



## How to Celebrate Driver Appreciation Week

Every year in September, the transportation industry celebrates National Truck Driver Appreciation Week (NTDAW).<sup>1</sup> The American Trucking Associations (ATA) created and promotes this week of recognition and gratitude for drivers' hard work. Each carrier, though, decides how to celebrate and what to do for its drivers.

### Why It Matters

At Stay Metrics, drivers tell us constantly that they feel under-appreciated for the essential work they do for our society and economy. In our recent report on the [Top 20 Opportunities for Carriers](#) to improve to retain drivers based on the Stay Index, we identified the level of compensation in relation to the amount of work performed was the most important area for carriers to consider. Likewise, seven of the top 10 issues were related to drivers' trust of their carriers.

***"Drivers chronically feel under-recognized and under-rewarded," – Tim Hines CEO Stay Metrics***

We believe that Driver Appreciation Week is one valuable tool in your strategy to increase driver trust, build a positive work culture, and correct the longstanding under-appreciation drivers feel.

This week should be a time that everyone in the company focuses on drivers and the entire team that supports them. It is a "can't miss" opportunity to demonstrate the importance of drivers and provide memorable gestures that drivers can take with them. It also helps you build a driver-centric culture that recognizes drivers every day.

<sup>1</sup>For this compilation paper, we will be referring to it as simply Driver Appreciation Week (DAW).

### A Compilation of Ideas from Across the Industry

Perhaps you work for a carrier looking to change or expand its DAW practices. Stay Metrics has researched what trucking companies do and conducted interviews with dozens of professionals who have graciously shared their creative and unique ideas.

In compiling their ideas, we hope to help other trucking company teams adopt, expand, and refresh their DAW events.

### We divide our findings into five categories:

- **Compliments and notes of appreciation**
- **Driver family involvement**
- **Events held during or around Driver Appreciation Week**
- **Driver gifts and giveaways**
- **Wellness activities**

After sharing these practices, we will touch on some of the side benefits of a great DAW celebration before emphasizing how important it is that driver appreciation continues to be part of your culture, day-in and day-out, whether it is Driver Appreciation Week or any week of the year.



## Compliments and Notes of Appreciation

One of the easiest ways to celebrate Driver Appreciation Week is to simply express to drivers how much they are valued and thank them. Amid hectic schedules and deadlines, it is easy to forget to do this daily. In fact, among Stay Metrics Annual Driver Survey respondents, only about 69.7% of drivers said that their dispatchers recognized good performance on the job,<sup>2</sup> and these carriers represent some of the best in the industry for driver appreciation.

Therefore, we think Driver Appreciation Week is a ready-made touch point for amplifying your expression of gratitude and building the habit of recognizing drivers into the workflow of your managers and dispatchers.

**Hoekstra Transportation (Kankakee, IL)** is a standout example of doing this right. As part of their Driver Appreciation Week schedule, they start thanking drivers early and keep doing it at least a week later. The whole staff is involved and encouraged to give drivers handshakes and one-to-one gratitude.

Starting a systematic process like this at your carrier can help grow a more constant stream of gratitude from your team. Use DAW as the starting place, but make sure your team knows that you expect them to keep up with thanking drivers.

Jason Eisenman from **Liquid Trucking (Plattsmouth, NE)** told us that he is committed to constantly recognizing drivers, and not just once per year. He does so by using daily internal communications that call out drivers for great accomplishments. Building the right habits can make this a reality at any carrier.

<sup>2</sup> Source: Stay Metrics Database (2019). Responses from August 1, 2018-July, 31, 2019. Total Responses: 16,874. Total Carriers: 78

## Driver Family Involvement

It's been said many times, but trucking is a "family business." This is true just as much for drivers as it is for owners. Due to the demands of the trucking profession, having a driver's family on board is critical to that driver's success in this career. DAW is a perfect opportunity to engage drivers' families positively.

