



Handling People, Cargo and Traffic

Of all commercial vehicles, the one that comes closest to operating just like a car is a van or straight truck. It's smaller than a truck-trailer combination and its power unit and cargo area are on the same chassis. However, limited visibility, blind spots and heavier weights require professional driving skills.

Because of the ways they're used, these vehicles place complex demands on their drivers.

Operators of delivery vans, as well as those who haul electronic items, household goods and other customized cargoes, must deal firsthand with their customers. In addition, they need to have:

- Defensive driving skills to combat dense traffic.
- An eye for cargo security, in and out of the vehicle.
- Careful load planning for efficiency.
- Vehicle maintenance for reliable, on-time performance.

You Are Your Company

Driver and vehicle each reflect the image of a company. If you show up promptly, have a fresh, clean appearance and consistently provide friendly and courteous service, you let people know that you are about the cargo you handle.

Your truck can say it, too. A shiny, well-cared-for van, driven with skill and good road manners, makes the statement that your company is a responsible one.

It's hard work to drive on the narrow, congested streets of our cities. Add in the hazards posed by poor visibility and thoughtless drivers and you see that the job is a big challenge for the professional.

Defensive Driving Delivers

One of your prime skills should be that of defensive driving. If so, you'll not only get to your destination safely, but will improve your efficiency. Observe the three key elements for successful defensive driving:

1. Recognize hazards.
2. Decide what to do about them.
3. Act to avoid a crash.

Hazards can be caused by many things: other drivers, pedestrians, mechanical failures or changing conditions. Professional drivers constantly scan the travel route at least 15 seconds ahead of their vehicle, watching for anything that may pose a hazard in their path.

Learn to judge your best speed and following distance for the conditions at hand. Maintain an escape route at all times so you won't get trapped in a hazardous situation.

Stay mentally ready. It enables you to avoid most accidents and, in a case where a crash can't be avoided, it helps you to minimize the resulting damage or injury.

Load for On-Time Performance

You'll probably have a difficult route to follow and a tight schedule to keep. It's critical that you have the right cargo on board before you leave your pickup point. Do a good job of arranging your cargo and it will keep you moving.

Plan your load so that heavy items are on the bottom and those to be delivered first go in last. This way, you prevent damage from cargo that shifts into empty space or flied around when you start, stop or turn.

Use cardboard to fill in dead space. Tape the top row of boxes on a pallet. This utilizes their weight to hold the boxes underneath in place.

Load locks can keep your load from shifting to the empty rear space as you complete your route.

Maintenance Assures Reliability

Your organizational skills can help you stay on time in spite of traffic problems. But vehicle breakdown can defeat you. Regardless of who maintains your truck, depend on yourself for routine checking. Keep notes of small things that aren't right.

As a van or straight truck driver, you can prepare yourself to meet every challenge of your job.

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