

CALLING FUTURE LOG HAULERS

By Greg Munden

Photo courtesy of Greg Munden

Recently, Munden Ventures had the opportunity to pilot a newly developed log truck driver training program developed by industry for industry.

The program was developed in response to a gap in Class 1 licensing and the competency required of a professional log truck driver, a shortage of qualified log truck drivers in BC, and an inability to properly train new entrants into the industry to operate consistently to an industry-set standard of professionalism, safety and performance.

The development of this program was managed by the BC Forest Safety Council (BCFSC) with direction, content, technical input and support from members of the industry's safety groups, namely the Log Truck Technical Advisory Committee (LTTAC) and the Trucking and Harvesting Advisory Group (TAG).

As a fourth-generation log hauling and forestry business based in Kamloops, our company has always strived to support industry initiatives, as well as innovate and give back when we can to an industry that has been good to our family.

Like many log hauling companies in the industry, Munden has high standards for hiring drivers, typically requiring a minimum of three years of log hauling experience, a clean "N" driver's abstract, good references and a history of loyalty to the previous companies that applicants have worked for.

Michael, the son of one of Munden's owner operators, wanted desperately to land a job hauling logs—just like his dad. He already had his Class 1 licence and was sporadically driving a vacuum truck.

In the past, we would not have even considered hiring Michael. We're too

busy to even consider figuring out how to properly train a young person, let alone having financial or staff resources to entertain the idea.

New program allows taking on training new young truck drivers

As a new member of the LTTAC, I was familiar with the program. Having the driver program available gave us the confidence (and the support and resources) we needed to take a chance on Michael. Trish Kohorst, the BC Forest Safety Council's Transportation Manager, quickly arranged a meeting with Michael and his Dad, Scott (who would become Michael's mentor), and Munden management to make sure they were prepared for the program and that we all understood our commitment.



Trish explained the program is competency-based; not a pass or fail, but a measurement of meeting or not yet meeting the required outcomes of the program. The program required that we spend time with Michael to cover all of the fundamentals of log hauling which included safe work procedures, fit for work, hours of service, truck systems, configurations, and shop safety before entering the cab of a truck.

Building irreplaceable knowledge before getting into the driving seat

One valuable aspect of the program was to have Michael spend time in our shop with one of our red seal mechanics. Having unrestricted time thoroughly going through a truck with a knowledgeable person is often not made available to a driver during the “throw them the keys and get them out there” style of training our industry has done too much of. Although Michael had spent time around and driving trucks previously, he learned more in those few hours about truck systems than he had in all the time he previously spent in the trucking industry.

Competency Conversations are not one-offs

Once we covered off all of the knowledge building of the log hauling industry, we repeated it over the course of the training, including “competency conversations,” which involves a conversation that can be led either by the driver’s mentor or someone helping with training. It is designed to have the trainee answer questions about the industry that have been covered during the knowledge building of the training. As with all parts of the training, reaching competency is the ability to demonstrate the knowledge and skills required by the industry multiple times in a variety of contexts. In this case, a trainee would be expected to successfully answer all questions in the competency conversation five times over the course of the training.

Having industry mentors willing and able to give their time and pass on their knowledge to the next generation of professional log haulers is critical to this program. As it turns out, taking on the training of his son forced Scott to refamiliarize himself with a lot of things in the industry which he forgot he knew. It also caused

him to identify areas where he had developed shortcuts in doing his job, which I know most log haulers find over time and seem to get away with, until they don’t.

Self-paced, self-styled training to best meet needs and assure competency

The training program does not dictate the particulars of how the training is accomplished, or at what pace. There is a significant reliance on the expertise of the driver’s mentor to assess the progress of the trainee, the conditions and all other circumstances (length of day, cycle times, pressure from other trucks, etc.) and tailor the training to ensure the success of the trainee, and, most importantly, safety. Once again, the mandate is to conduct the training over a period of time and have the trainee demonstrate the outcome multiple times in a variety of contexts.