One possible avenue for this engagement is a Stay Metrics-administered rewards program. Many carriers give drivers a significant point award during Driver Appreciation Week, and we know from our interactions with drivers that families are often involved in choosing items to redeem. Consider letting families know these points have arrived to get them excited to browse the catalog.

Another approach to reach drivers' families is to mail something to drivers' home addresses. **Nussbaum Transportation (Hudson, IL)** sends a personalized greeting card to each driver's family. They include a gift card specifically for the family to use, often for Amazon or similar. Nussbaum knows that driver support systems are critical and wants each family to know how much the carrier appreciates "all they do to support their driver." The response to this initiative has been "overwhelmingly positive."

**Hoekstra Transportation** takes a similar approach. They send a letter to families from President Steve Hoekstra letting them know how much they appreciate each family's support. New for 2019's DAW, Hoekstra will be reaching out to families to ask for comments and photos to be posted on Facebook.

**Baylor Trucking (Milan, IN)** also recognizes the value of Facebook to reach families. They use DAW as a time to post driver recognition messages knowing that spouses and children will be more likely to see

them on that platform. They keep this strategy going year-round. Just a few weeks ago, they posted about how drivers deliver critical chemotherapy drugs that save lives. Baylor wants drivers' families to know that their driving family member is "making a difference every day."

## Events Held During or Around DAW

One of the most popular ways to commemorate Driver Appreciation Week is with special events for drivers.

### Week-long Events

**Load One (Taylor, MI)** provides both breakfast and lunch for drivers every day. The meals have a lot of variety, too, with each day coming from a different caterer. The range goes from a full, hot breakfast buffet to a barbecue lunch to gourmet lunch boxes. They also hire someone to come in twice during the week to wash drivers' trucks while they eat or partake in other festivities, such as lawn games like corn hole.

Very similarly, **Navajo Express (Denver, CO)** holds events all week with breakfast and lunch provided by food trucks (pictured on cover of this paper), which have amazing quality and variety in a city like Denver. They take a lighthearted approach to the week with events such as a dunk tank with the executive management team taking turns in the tank and driver leaders taking a pie to the face from their drivers. The office staff faces off against drivers in an epic game of tug of war.

In addition to these events, Navajo holds a raffle. Last year drivers competed for a trip to California to go on a blimp ride in the Goodyear® blimp. MHC Kenworth Denver comes out on the Friday of DAW to hold a big giveaway and host a barbecue for drivers. Navajo sees a side benefit of this being that drivers get a chance to express their feedback on equipment straight to the

source.

**Hoekstra Transportation** takes the food to the next level. Rather than providing food at specific times, to meet the demands of a 24/7 operation and drivers that work at odd hours, they provide food all day long each day. Drivers can even take a second meal with them in a takeout container.

### One-Day Events

**AIM Integrated Logistics (Girard, OH)** makes their Driver Appreciation Week event a family affair. They hold a picnic with hot dogs and hamburgers that has a carnival-like atmosphere with face painters and other activities. Uniquely, they do not restrict attendance to their drivers and let any driver with a CDL in, making it a great outreach event for the company. Drivers enter giveaways and get a selection of company swag.

**Star Fleet Trucking (Middlebury, IN)** celebrates several weeks before the official week to take advantage of the Elkhart County Fair, one of the largest county fairs in the nation. They pay for all their drivers and families to enter and hold a picnic with giveaways, gifts (such as multi-tools, thermoses, blankets, wireless speakers, cell phone holders, and much more), and a lot of extras from partner vendors, including us at Stay Metrics! We attend and give drivers the chance to "spin the wheel" and earn points for their rewards program, as well as ensure that drivers know how to log in and use it.

Taking a different approach, **Baylor Trucking** makes their celebration a dinner event. They invite drivers to bring their spouses and have a VIP party. They describe the atmosphere as "truly like a wedding," with lots of fun, camaraderie, and appreciation all around. The company puts up drivers and their



spouses for two nights at a hotel and shuttles them to the party and back. In a more solemn moment, they also light lanterns to remember drivers who have passed.

