

How to Change Senior Management's Misperceptions about Your Fleet

Fleet managers tend to get bogged down in the day-to-day operations and then wonder why they are not connecting with upper management. These fleet managers wrongly assume that effective fleet management is simply managing assets. My reply is, you also need to be a good “storyteller” to be a successful fleet manager.

Increasingly, today's fleet managers are scrutinized for their every action and are constantly second-guessed by management and user departments about the efficacy of their policies. A common (and ongoing) perception by senior management is that fleet management is not a complicated and sophisticated profession; not recognizing that it requires expertise in a multitude of peripheral areas. Fleet managers also must deal with the revolving door of new managers, especially the “fleet experts,” who assume the fleet is not run efficiently. These individuals erroneously believe anyone can run a fleet and that no special skills or expertise are required. Consequently, a fact of life faced by every fleet manager is the ongoing, year-to-year struggle to continually educate all levels of management about the intricacies and nuances of fleet management, so they truly understand and appreciate its complexity. Sadly, fleet managers, as a whole, are not doing a good job at educating their senior management about the profession because this second-guessing continues to be a perennial issue.

Perception vs. Reality

A fleet manager must increase his or her exposure with management to educate them as to the value they provide. To do so, you first need to become known to management. Periodically set up meetings with HR, purchasing/sourcing, and sales management when new fleet-related topics come up pertaining to one of these areas. As you are updating these managers, you are educating them as well. More times than not, these managers may be unaware of your capabilities and subject-matter expertise. Your ultimate goal is to become someone whom management consults when making major decisions. You want them to call you into their office or include you in meetings to solicit your opinion. But, to earn (and retain) a seat at the table with management, you must know your total fleet costs, frontward and backward.


To avoid misperceptions, fleet managers need to define and elevate their stature in the eyes of management. Otherwise, someone else will do so, which often is the root of false perceptions. Ask yourself, how do you prove you are doing a good job? You may think you manage a well-run fleet, but do you

have the metrics to substantiate this assertion? If you can't succinctly quantify the fleet's performance to management, they, most likely, will not truly appreciate your asset management skills. This lack of understanding is often at the root of second-guessing inquiries that put fleet managers in defensive positions attempting to justify performance or policies. Do not assume management knows you are doing a good job. To demonstrate your subject-matter expertise, you must develop performance metrics that can be reviewed by all corporate areas that interface with fleet. It is important to have an open-book policy and share fleet data with both management and internal users. From the perspective of management, this will validate that the fleet is operating as cost-effectively as possible. The fleet's stature and accountability can be further increased by organizing fleet user committees to address operational or policy issues that arise between fleet and its internal customers.

Embrace increased accountability, because it will make you a better fleet manager. When measuring fleet's performance, it is important to communicate these goals within your company. Continually push metrics to internal customers to demonstrate how they can contribute to improving productivity and make the fleet operate more cost-effectively. Maintaining an efficient fleet is not a goal, but an ongoing journey. You need to keep feeding the metrics back into your processes to continually improve performance. It is important to realize that, only by putting this data into practice, can you develop performance metrics that will truly optimize fleet performance and identify inefficiencies.

Tactical vs. Strategic Fleet Management

It is important to realize that no one within your organization knows the fleet better than you. You need to step outside the boundaries of day-to-day tactical fleet management and think “big” by taking a strategic approach to managing the fleet. Visualize how your operation would look if you could start with a clean sheet of paper. How would you redesign the overall fleet program to increase its efficiency and effectiveness? Develop a plan to realize this vision and communicate this “story” to management — hence, become a storyteller. This concept was best summarized in one of my favorite movies, *Dead Poets Society*, using the Latin phrase “carpe diem.” Take a moment to Google the phrase, or watch the movie, and reflect on its meaning to you.

Let me know what you think. 

mike.antich@bobit.com