

# Good Behavior Means Good Drivers

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With all the bad news we're subject to each day, it was wonderful to learn from TTNews.com recently that the figures on fatalities involving big trucks were down again in 2002.

Naturally, training plays an important role in driver safety. However, other factors may be even more significant, according to a 1993 study Behavioral-Values Research Associates conducted.

The research was conducted on maintenance workers between the ages of 22 and 64 who had been with their company an average of 17.5 years. They were given four assessments that measured their behavioral style and attitudes, their knowledge of safety rules and their pictorial and mechanical reasoning abilities.

Interestingly, the study showed that the only significant differences between the two groups of workers (injured vs. non-injured) were in their behavioral styles, attitudes and values.

The research showed that when companies implement a pre-hiring assessment selection system, accidents, workers' compensation claims, turnover and maintenance costs are all reduced.

For example, G&P Trucking in Gaston, S.C., has been assessing the behaviors of all driver applicants for seven years and reports lower accident costs since it began the testing program.

Common sense tells us that truck drivers who are naturally careful and cautious are going to cause fewer accidents than those who are prone to "road rage."

Clearly, trucking companies would be wise to hire drivers who are slow to anger. The safest drivers are those who are steady and cautious by nature, and who genuinely put others' well being above their own.

The BVRA research found workers with the best safety records are those who are high in the "S" and "C" behavioral styles and low in the "D" factor. They are also high in the "social" value. Let me explain.

In 1928, Harvard psychologist William Moulton Marston defined the four behavioral styles we all have in varying degrees. The four are Dominant, Influencing, Steady and Cautious (DISC).

Around the same time, psychologist Eduard Spranger published his studies of six values or attitudes that determine how we view the world and what's important to us.

Target Training International in Scottsdale, Ariz., continued that research and produced what it said was the first computer-generated behavior and values assessment companies can use to hire and manage the best employees. These are two of the assessments the BVRA research project used.

Those high in the "D" factor want control, are quick to anger and become impatient easily. They are the ones most likely to experience road rage if they don't like the way someone else is driving.

My cousin recently sent me a copy of a letter she wrote to a trucking company complaining that one of its drivers tailgated her as she was passing a car on an interstate highway. Before she had time to get into the right lane, the truck driver went onto the left shoulder to pass her. I suspect this driver has a core Dominant behavioral style and may be high in the "individualistic" value.

Those high in the "I" behavioral factor are extroverted and people oriented. They talk a lot and like attention. The research found no significant difference in the "I" factor between the injured and non-injured workers.

People high in the Steady category are patient, move slowly and have a strong focus on their team's success. We can see why those with a core "S" style are more likely to be safe drivers.

Those high in the Cautious category are extremely careful, pay attention to detail and believe in following rules.

It's understandable that drivers high in both the "S" and "C" factors and low in the "D" style will have or cause fewer accidents.

It's also significant that research shows those high in the "social" value are the safest workers because they selflessly put others' needs above their own.

One thing BVRA's research didn't show, which I believe is significant, is the ranking of those workers in the "individualistic" value. Even more than those with core "D" behavioral styles, people high in this value are passionate about having power and control over situations and other people. I believe it's important for trucking companies to hire drivers who are low in this attitude.

Simply put, the ideal driver — the one you want to hire — is one who tests high in the "S" and "C" factors, low in the "D" factor, high in the "social" value and low in the "individualistic" attitude.

Of course, these are not the only systems for testing attitudes and behaviors in prospective employees. The famed Myers-Briggs test, for example, has been used for many years.

The point is that, in my opinion — validated by these studies — they work.

*The Estes Group provides coaching and consulting services for executives on leadership and other business topics.*

