Driver Turnover Is Not Inevitable

Executive Summary

Professional Human Resources | ProHRHQ

Evidence reviewed through August 8, 2026

Truck-driver turnover is usually discussed as one national problem: not enough people want to drive trucks. The research shows something different, and it points to two separate jobs a carrier has to get right.

First, a carrier needs a job worth keeping. No recruiting can repair bad dispatch, unsafe equipment, poor home time, or low pay.

Second, once a carrier has a good job, it should not lose the drivers who apply to it to a slow, frustrating hiring process.

Turnover depends on the job, not the occupation

A 2024 National Academies review reported historical annual driver turnover of about 92.7% at large long-haul truckload carriers and 77.6% at smaller ones. Over the same general periods, private fleets ran about 15% and LTL linehaul ran 11.8%. (A private fleet is a company that hauls its own goods, like a grocery chain. LTL, or less-than-truckload, carriers combine freight from many shippers on one trailer.) The measurement periods differ, so these are patterns rather than exact 2026 numbers. The gap has held for decades.

Every one of those jobs needs a CDL and puts a driver on the same interstates. If truck driving itself burned people out, all four groups would look alike. They do not.

The same review separates two things people mix together: drivers leaving a carrier, and drivers leaving trucking. Nationally representative data found about 82% of for-hire drivers were still for-hire drivers a year later. Most of the churn a carrier feels is drivers trading one driving job for another. A driver who leaves on Friday and starts somewhere else in two weeks did not leave trucking. He left a job.

The job is a system

A carrier advertises a job: a pay rate, home time, equipment, benefits. That is the offer. What the driver actually gets, week after week, is decided by the operating system behind it, meaning freight, dispatch, routing, equipment, and appointment scheduling. The advertised job and the delivered job are not always the same.

That matters because the parts interact. A serious failure in one can undermine the value of the rest. Bad dispatch means waiting, which means fewer miles, which means a smaller check and missed home time. A truck that keeps breaking down does the same thing. A driver does not experience pay, dispatch, home time, and equipment as separate boxes on a list. He experiences one job, and one bad part can make the whole job not worth keeping.

Research across roughly 20 studies keeps naming the same things in jobs drivers keep: realistic and steady earnings, paid or fairly handled waiting time, predictable assignments, credible home time, reliable equipment, a real safety culture, and dispatchers who treat the driver like someone worth keeping. Benefits belong here too. Company drivers rank job security, income, healthcare, and retirement near the top. A "W-2" job is shorthand for that employee package, and the package is a real reason a driver stays, as long as the operating system delivers the job around it.

A good job can still lose the applicant

A competitive job creates driver interest. That interest does not last long. A qualified driver is applying to several carriers at once and deciding in days.

Speed matters. One large platform analysis of more than 1.5 million drivers found a 6.2% hiring rate for carriers that responded within five minutes, against a 3.7% average, with hiring rates falling by as much as half when the process dragged past 10 to 15 days. These are associations from vendor data, not a controlled study, but the reason is plain: a driver with several applications out starts a relationship with whoever answers first.

Friction matters the same way. A driver application asks for a lot: employment history, license details, accident and violation records. A driver on a phone asked to retype information the system could already have will often quit the form. Pre-filled applications complete at higher rates.

This is the bridge between the two problems:

> *Speed protects interest the job has already earned. Friction discards it.*

What DQ Vault does

DQ Vault is ProHRHQ's driver application and applicant-tracking system, built for the second problem. When a driver applies, it does not just send an acknowledgment. It uses what the driver already supplied, together with ProHRHQ's carrier and USDOT database of 4.4 million FMCSA carrier records, to begin building the actual driver application right away, including motor-carrier employment history. The driver reviews and corrects instead of retyping, returns through a simple secure link if he gets interrupted, and stays in one applicant record with communications, documents, next steps, and loss-reason tracking in one place.

The job creates the interest. DQ Vault is built not to waste it.

The economics, and how to measure them

Turnover is an operating cost. One private-fleet benchmark put the cost of a single turnover event at $12,313, and an empty truck adds more: the payment, insurance, and depreciation keep running while the truck earns nothing. The most useful number a carrier can track is not the cost of a lead but the cost of a driver still on the job after 90 days. A cheap lead that never applies is not cheap. A hire who quits in three weeks is not a hire.

The measurement that tells a carrier which problem it has runs from first interest through retention: response time, application completion, orientation show rate, seating, and 30/90/180-day retention, with the reason recorded every time an applicant is lost. A slow response is fixed in recruiting. A delivered job that does not match the advertised one is fixed in operations. They are different problems, and they need different fixes.

Build a job worth keeping. Then make sure the recruiting process does not throw away the drivers who want it.

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