DfBB Women in Transport Podcast:

Sadie Weston - Owner and Managing Director of Employ Recruitment

Sharon: Welcome to the Driving for Better Business podcast celebrating women working in transport, fleet management, and road safety. Driving and riding for work presents one of the biggest risks to business and addressing those risks often involves fresh, new thinking. With me today is Sadie Weston who established Employ Recruitment in 2005.

Sadie, lovely to see you again and thank for you taking the time to chat with us today.

Tell us about your journey of getting into recruitment and working in the logistics sector.

**Sadie:** I fell into a career into logistics before I even knew what it was. When I was 19, I started working for a specialist driving agency. Early on I saw first-hand the importance of compliance and safety following a major road traffic accident, so when I was about 21, I set off with all my new learnings and set up my own driving agency, Employ Recruitment, which specialises in the supply of logistics staff -mainly HGV drivers on a temporary basis to haulage companies.

Because of my attention to detail and desire for continuous improvement in standards I realised quite quickly that many driving agencies were not compliant and did not fulfil their obligations in terms of driver’s hours and working time directive despite all the legislation in place. I identified a need for change, and I wanted to do things differently. In 2005 I dedicated my career to change the perception of HGV driver recruitment agencies through raising standards. My vision back then was to create a successful driving agency with 100% compliance at its core and that’s been achieved in subsequent years.

When we began that was quite a challenge – we relied on a lot of manual processes to achieve the vision., I invited in all the legislative bodies I could think of to check our manual processes until they were sufficient. Culture was also really important from a young age and for the colleagues, the drivers, and the clients. We now have very well-established brand promises that focus around honesty, humility, and respect for everybody and what I found to be my greatest challenge when working in Employ was finding a piece of software that managed the process of driving recruitment from start to end with a focus on compliance.

It didn’t exist so I started to use a piece of software that met that requirement as closely as possible – then I went onto buy the company which is now a business in its own right know as DRS driver Recruitment software, a SAS platform that streamlines and automates the process of HGV driver recruitment end to end. The introduction of DRS into Employ eliminated the majority of manual processes, and it streamlined the business, achieving a 25% reduction in overheads, through automating the resourcing, the planning, compliance, finance and management information driving agencies rely so heavily on being accurate.

So going back to my earlier vision to improve the perception of logistics recruitment throughout the UK and seeing the results in Employ, in 2019 I went to offer DRS to other driving agencies and by that point I had a tried and tested proven solution which was Employ and DRS enabled Employ to double, reduce overheads and remain 100% compliant in real time which improves road safety and protects our drivers and customers.

Aside the businesses and in a bid to bring agencies and clients together for the greater good, I’m also the divisional director TEAM and hold a seat on the Logistics UK government group for driving agency excellence, and within these diverse roles I believe I’ve created an environment for collaboration to share best practice with other driving agencies – moving away from that stigma of keeping information under lock and key, and then later, with that collaboration we’ve been able to go to operators in a bid to align agency standards and margins and you’d be lucky to have a conversation with me where margins don’t crop up. They’re important. I understand that agencies work hard in a reactive role to meet the client requirements to ensure standards are aligned - agencies need a margin to reinvest to the same level as hauliers do in training staff systems and accreditations and so on. Since neutral vends entered the market place hauliers saw the opportunity to standardise low margins, in my opinion that only served to halt the progress of many driving agencies, and I would like to see an improvement in how we all work together so that the compliant agencies who are doing their very best are rewarded by being offered more work first and it no longer comes down to low margins, power or rebates.

Employ have been lucky enough to maintain these margins and benefited by being able to continually invest, and as a result some of the most recent initiatives this year, the introduction of crisis cover which provides access to transport lawyers in the event of blue light incidents, and e-learning for HGV drivers, a roadskills online driver benefits package, and a 12 month HGV driver specific wellbeing campaign, and I think that brings you right up to date Sharon.

