

Let's Talk Fleet Risk - Episode 13

Strong leadership in driver risk management delivering business benefits

Stewart Lightbody, Drive Consulting

Simon: Hello everyone and welcome to the August edition of Let's Talk Fleet Risk. At Driving for Better Business, we're currently focused on promoting the business benefits that flow from good management of drivers, and how strong leadership is key to this. My guest this month is Stewart Lightbody.

Stewart is a former fleet manager, with experience running very large fleets with thousands of vehicles for companies like Siemens, Kier, Anglian Water and M Group. He is also currently Deputy Chairman of the Association of Fleet professionals.

Stewart is a recent winner of the Fleet News Fleet Manager of the Year; however, he has now decided to use that experience to help others, and last year joined Drive Consulting as Fleet Innovation and EV Manager.

Stewart, welcome to the show.

Simon: We showcase some amazing achievements from organisations that manage road risk well. They show significant reductions in collisions and equally significant improvements in business efficiency, performance, cost control, sustainability, etc. How important is strong leadership in driver risk management to delivering those achievements?

Stewart: In my experience it's critical. Fleet managers normally aspire to do their best for the business and supporting their drivers, and sometimes the results coming back and the things needed to make those changes require some significant business input. Sign off at board level as well in a lot of cases. You're looking at human behaviour and trying to make decisions in day to day life at the same level which is a challenge and also for them, you start to see data coming through that you want to look at and it is getting the leadership teams on the operations side - to understand you're not necessarily criticising but trying to get a comparison of where the driver is in comparison to another driver or set of drivers so they can see potentially - through coaching and supporting - you can get that driver to improve. It won't happen overnight as you are trying to unravel potentially 30 to 40 years of driver experience and driver habits and it's not until you see it in black and white – for some drivers that can be intimidating. It's picking the message and not throwing rocks at people but saying there is scope for improvement to gain the benefits – reduced spend on fuel, reduced incident collision, less hassle for the drivers, getting to the first job in a better frame of mind. It's not an easy message to land – the driving element is not as key as the general health and safety. I work with fleet managers day to day and through the AFP, and getting drivers to acknowledge that the driving element is as important as general health and safety when they get to their first job on site is a challenge.

Simon: You mentioned you look at reports on a regular basis –you mentioned operations – how do you go about impressing on others why this data is so important in making improvements? In a bigger business you have to push that up to the board on a regular basis and in a smaller business maybe other stakeholders looking at driver risk as a part time role so how do you ensure that people understand the importance? What's your experience of how well business leaders understand the need to do this, and their understanding of how this can lead to a better performing business?

Stewart: I think it's tailoring the message – in the early days I probably made the mistake of almost being a one trick pony because it was my view, if it was 25 miles to the gallon in the average panel van, and I said I think we should be pushing 30 – it was almost subjective as to what that target should be. I think I learnt to tailor the message to every stakeholder by understanding what their objectives were and their views on the subject. Some were very finance driven so actually if we are going to reduce our collision rate by 10% I put it into monetary terms for them. I would see the value of a one-to-one conversation with my driver - when you reduce your harsh braking – and they could see it in pounds and pence so they could buy into it. Others were not interested in the financial aspect. They were more interested in the wellbeing and safety of their drivers. So, it's knowing your audience and understanding what they want to achieve and then working out how I could help them. I found that was the best way of getting their buy-in, especially over time. When we started to then track performance I could show them a continuing downward trend on their fuel spend or continued up time because the driver was on the road more often. Then you can have wider conversations and they buy-in to what we want to achieve.

Simon: Yes, it's so important to have everyone pulling in the same direction and different people in different areas understanding how it impacts them in their own area. You are working with a number of fleets at Drive & speaking to lots of fleet managers in your role at the AFP – are there any areas of managing driver risk that they are particularly concerned about?

Stewart: It's the sheer amount of data. Fleet managers – people think you get to look at shiny new metal, place new company car orders, but it's much bigger than that. It's now a risk management role. So, it's having the understanding of their drivers, and a lot of them tend to work in isolation is what I find. It can be quite a lonely role you're trying to change the world from inside the organisation., So the challenge is understanding who your key stakeholders are and managing driver risk sits on the fleet manager's shoulder and actually, largely, we don't put the drivers to work. It feels like a poisoned chalice as you have awareness of what's going on, but you don't necessarily have everything you need or direct access to the drivers to do something different. It's that intimidation piece – it's a very big subject and lots of opportunities to improve safety and wellbeing but it's not all in the gift of the fleet manager. So, some feel more isolated than ever because of the sheer amount of change - delays to new vehicles, electrification of the journey – all this has gone on top of what is a fantastic but challenging role as a fleet manager.

