

Calling Future Log Haulers – May 2019

Recently, we had the opportunity to pilot a newly developed log truck driver training program developed by industry for industry.

The development of this program was managed by the [BC Forest Safety Council \(BCFSC\)](#) with direction, content, technical input and support coming from members of the industry's safety groups, namely the [Log Truck Technical Advisory Committee \(LTTAC\)](#) and the [Trucking and Harvesting Advisory Group \(TAG\)](#). Members include representatives from log hauling contractors, log truck drivers, forestry licensees, harvesting contractors, RCMP, Commercial Vehicle Safety and Enforcement, and the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resources and Rural Development.



The program was developed in response to a gap in Class 1 licensing and the competency required of a Professional Log Truck Driver, a shortage of qualified log truck drivers in BC, and an inability to properly train new entrants to the industry to operate consistently to an industry-set standard of professionalism, safety and performance.

The first steps of developing the program included the establishment of core competencies – what are all the things every log truck driver in BC needs to know, and then deciding how best to teach that content to ensure consistent outcomes that reflect the performance, knowledge and skills needed to be a good log truck driver in diverse BC forestry conditions.

As a 4th generation log hauling and forestry business based in Kamloops, our company, Munden Ventures, has always tried to support industry initiatives, as well as innovate and give back, when we can, to an industry which has been good to our family.

Through involvement that I've had with the BC Trucking Association and the Canadian Trucking Alliance, I know first-hand that the driver shortage being experienced in the log hauling sector in Canada developed even earlier in over-the-road trucking sectors.

Being asked to assist in the late stages of development of this driver training program seemed like a natural fit for me, and then to be presented with the opportunity to offer training and mentorship to a young person looking to become a log hauler using the program, was a no-brainer.

From the start, quality and consistency were key factors

Work began on the development of this program more than two years ago by a group of veteran industry professionals. Coming late to the party, I was struck by the passion that this group had in the countless volunteer hours and work they had done in building something they were extremely proud of and hoped the industry would embrace. One of my main take-aways was that the group's priority was of ensuring the training standards, as they had written them, would be maintained, sustainable and measurable regardless of who delivered them. The vision was to create materials and resources that industry could use directly in their own operations and that could also be used by educational institutions/industry partnerships and private training providers.

Like many log hauling companies in the industry, we like to think we have pretty high standards for landing a job with us. Typically, we require a minimum of three years of log hauling experience, a clean "N" driver's abstract, good references and a history of loyalty to the previous companies that applicants have worked for.

Given that we have been hauling logs in the BC Interior since 1967, we are relatively well-known and coupled with a low turnover rate, we are fortunate in not normally having positions open for long when they do come up. That said, virtually all of our hiring simply sees a veteran log hauler coming to us from another log hauler – we certainly aren't adding to the driver pool, and, in most cases, only passing the issue on to another business in the industry. It's no secret that industry was short an estimated 5,000 professional drivers in BC in 2018. (See link at the bottom to the study.)

At the same time, I was getting involved in the development of the program, one of our owner operator's sons, Michael, wanted desperately to land a job hauling logs – just like his Dad. Fortunately, he already had his class 1 license and had been driving vacuum truck, sporadically. In the past, we would not have even considered hiring a young man like Michael. After all, we are a log hauling business – too busy doing what we do to even consider figuring out how to properly train a young person, let alone having the financial or staff resources to entertain such a thing.

Program allows one to take on training new young workers as truck drivers

Having the driver program available gave us the confidence (and the support and resources) we needed to take a chance on Michael. Trish Kohorst, the BC Forest Safety Council's Transportation Manager, quickly arranged a trip to Kamloops to meet with

Michael, and his Dad, Scott (who would become Michael's mentor), and Munden management and make sure they were suitable for the program and to make sure we all understood what we were committing to.

During that meeting, Trish explained the basis of the program being competency-based. This is not a pass or fail situation, but a measurement of meeting or not yet meeting the required outcomes of the program. The program required that we spend time with Michael covering off all of the fundamentals of log hauling – everything from safe work procedures, fit for work, hours of service, truck systems, configurations, and shop safety – before ever entering the cab of a truck.

Building irreplaceable knowledge before getting into the driving seat

One of the really valuable things that the program encouraged us to undertake was having Michael spend time in our shop with one of our red seal mechanics. Having unrestricted time going thoroughly through a truck with a knowledgeable person, is often not made available to a driver during the “throw them the keys and get them out there” style of training our industry has done too much of. Although Michael had spent time around and driving trucks previously, he will tell you that he learned more in those few hours about the truck and truck systems, than he had in all the time he previously spent in the trucking industry.

Competency Conversations are not one-offs

Once we had covered off all of the “academic” knowledge pieces of the log hauling industry, we repeated it over the course of the training, including what the program calls the Competency Conversation. This piece is literally a “conversation” that can be led either by the driver mentor, or by someone else helping with the training. It is designed to have the trainee answer questions about the industry that have been covered during the knowledge pieces of the training. As with all parts of the training, reaching “competency” is the ability to demonstrate the knowledge and skills required by the industry multiple times in a variety of contexts. In this case, a trainee would be expected to successfully answer all questions in the competency conversation five times over the course of the training.

Having industry mentors willing and able to give their time and pass on their knowledge to the next generation of professional log haulers is critical to this program. As it turns out, taking on the training of his son forced Scott to refamiliarize himself with a lot of things in the industry which he forgot he knew. It also caused him to identify areas where he had developed “short cuts” in doing his job, short cuts that I know most log haulers find over time and seem to get away with – until they don't.

