

Barloworld Transport addressing shortage of truck drivers

One of the biggest roadblocks to ensuring the safe and efficient transport of goods on South Africa's roads is without a doubt the severe shortage of skilled and experienced truck drivers.



James McKenzie, executive for human resources at Barloworld Transport, says the shortage of drivers is a huge challenge for the road freight industry. “Out of every 100 drivers who apply for jobs at Barloworld Transport, only about seven initially meet our criteria.”

According to McKenzie, an estimated 40% of professional drivers in South Africa are also operating illegally as their professional drivers permits (PrDPs) are either fraudulent or have expired.

Barloworld Transport Academy

In order to address this skills shortage, Barloworld Transport founded the Barloworld Transport Academy, a separate division within the company focusing on niche road transport training. The academy is a fully-accredited training provider registered with the Transport Education and Training Authority (TETA) and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET).

McKenzie says the academy enables the company to develop and hire the skilled drivers the business requires, while also ensuring the continuous development of its existing employees.

As the academy is a registered FET College, employees receive formal recognition for the training they complete in the form of a National Certificate in Professional Driving (NQF3). “Each new driver who joins completes a three-week professional driving course through the academy – which forms the start of the qualification - and every single one of the 1800 drivers employed with us also takes part in a refresher course every year.”

McKenzie says the training its drivers receive through the academy is crucial for the company to manage risks and contribute to safer roads for all road users. It also plays a part in addressing the high levels of unemployment in South Africa, especially among the youth. “The academy offers funded learnership programmes for unemployed people. We have 140 unemployed people on various academy programmes at the moment and another 100 unemployed learners are enrolling this month.”

Lack of experience: biggest barrier

He says a lack of experience is also the biggest barrier facing young people who want to become truck drivers. “You need between three and five years of experience to be hired as a professional truck driver, but this makes it very difficult to get hired and gain the experience you need in the first place. The Academy bridges this gap.”

Barloworld Transport has partnered with a technical high school in Pietermaritzburg where 10 matriculants have been enrolled into a school-leavers programme. “These learners will ultimately go back to the school to talk about their experience and present the transport and logistics industry as a career choice. The opportunities are vast.”

The training courses take place at centres throughout the country, while the majority of unemployed learnership programmes take place at our academy based in Mkondeni, Pietermaritzburg. “The academy not only brings much-needed opportunities to the community, but we have found that learnership programmes are often more successful when based in smaller metropolitan areas.”

Tapping into talent

He says the relatively high level of entry level wages for truck drivers also mean that people who complete the programme to become drivers are more likely to continue in the professional driver field or further their education and go on to fulfil other roles in the transport industry.

He says Barloworld Transport is also tapping into a talent pool most other companies in the road freight sector seem to have largely ignored – namely women. The Academy has a learnership programme aimed specifically at training female truck drivers. “95% of the 45 women already trained through the programme are now employed as drivers for Barloworld Transport, another 45 are currently enrolled in the programme and a further 60 are starting it this month.”

Interest in becoming truck drivers growing among women

He notes that interest in becoming truck drivers is growing among women. “The academy’s phones ring all day. We received over 1000 applications to fill those 60 spots. These are women who already have their Code 14 licenses and are passionate about becoming truck drivers.

“In line with our transformation targets, our aim is that women will make up 25% of our drivers by 2020. We believe this approach is integral to the transformation of the transport industry while addressing our skills challenges,” McKenzie concludes.