### A Note on Participation

All the companies we spoke with who held events recognize that not all drivers can or want to attend. This is the key thing to keep in mind if you choose to use events to celebrate Driver Appreciation Week.

There is no perfect solution. The job of a truck driver, by its very nature, requires time away and working nights and weekends. Many drivers will miss these events because of these realities and that can be alienating.

We have a few ideas for carriers to consider that might help:

- **For multi-terminal fleets, make sure your celebrations are held at each terminal to involve the most drivers possible.**
- **Think about having a “Make-Up Day” celebration that includes all the festivities of the original event for drivers that, for whatever reason, cannot celebrate during Driver Appreciation Week.**
- **Send gift cards to drivers who are away so they can have meals on the company even though they could not do so at your event.**

## Driver Gifts and Giveaways

A related way to celebrate DAW is to provide gifts for drivers. There are many options, so choose one that fits your culture and budget.

**Load One** uses a combination of gifts and rewards points in their Stay Metrics-administered rewards program. Last year, the company gave away over one million rewards points to drivers, as well as providing each driver with a shirt and other company swag.

To get drivers excited for their gift bags, **Baylor Trucking** promotes them in advance. They recently posted a video on YouTube of drivers unboxing the gift bag from last year. Some of the items that have been included in past gift bags include vitamin energy drinks, t-shirts with the driver’s name embroidered, and Pilot Flying J gift cards.

Baylor also holds a raffle for big prizes. The most popular option has been a Wyndham travel voucher for a one-week vacation anywhere in the world, including airfare and hotel. Baylor says of this prize, “They can choose anything from Gatlinburg to Greece.” Other prizes they have raffled have been 50-yard line Indianapolis Colts tickets, chrome and lights for the driver’s truck, exercise bikes that fit a truck, winter coats, camping supplies, and gift cards to popular retailers.

**Hoekstra** also provides both gifts to all drivers and raffles. For gifts, they have given jackets, pullovers, shirts, backpacks, duffel bags, double-wall steel travel cups, and more. Their raffles have included round trip airfare tickets, gift cards, high-end Bluetooth headsets, commercial-grade GPS devices, and more. They add a personal touch to the gift as well by including things like personal thank you messages and homemade cookies or Chex mix.



**AIM** not only uses raffles to show appreciation, but they also tie it to building up the driver community. As mentioned before, they allow any driver, regardless of carrier, to attend their picnic. That also means any driver present is eligible for the raffles they hold at the event, regardless of carrier affiliation. They give away a \$50 gift card to attendees every 15 minutes of the event, a total of 10 winners. AIM drivers get an extra raffle as well for a really nice 4-wheeler.



Taking a different approach altogether, **Roadmaster Group (Glendale, AZ)** reimburses each driver for dinner wherever they want. They also raffle off prizes and gift baskets to drivers, and this year they are introducing SiriusXM subscriptions for all company trucks that week.

## Wellness Activities

A newer and less common way to recognize Driver Appreciation Week is to focus on driver wellness. Focusing on this area shows drivers you appreciate them by giving them resources to ensure their wellness. Being a truck driver, especially an OTR truck driver, makes wellness challenging. When a carrier understands this dynamic and does all it can to help counter it, drivers will feel appreciated.

These wellness activities can be tied directly to other DAW celebrations, especially events. **Load One** includes a wellness clinic at their event, allowing drivers to check their blood pressure, receive flu shots, and have their blood sugar levels checked. These simple procedures can often help identify any larger issues before they get worse.

**Prime, Inc. (Springfield, MO)** also focuses on wellness for DAW and encourages their shippers and receivers to join in. They want to make drivers aware of potential health threats and encourage them all to get regular screenings and checkups.

There are fewer examples of this tactic available in the group of carriers we spoke with, so we think it is a newer practice. It might be an innovative and cost-effective solution. Carriers that already have a celebration should consider including some type of wellness component.