Self-paced, self-styled training to best meet needs and assure competency

The training program does not dictate the particulars of how the training is accomplished, or at what pace. There is a significant reliance on the expertise of the driver mentor to assess the progress of the trainee, the conditions and all other

circumstances (length of day, cycle times, pressure from other trucks, etc.) and tailor the training to ensure the success of the trainee, and, importantly, safety. Once again, the mandate is to conduct the training over a period of time and have the trainee demonstrate the outcomes multiple times in a variety of contexts.

As you would expect, Michael's driving training started with simply being a passenger and observing. This gave him a great opportunity to watch his mentor handle various situations and see the safe work procedures learned in the knowledge stages of the program work in practice. Everything from radio protocol, signage and loading/unloading procedures. Eventually, riding along led to empty driving. Empty driving led to loaded driving, and, ultimately, complete handling of the day (with mentor oversight).

Training progress is documented by both trainee and mentor

Both Michael and Scott were required to document the training and submit a regular report to our office, which we shared with the BCFSC. This reporting was intended to identify progress against competency elements, identify gaps to be worked on, and, ultimately, keep everyone focused on covering all of the required skills and knowledge in the program, and have Michael reach a level of "competent".

Once Michael could demonstrate to Scott the ability to handle all of the various functions of the job a minimum of five times in a variety of contexts, Scott said he was ready.

Okay, so your mentor says your ready... or maybe he is just tired of sitting in the passenger seat, right?

Scott said he was ready, our shop said he was ready, and our operations staff who conducted the competency conversations and knowledge training said he was ready. Now it was up to an independent 3rd party to determine if he was ready. The BCFSC arranged for an independent driver assessor to travel to Kamloops for Michael's final independent assessment.

Independent assessment is critical to ensuring success

Thinking back to one of the main goals of the program development team, the independent assessor is mandated with ensuring the standards of the program are maintained and met. The independent assessor's role is to spend a trip with the trainee and evaluate his/her competency using the attributes, skills and knowledge that a professional log truck driver needs to confidently display to be considered "competent". This starts with the competency conversation, includes the pre-trip inspection and then a complete "cycle", whereby the trainee must demonstrate each element of the training to the standard. Once again, there is no grade or pass or fail, there is simply "competent", or "not yet competent" for each required element of the program.

Successful completion of this program means Michael has displayed competency in every area and confirmed by independent verification.

I know Michael is proud, but I can also say that we are all proud of Michael proving his competency in this final assessment and earning his endorsement as a Professional Log Truck Driver.

This training took approximately two months from the time we started mid-October through mid-December and saw Michael in the office, truck or shop everyday. The bulk of his training was in-cab. Now to say that we had our reservations about training a young person to become a professional driver would be fair. To think that we were willing to do that during one of the toughest times of the year, through almost every possible weather and road condition, with both on-highway and off-highway loads, on a tri-drive/quad short log unit, might even be considered a little crazy. Actually, I think it's one of the best moves we made.

Keeping it real means it's sustainable for industry and invaluable for the trainee

Sure, Scott could have trained Michael through the summer in dry and relatively safe conditions. We could have restricted him to our easiest runs, on the shortest days, with the least pressure. But we didn't. Scott's truck stayed on his normal haul, in his normal position, hauling his regular loads. Michael saw the true picture of hauling logs (except maybe 30-degree weather in dry conditions). He experienced a lot of the circumstances he will normally encounter in the industry – and he learned a ton, in an organized, intentional and safe way.

So how do I convince myself this was a success? I guess time will tell. In the meantime, the best measure is being confident enough to put Michael to work in this industry. When we started the training, we did not have a position available. As circumstances, and chance, would have it, an opportunity opened up just as Michael was completing his training.

Michael is now part of our regular professional driver team and is pulling his weight, safely. I can honestly say that I am very confident in Michael's abilities and the training that he has received. It is by far and away the most comprehensive training we have ever been a part of in developing a driver. Best of all, we have been able to transition a young, passionate person into the industry without simply passing along our driver shortage problem to another company. I think it's a good first step.

I believe it's possible that the endorsement as a "Professional Log Truck Driver" provided through this training program helps to lay the groundwork for a higher regard for this occupation, sort of "red seal-like". I think it's entirely possible that licensees could begin recognizing and even requiring this designation among their log hauling contractor or employee groups. After all, eliminating log hauling incidents and accidents remains one of the licensee's highest priorities. This, in turn, will make it important for companies, like mine, to attract drivers who either already have, or who are prepared to spend the time to get this important endorsement. And, if you're a professional driver, aside from making you safer, it may make you even more valuable.

Training is serious business. It takes time, resources and it takes effort from many people. And it is incredibly rewarding. Next time you see Michael or Scott on the road, just ask them.

For me, I am committed to doing my small part in elevating the occupation of professional log truck driver to what it once was and should still be. To have the highly skilled and hard-working people driving log trucks respected for the challenging job they do, and to ensure there is a means for attracting and training the next generation of professional log haulers safely into the industry. As they say, “it takes a village” and I would highly encourage other log hauling businesses in the province to consider training a young person using this program.

I believe it will be as rewarding for you as it is for them.

Greg Munden, Munden Ventures – Kamloops, British Columbia, May 2019