

## Inside The Box

My first column for *Truck Australia* was titled 'Outside The Box'. So I think it's only fair to sign off after a year with a Christmassy look 'Inside The Box' ...

What a huge year for everyone – coping with the GST conversion, diesel grants, rebates and the works. It certainly was more time consuming and complicated than I ever thought it would be. Particularly when you wait on the telephone 45 minutes to get GST answers from the tax office ...

Also, the massive hike in diesel prices and the constant and continuing battle with some customers to justify rate increases has been a real challenge. As they say, for those that have made it through all of this, "things can only get better".

Every year I like to sit back and ask myself, well, what did I achieve this year? If you do the same, don't be too hard on yourself if there are a couple of goals you have not achieved. I know my goals of better

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organisation and time management of paperwork are still coming along.

I believe a concerted, steady, bit-by-bit approach is often better than charging in. As long as the end result is the same. One challenge this year was writing a regular column for *Truck Australia* magazine. I went through a steep learning curve, but I have enjoyed the experience immensely. For myself, it was an opportunity to give something back and raise some important issues:

- Ways to reduce fatigue;
- Information highway hazards;
- Food safety;
- Solutions to Industry criticisms;
- Report from the Fremantle Fatigue Conference;
- How to establish induction procedures;
- Designing a web site on a budget.

For my swan-song, I'd like to look 'Inside The Box' and take up the cause of transport businesses' most important – but often un-noticed – asset: its staff. Internal communication with staff is important; particularly if the company is undergoing change such as; business expansion, moving offices, lost contracts, tax reform ... whatever.

Employees behind the scenes often get mixed feelings and emotions if they are not well-informed. Staff who become confused about what is happening begin to feel insecure. Passing on general information to your staff about daily activities is, therefore, crucial.

Recently I went into a shopping centre to buy something and asked the young lady behind the counter how long the goods were to be dis-

counted (Ed's Note: poor 'bargain-hunter' Darren is saving up for his wedding!)? After some discussion with another assistant, the lady said, "Ohhh, I don't know – I will have to look into my Black Book?"

I thought what the heck does she mean? Anyway, the young lady drags out a little black book from her handbag and opens it. The shop assistant began to tell me that she only works on Thursday nights, so the book keeps her up-to-date on what's happening in the business. Apparently, the staff know where the manager leaves all of his memorandums and notes. When he's not in his office, they take notes on specials from the official documents in their little black books.

Naturally, I was shocked. When I inquired why her boss wouldn't pass

on any of the information, she said he never communicates. He keeps everything to himself because knowledge is power and he believes the store's staff are just 'dumb' shop assistants!

It's an interesting scenario. These women are striving to serve their customers efficiently, but are actually hampered by the boss. And it's all because the 'big D' – Dictate often overrides the 'big C' – Communication.

It's worth assessing how information is distributed to all levels in our own businesses. Are we guilty of withholding information? Again and again I hear – and often make – the excuse, "I'm too busy!" I think we all have to ask ourselves what benefit comes from being too busy to share information?

Whether you are the office person, driver, operations manager or CEO, we all have a responsibility to communicate, inform and update. A business is only as good as the people working for it. The less employees know, the slower the business will grow.

Finally, I'd like to thank all *Truck Australia's* readers for the opportunity to share my thoughts in this column. I sincerely hope you enjoyed reading the monthly tome and perhaps gained something. If you have, then my contribution has been worthwhile.

Remember if you plan to party over the Christmas period do it safely. And if you are one of those people who require time off to recoup, there's nothing like the Christmas period to put on a few unwanted kilos. Jingle Bells, Jingle Bells ...

Darren Nolan is the Quality Manager of Nolan's Interstate Transport  
 Email: [quality@nolanstransport.com.au](mailto:quality@nolanstransport.com.au)  
 Web: [www.nolanstransport.com.au](http://www.nolanstransport.com.au)