Simon: Your role at Drive also includes EVs – are there any areas of risk management that people should be looking at if they're new to EVs?

Stewart: A lot of fleet managers feel under pressure with the EV Transition – that they must progress electrification with everything now. That's not the case. Company cars are going that way – taxation policy is driving that change – having significant increases in fully electric

car numbers – that’s heading in that direction, other than the cost parity and understanding where your total cost of ownership is going. On the van side its far more confusing – trying to find an asset that will do the job and not run out of juice before the day is done is not so clear. Consider electrification as part of what’s happening but not too much onus on the electric vehicle element because the biggest thing is the driver induction piece is done – but that should be happening with ICE vehicles as well so moving from one vehicle to another its very easy to say I’ve driven a van for 20 years and moving from one van manufacturer to another it’s no different, so I’ll be fine. That handover piece has always been important – the advantages on moving to an EV need to be maximised if you’re going to prevent some cost creep because EVs tend to be faster and they drive differently so make sure your driver has embraced the good things – the battery regeneration, certainly when I’m driving around in my EV, I don’t break now unless it’s an emergency situation because if I’m driving around using my regeneration to top up my fuel level that’s an important piece – otherwise the drivers have all this new found power in electric vehicles but don’t the most of their EV range so I think it should be happening anyway but not as strong as it could be and if you want to maximise all the good stuff it needs to be.

Simon: I think it’s critical - when you were talking about fleet managers feeling isolated – managing EVs is something they’ve got to get on top of fairly quickly but I guess supporting fleet managers through some of these challenges is the role of the AFP. Do you want to talk about some of the benefits our listeners get from joining the AFP?

Stewart: In my role at Drive I work on a one-to-one basis. What the AFP does is a number of committees – I chair the LCV committee, and I co-chair with Paul Hollick on the EV electrification and alternative fuels one. We have some of the largest fleets in the UK as members & some fantastic fleet service providers who have infinite knowledge and experience, so we talk about these things, and we understand from the membership and the industry what the challenges are. We put together best practice and policy documents so if you find yourself in that boat and you’re asking questions and you don’t know where to go we have probably already covered it so rather than reinventing the wheel it may be worth making use of some of that knowledge and wisdom. If you invest in the membership, we are the voice of the fleet operator to protect and speak on behalf of anyone running fleets – cars and vans – we support our membership who run vehicles of any type and our membership is prepared to share what they’ve learnt on the journey they’ve already made. We really try to make that transition easier for organisations and rather than run down rabbit holes we aim to make that electrification journey quicker and easier and it puts you in a stronger position.

Simon: So, they’re learning from the experience of your wide range of membership in the AFP. Have you got any final words of wisdom for managers. What’s the key lesson you’ve learnt from your days as a fleet manager?

Stewart: I think my journey over the last 20 years has been a continual learning one -what it was 20 years ago is not what it is now. Try not to look at things one dimensionally - we talked about telematics earlier, normally when you make a business case, getting it signed off, you’re chasing one metric – reduce collisions, improve fuel efficiency or reduce speeding – all those things are achievable together, So if you’re investing in something maximise the investment, I found that if you invest in telematics you should look at every opportunity that comes out of it, I learnt more in my first year of using telematics than I probably would have talking to people for 3 years. I proactively chose to something more with the data I was given. It’s easy when you’re swamped with data to put the lid back on the box. Once you’ve

opened that lid you may as well do the most with it because I think that's where the rewards come from. They can be slow-burn but if you look at it with a holistic view and try to change things slowly rather than with one big bang – invariably that's short lived – I was looking for more organic change over time and keeping track of where we were going and moving small levers to tweak it – don't just carry on the same path - things change all the time and that data will tell you where you need to step in and do something.

Simon: Great advice - Stewart, I really enjoyed our conversation, thank you for sharing some of your insights with us. I'll include the links to the Driive website and the AFP website in the show notes.

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Simon: If you manage drivers and their vehicles, and you face similar issues to those discussed in this podcast, there are links in the show notes to some useful resources on the Driving for Better Business website. And these are all free to access. If you enjoyed the conversation, please don't forget to hit subscribe - so you know when the next episode is released. And please also give us a 5-star review, as this helps us to get up the podcast rankings, and makes it more visible to others who might also find it useful. You can follow us – that's Driving for Better Business on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. And most importantly, please help us to spread the word. All our resources are free for those who manage fleets and their employees who drive for work. Thank you for listening to Let's Talk Fleet Risk, and I look forward to welcoming you to the next episode.