

Study Guide for Choosing a Driving Career

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Big shiny trucks, hints about the 'freedom of the road', traveling the country sightseeing, and promises of more money than you make at your current job in two years are all used by trucking companies and trucking schools to 'hook' you into a driving career without knowing what the job really entails. Trucking isn't as easy as they make it appear, if it was there wouldn't be a so called driver shortage, everyone would drive trucks for a living. If you are thinking of becoming a trucker, there are some things you need to take into consideration.

Are you married and/or have young kids?

Being a trucker requires long periods away from home, up to a month to six weeks during your training time and could be that long depending on the company you work for, after you go out in your own truck. You will miss those important events in your family's lives such as anniversaries, birthdays, some holidays and school activities. Once you gain some experience, you can change companies to a company that allows more frequent home time, but in trucking, even if you put in to be home, there is no guarantee you will get there or at least get there exactly when you want to be.

Truck Driving Schools

There are many driving schools out there, some help you with financing, some don't and some are affiliated with trucking training companies that will pay your tuition for you but require you to sign a contract to drive for them. It is better if you can finance your own school. Most schools are of short duration, 2-3 weeks. You are basically taught how to pass the test to get your cdl, this does not make you a truck driver, you have tons of things to still learn. Some schools take a month or more to complete the course. These types of schools are better than the shorter ones.

Many schools promise that you will be able to get a local job right off. You might, but it is doubtful. Most local jobs are taken by drivers with lots of experience, and you might have to wait for one to retire or die before getting the job. This is dependant on where you live, the bigger the city, the more local jobs available.

Money

I see a lot of ads that promise up to \$60k your first year. Though there are a very few companies where you might make that your first year, it is more realistic that you will make between \$25-35k your first year. While you are with your trainer, average pay is about \$350.00 a week gross. Out of that you will have to pay for your road expenses such as meals. If you eat three meals a day at truckstops, you can figure \$30.00 a day for meals.

Trucking pay is primarily of two types. Mileage pay, where you are paid so many cents per mile and percentage pay where you are paid a percentage of what the load pays to the truck. Most companies do not pay on the actual miles you might drive, they pay on shortest route which might include routes that are not feasible for trucks. Some companies are going to what is called practical miles. This is the route that is shown to be shortest and fastest on a computer program and is more accurate to a point. It does not take into account detours or change of route for weather avoidance.

Sightseeing

The fact of the matter is that you can see a lot of great things from the cab of your truck, at 65 mph as you go by, but there is little or no time scheduled into runs for time to stop and look even if you find somewhere that you can get the rig into.

Trucks

Many ads show a big shiny, chromed out large car and say you can drive one of these in just two weeks...NOT LIKELY. Most training companies have economy trucks, trucks that are just work horses and have the bare minimum of comforts and do dads. If you stick with it, gain a couple of years experience, you might end up in a large car, which leads to the next topic...lease purchase.

Lease Purchase or Owning your own

Many companies offer students the option of going into a lease purchase program to own their own truck. Though there are some fairly good lease purchase programs out there, most are not. Most people who enter into lease purchase programs right out of school fail miserably. This is also true for going out and buying your own truck right out of school.

Trucking on the face of it might appear a simple business, but in depth it is not. There are many factors that will make you or break you and it takes several years of experience to learn those factors.

Summary

Trucking can be a profitable and enjoyable way to make a living, it has been for me. Do your homework and learn all you can about the industry and the job. Talk it over with your spouse if you are married and make sure that they also understand what the job entails. Find the longest training school course that you can afford and choose your training company carefully. Use your common sense and remember that if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is false.

If you choose to become a trucker, then do it proudly. The profession has a long, diverse, illustrious history and provides a very needed service to the country. Finally, remember that safety comes first, no matter what, no load is worth your life...and no matter how long you drive, you will always have something more to learn about trucking. Good luck and I hope your roads will be always straight and dry.