

Every Trucking Company Needs More Problem Solvers

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In today's increasingly complex trucking environment, it is more important than ever to ensure management teams have sharp problem-solving skills. If an evaluation of these skills has not been done recently, now may be the time.

In IBM's past three Global CEO studies, CEOs said that coping with change was their most pressing challenge. In their 2010 survey, a new primary challenge emerged – complexity. CEOs said they are operating in a world that is more volatile, uncertain and complex. Many shared that incremental changes are no longer sufficient in a world that is operating in fundamentally different ways. Four primary findings arose from this survey:

- Today's complexity is only expected to rise, and more than half of the CEOs doubt their ability to manage it.
- Creativity is the most important leadership quality, according to the CEOs.
- The most successful organizations co-create products and services with customers and integrate customers into core processes. Customer intimacy is their No. 1 priority.
- Better performers manage complexity on behalf of their organizations, customers and partners. They do so by simplifying operations and products, and increasing dexterity to change the way they work, access resources and enter markets.

One CEO in the survey stated that "Creativity means new ways of solving tough problems. Many challenges require innovative thinking." Another stated, "The management environment is rapidly becoming more complex. In these uncertain times, the need for effective and swift decision making is more important than ever."

Recently, Harvard Law School realized they do an incredibly good job of training the best analytical minds in the world, but reading and interpreting the law is not what the typical lawyer faces each day in law practice. They decided that a Problem-Solving Workshop was needed to equip lawyers with another important skill set that would include creative thinking and teamwork. They launched this unique workshop the winter term of this past year.

With problem-solving skills being so critical in this increasingly complex world (i.e. CSA 2010, hours of service, etc.), how do trucking companies begin to train and evaluate their management team on these skills?

Katz, Sapper & Miller (KSM) asked that same question and decided it would assess its own management team since the firm places a high value on being considered problem solvers for its clients. KSM determined it would be beneficial to formally train its staff in problem solving, and needed a simple problem-solving framework to achieve this goal. KSM thoroughly researched different training methods and discovered a book written by a former McKinsey consultant, which described, in simple terms, the McKinsey problem-solving process and some of the tools that McKinsey consultants

use to solve problems. A former McKinsey consultant and a leadership consultant were engaged to help KSM design a problem-solving course built around the book and its methods. The problem-solving process is simple:

- Understand the situation.
- Identify the root cause of the problem.
- Develop an effective action plan.
- Execute and modify until the problem is solved.

The author of the book explains that even though the process is simple, individuals often do not choose the solution that is the most simple and obvious. Thus, having a simple problem-solving framework and teaching staff easy problem solving tools can accomplish the following:

- Provide a framework for thinking more creatively.
- Help managers to arrive at the *best* solution to a problem, not a solution that may cause additional problems.
- Allow for a transfer of problem-solving skills and knowledge among staff.
- Provide staff with the confidence to make decisions quickly.
- Allow staff to be better problem solvers in their personal lives.
- Will make an organization better equipped to assist clients in solving their problems.

Katz, Sapper & Miller's Transportation Services Group has designed a problem solving workshop specifically for the operations team of a trucking company. The majority of the workshop is spent with the operations team engaged in discussing ways to improve the profitability of the trucking company. If you are interested in learning more about this workshop, contact Tim Almack at Katz, Sapper & Miller, LLP.

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