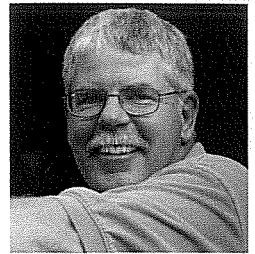


It Can Be Done

Here's a carrier that's cutting brave new ground with the full support of its drivers and customers.



JIM PARK

We said a long time ago that *highwaySTAR* was a celebration of all that's good in trucking, so here's something worth celebrating. It's about a carrier in B.C. that went into 2007 committed to embracing both the new HOS rules *and* on-board recorders. Cloverdale, B.C.'s Coastal Pacific Xpress Inc. has done just that, without incentives, regulations, or a mass exodus of drivers.

To make sure it all works, company owners Jim Mickey and Glen Parsons held lots of meetings with not only their drivers, but with customers, service providers, and law enforcement. They spent a weekend in Kamloops in December showing officials there how the new electronic on-board recorders were supposed to work, how to view or download data, and even working out ways of getting data to the cruisers by fax or e-mail if for some reason the inspector wasn't able to get it from the recorder itself.

CPX isn't hiding anything from the authorities. Quite the contrary; it's leading the charge toward electronic HOS compliance, and it's counting on enforcement to make the plan work.

"History will see us as either a footnote or a vanguard carrier in this regard," company co-president, Jim Mickey told me. "If our plan doesn't work we're dead. If it does work, we're golden, and it all depends on how well the enforcement people do their jobs."

Mickey and Parsons are literally betting the farm that their competitors are going to try to maintain the old way of doing business – right down to continuing to cut rates to get business and falling down every time with service failures, out-of-service orders, and massive driver discontent with the new working conditions.

CPX on the other hand, has 100% driver buy-in, nearly complete customer buy-in, and total support from the enforcement community.

Mickey credits the new HOS rules with allowing the company to implement this brave new plan. "Without the new, more restrictive rules, my customers would never have accepted our

23% rate increase," he says. "We went out with DVDs and CDs that we produced and explained it all to them, and the buy-in was terrific. Yeah, a few told us we'd have to look elsewhere for freight to haul, but that's okay. If the customers aren't onside, the plan won't work."

As for the drivers at CPX, they all got a 23% raise recently — part of a company strategy to reduce the driver's workload in an effort to improve their home lives, Mickey says.

"We promised we'd cut the miles back across the fleet to about 10,000 a month, while instituting a pay increase to make up the difference," he says. "Nobody here is making any less, but they're working less, and they're happier, and the raise is consistent with the expected reduction in miles under the new rules."

When asked how the pair plan to pull this off in the face of competition that can't cut rates fast enough, Mickey said it's all a matter of setting more reasonable targets. "We told the drivers we'd expect 450 miles a day out of them rather than 600, and we told the customers that we'd base our delivery schedules on a 10-hour day rather than 13, which leaves us room to absorb some of the stuff that goes wrong out there everyday."

"I think trucking is the only industry in the world that expects 100 percent – sometimes 110 percent – from its people every day of their lives," Mickey says. "It's not right. It's no way to live. We're shooting for 80 percent of what we used to do. We're rearranging our delivery schedules, and we're adding switch yards so the longer runs become more manageable."

How's that for a new way of thinking? I've been watching CPX for about a year now, and so far Mickey and Parsons have delivered on every promise I've heard them make to their drivers and their customers. I'm glad to be able to report on developments like this because it shows the industry – or at least small parts of it — are moving forward without bans and mandates and level playing fields and government incentives and all that other stuff they keep telling us has to happen before anything else will change. ★