Sharon: Our Driving for Better Business programme encourages and supports operators to look at what they do by evaluating their practices and taking the necessary steps to enhance their performance. You mentioned TEAM – can you share how it’s supported and benefited you as an employer but also those other members?

**Sadie:** TEAM stands for The Employment Agency Movement, and it’s split into different sectors. Speaking about the driving sector, it’s a really easy environment for driving agencies to come together and we have guest speakers, training specific to driving agencies, in fact I’m organising an event for the 3rd November to bring 50 driving agencies together to focus on what to outsource so we’ve got various suppliers tp pitch their product in 15 minutes and focus on what value that will give back to the driving agency – time, financial – so that agencies can focus on what they need to do best, which is really customer service to the drivers and the customers. They don’t need to get bogged down with admin processes. As well as the collaboration which is the best I have seen within the driver agency sector, there’s also shared resources, things like terms & conditions, there’s access to endless training and there’s a community. TEAM feels like a family in the industry – we’ve got a WhatsApp group so we can share problems, and someone is always there to help, and I would recommend any driving agency to consider joining.

**Sharon:** I know you’re always pushing the boundaries for improvement at Employ. Tell us about how ISO9001 and Investors in People have helped you.

Sadie: Over the years, I have signed Employ up for most things and we learnt an awful lot from Investors in People on culture, trust probably being the main thing – how to look after our people and in return we found that they bring a lot back to the business. Something I am prepared to touch on later is things like I employ a lot of working mums, so we wanted to look at the things that were suitable for working mums. Things like contributions to childcare, working hours and work from home which are not common in our industry which is male dominated as you know. To touch on ISO9001 that meant that we got a library of policies and procedures that informed our people how to run the business s in a consistent way.

Sharon: You touched on working mums, Over the years supporting and inspiring other women whether staff, drivers or clients is close to your heart. Why is that so important to you?

**Sadie**: I think that comes down to I would love to see more women in logistics. I stumbled on this industry, and I’m constantly impressed by the women I meet in the industry. I worked with a lot of men in the early days and some of those men taught me how not to do things and some inspired me, and I’ve had the privilege of working with many great women, one of whom is a coach I use, Claire Barnett, from Synergy who focus on coaching on organisational development and that put culture at the top of the list for me. I also work with some excellent women these days – Leslie O’Brian of New Aura and Charlotte Le Maire – both are very inspiring – they’re on the same mission that I am on. They want to see improvement for HGV drivers and road safety. That’s really where I’d like to see the whole industry going. Women – logistics is the perfect industry for women. Women have a very detailed understanding into their subject matter and tend to remember quite a lot, to the pain of our partners from time to time, and we are able to provide tangible data for improvement.

I would love to see more women in the industry. I’ve employed around 40 women in my time at Employ and at DRS, often in their first job in transport and we’ve had a high commitment to their training from great companies like the RAC and Logistics UK, wellbeing coaches, and now a lot of those women have stayed in the industry which is really important, and gone on to hold really important roles in the industry.

Sharon: You fell into this industry by accident. How can we showcase and promote the diverse roles that are available. What more could we do in schools and universities to raise awareness?

**Sadie:** Something that I do – I think we’ve all got to do our bit - so on occasion I go into schools and talk about my career in logistics and what that has looked like and the various opportunities.

I think school is a crucial starting point, and something that impressed me yesterday, my son is about to choose his options and he came home having answered 100 questions online which had populated his career options and based on his strengths and preferences I was pleased to see that ‘logistics manager’ came up as his 3rd recommended job role. When we were at school, we had an hour with a career’s advisor, and logistics was unheard of, so to see that difference now days is really positive.

**Sharon:** I’ve got to say I had an hour as you said, I said I wanted to work in logistics and they told me the only job ever available would be a driver, and to go and find something else to do and come back when I was 21. That was my careers advice.