## The Perks of a Great DAW Celebration

In addition to happier and better-recognized drivers, a great Driver Appreciation Week celebration can have several side benefits for carriers. These should not be your primary goals, but it makes sense to keep them in mind as you make your plans.

### Positive Press

Depending on the size of your carrier, your celebration could have a big impact on your local community or region. There is a very good chance local papers and news stations will want to feature what you are doing for Driver Appreciation Week.

One of the simplest ways to stimulate this growth is to send a short press release to all your local news organizations a few weeks before DAW or the week you are celebrating. Feel free to use the format of one of the press releases on the Stay Metrics website as a template if you have never written one.

A few of the carriers we spoke with are doing this. **AIM** mentioned that a local reporter is already on the story of their event. This story is even more positive because it follows up on the news that another local carrier recently went out of business. AIM is creating a strong connection to its community.

**Hoekstra Trucking** had a local paper send someone to ride with a driver for a day. The reporter was blown away by everything drivers had to do and what they encountered in just a single day. This article appeared in the paper over Labor Day weekend of 2015, just a week before DAW.

### Achieving Business Objectives

Celebrating Driver Appreciation Week can help carriers achieve other business objectives. The most obvious one is recruiting since recruiters will be able to tell potential drivers about what they will be getting during DAW, but the event itself could also stimulate recruiting.

**Baylor Trucking** uses the occasion of DAW every other year to create a high-budget driver appreciation video that is also a recruiting tool. The drivers loved this video, which took the theme "Our business is our family."

Recruiting is not the only department that can benefit. **ShipEX (Salt Lake City, UT)** used DAW to unveil its new Bonus Program, which is based on productivity and compliance. There was a massive, positive reception to this program.



It's important to celebrate  
the team's efforts. They  
are the driving force of  
our community, our  
company, and our country.  
-- Cari Baylor

## Not Just Once a Year

As you can see, carriers across the industry have found varied and impactful ways to celebrate drivers during Driver Appreciation Week. But celebrating drivers just once per year is not the right call. To change your culture for the better so that drivers are more satisfied and stay at your carrier, driver appreciation must be a part of your standard operating procedure.

Several carriers we spoke with emphasized this point. **Liquid Trucking's** Jason Eisenman noted that he tries "not to relate our focus of appreciating everyone who works for us down to one week and take a more holistic approach of working on this all the time." That includes Driver Appreciation Week, but he emphasizes that this approach is ingrained into his team's daily operations.<sup>3</sup>

Likewise, Jim Guthrie from **Prime** commented, "We really like to keep the driver appreciation culture alive year-round."

The consensus we come to is that **Driver Appreciation Week should be celebrated, but it cannot be the only time you focus on recognizing drivers and show them you appreciate their work.** Creating an ongoing culture of gratitude can transform your company and build the type of driver-centric culture that retains drivers.

Cari Baylor from **Baylor Trucking** sums it all up:

*"It is important to celebrate the team's efforts. They are the driving force of our community, company, and country. It is important that their families know what a VIP the drivers are."*

No matter how you commemorate the event, this message is central to Driver Appreciation Week: drivers deserve our gratitude. Finding ways to show it well every day is sure to make you a carrier to beat in driver loyalty and retention.

<sup>3</sup>To find out more about the driver-centric culture at Liquid Trucking, [check out our case study on them.](#)

## About Stay Metrics

Stay Metrics helps trucking companies engage, reward and keep their best drivers through an industry-leading suite of driver surveys. After running responses through our scientifically rigorous models, carriers gain a deep understanding of driver behaviors and attitudes that drive retention.

Stay Metrics also offers a custom-branded loyalty rewards program to recognize driver performance on key metrics. We create a fully featured website to support your program and to serve as a communication hub for drivers. Add in our DRIVE SAFE and DRIVE FIT interactive training modules, and we think you will agree that Stay Metrics offers the most comprehensive driver retention toolkit on the market.

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