters, the truck manufacturer wins, and the driving school gets more business, and the women themselves have all the tools for success.

**Anne-Marie:**

I love the idea that as well as creating jobs it is creating opportunities and growth and help for people all over in those countries. What are some of the personal stories?

**Astrid**

There are so many – I love to hear them. It's the best bit of my job. You receive messages from a son of a lady truck driver – 'I saw your profile on Facebook it was my Mum that you spoke to and she loves to be a truck driver...' but the two stories that stand out for me – in countries where you least expect a women to be a truck driver. In Kenya a lady had 3 children, one at university, one at secondary school and one at primary school. She was so proud to tell me she was independent and on her own raising her family - because of the consistent income from the truck driving job she was paying all their school fees.

One of the female truck drivers in Uganda – she kept seeing this particular police officer who observed her nearly every day, eventually she was stopped and she expected it to be papers, insurance etc, but instead she was offered a basket with food, drinks by this police officer, because he had never seen a female truck driver in his life and he was really pleased to see it.

**Anne-Marie:**

Building resilience for those families – I love the way it's changing perspectives. How do you think it's been perceived in these communities?

**Astrid**

I think it's been positively because of the opportunities and growth its creating and the fact that it makes these women independent. We are now venturing into the Middle East and in one of the countries there they are looking at setting up the programme which would be the most incredible thing ever to have a Women on Wheels programme in that type of environment. 'Women should be staying at home looking after the family' – it's changed – people are realising that is not the case anymore. Women can do this.

**Anne-Marie:**

Astrid if people want to learn know about Women in Wheels and Holcim where should they go?

### **Astrid**

We have a website Holcim.com and if you type in 'women on wheels' or Uganda you will find these stories and all the information is there. Of course, people can find me on LinkedIn and ping me a message and I'd be happy to share what we do and how we are structuring this.

### **Anne-Marie:**

Astrid, thank-you so much and if you're listening to this and want to know more about 'Women in Transport' visit the Driving for Better Business website – [Drivingforbetterbusiness.com](http://Drivingforbetterbusiness.com)