**Sadie:** That’s shocking – how did you know what you wanted to work in?

**Sharon:** It was a family thing for me so many of my holidays were spent in a vehicle map planning! Any professional fleet operator will want to ensure that all their drivers – whether temporary or fully-employed – they are driving safely and responsibly – so there are thousands of recruitment businesses out there, and they do not all work to the same standards which unfortunately does have an impact on road safety.

What are the key areas that you would recommend a fleet operator to explore when looking to engage with a new agency, to they know there is no negative impact to their compliance, operator licence and safety standards?

**Sadie:** I think that stems from the set-up meeting that’s held. I’d be looking for an agency that goes through rigorous set up, who want to know all about the day in the life of a driver working for that operator, about the insurances - how long must the driver have held a licence? How many penalty points, what type of induction is available - and you want your agencies pushing for that information. If the agency starts to supply blind, I would question the service you’re going to get.

Something else I would look for is accreditations – something I’m passionate about is the Logistics Driver Agency Excellence Scheme. It’s the only audit that really audits the agency on their processes for driver engagement and management - and so a bit about the audit – the audit looks at the core business standards – terms of engagement, insurances, staff training and policies and then it’s also looking at driver recruitment standards. Is the agency obtaining the right identification for right to work? Qualifications? Are they adhering to the clients’ requirements in terms of insurance, pay parity and then things like driver management standards so collective / workforce agreements, working time directive management of the EU Driver hours and how the agency are confirming the shifts and planning these drivers that they are not seeing day to day. For me the biggest tick an operator could look for would be a demonstration of those robust processes through the driver agency excellence accreditation. Of course, you may wish to create your own audit which I would recommend and audit your agencies against your own processes.

**Sharon:** From what you’re saying, you’d always recommend that operator going to meet with the agency and seeing the processes in place – back-office - to support the operations.

**Sadie:** Where possible yes, it’s not always practical but nowadays we can jump on Teams from wherever in the country and I would have a specific list of things that are important to the operator, and I would be asking the agency to evidence those processes through a meeting.

**Sharon:** The last 2 years has seen many obstacles within the industry - the pandemic and driver shortage to name just two. How do you think these have changed the operator’s perception of temporary workers and the flexibility they provide to support an operation?

Sadie: Yes, I really do – I think for a long time, agencies were seen as a necessary evil by many - agencies and agency drivers – treated like 2nd class citizens and information wasn’t shared properly on processes and then as soon as something went wrong the agency were beaten up for it or the driver was banned, and really there was no partnership. In many cases it felt like a dictatorship – I’ve walked away from a number of clients for that reason so things like lead vend models and the legislation like AWR and pay parity went some way to redefining the relationship, but that put further pressure on margins which was a negative thing for driving agencies to progress and I think now the value of agencies and their drivers has been redefined by the driver shortage. We’ve seen more operators looking at more sustainable partnerships with aligned objectives. It no longer comes down to just money and who can supply the most drivers. We see senior members of our customers collaborating with the agencies as respected partners for the greater good. I know more recently we have been asked to support in understanding the neutral vend model which resulted in fairer calculations for the agency charge rate. I honestly feel there’s a long way to go. Some agencies are working below standard for compliance and service – but operators are embracing the contribution of a good agency and seem to understand that partnership is key to a successful supply relationship. I hope along the way we can bump the standards up of many more driving agencies in the UK.

Sharon:

From a recruitment point iof view, how important is it for drivers to get a thorough induction, familiarisation, training. when they start with a new operator?

Sadie: Absolutely crucial. Some can be done through automation – things like video inductions work in the absence of someone being able to be there to induct the driver. It’s always better if there’s a full site induction and familiarisation with the standard operating procedures, and a driving assessment as well because it’s not reasonable to expect the agency to be able to assess their own drivers, certainly not on lower margin contracts, so it’s crucial the drivers have a walk through the SOPs.

Sharon: Sadie, thank you so much for talking to us and sharing your story and your insights as well as your best practice with us today.

For those of you who want to know more about Driving for Better Business and the benefits to managing and reducing your road risk, visit the website at

<https://www.drivingforbetterbusiness.com>