As you would expect, Michael’s driving training started with simply being a passenger and observer. This gave him a great opportunity to watch his mentor handle various situations, and see the safe work procedures learned in the knowledge stages of the program work in practice. Everything from radio protocol, signage

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and loading/unloading procedures. Eventually, riding along led to empty driving. Empty driving led to loaded driving, and, ultimately, complete handling of the day with mentor oversight.

Independent assessment is critical to ensuring success

Thinking back to one of the main goals of the program development team, the independent assessor is mandated with ensuring the standards of the program are maintained and met. The independent assessor's role is to spend a trip with the trainee and evaluate his/her competency using the attributes, skills and knowledge that a professional log truck driver needs to confidently display to be considered competent. This starts with the competency conversation, includes the pre-trip inspection and then a complete cycle, whereby the trainee must demonstrate each element of the training to the standard. Once again, there is no grade or pass or fail, only competent or not yet competent for each required element of the program.

Successful completion of this program means Michael has displayed competency in every area and confirmed by independent verification.

I know Michael is proud, but I can also say that we are all proud of Michael for proving his competency in this final assessment and earning his endorsement as a Professional Log Truck Driver.

Training took approximately two months every day from mid-October through mid-December. The bulk of his training was in-cab. We had our reservations about training a young person to become a professional driver, especially during one of the toughest times of the year, through almost every possible weather and road condition, with both on-highway and off-highway loads, on a tri- or quad-drive short log trailer unit, but I think it's one of the best decisions we made.

Keeping it real means it's sustainable for industry and invaluable for the trainee

Scott could have trained Michael through the summer in dry and relatively safe conditions and we could have restricted him to our easiest runs, on the shortest days, with the least pressure; but we didn't. Scott's truck stayed on his normal haul, in his normal position, hauling his regular loads. Michael saw the true

picture of hauling logs (other than 30-degree weather in dry conditions). He experienced a lot of the circumstances he will normally encounter in the industry and he learned a lot, in an organized, intentional and safe way.

Time will tell if this was a success. In the meantime, the best measure is being confident enough to put Michael to work in this industry. When we started the training, we did not have a position available. As circumstances and chance would have it, an opportunity opened up just as Michael was completing his training.

Michael is now part of our regular professional driver team and is pulling his weight, safely. I can honestly say that I am very confident in Michael's abilities and the training that he has received. It is by far the most comprehensive training we have ever been a part of in developing a driver. Best of all, we have been able to transition a young, passionate person into the industry without simply passing along our driver shortage problem to another company. I think it's a good first step.

Training is serious business. It takes time, resources and an effort from many people and Michael and Scott will attest to it being incredibly rewarding.

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I am committed to doing my small part in elevating the occupation of professional log truck driver to what it once was, and should still be where highly skilled and hard-working log truck drivers are respected for the challenging job they do, and to ensure there is a means for attracting and training the next generation of professional log haulers safely into the industry. As they say, "it takes a village" and I would highly encourage other log hauling businesses in the Province to consider training a young person using this program. I believe it will be as rewarding for you as it is for them.

By October 2019, Michael will have been driving with Munden for a full year (including training time). His usual route hauls take him between Kamloops and 100 Mile House for West Fraser.

"I would highly recommend this program to any new logging driver hoping to get into this industry," says Michael. "It was even more special for me to go through this with my dad as my mentor; it has been more than I could hope for. I feel like I had the chance to learn about every aspect of the log hauling industry and spend as much time as I needed to be comfortable. Although I realize I will continue learning for years to come, this program has definitely given me the confidence to start my career safely and productively."

"I can tell you it was a pretty proud day for me when Michael went on his own with the Forest Safety Council Independent Assessor and I felt confident that he could handle himself as a professional log hauler," says Scott. "It was great to have guidance through this program on all the aspects to train on, and the mentorship time was so valuable to the success of bringing Michael into the industry. His mother and I both sleep better at night knowing that he has received a high level of training and has the knowledge and tools to enjoy a long, safe career in the industry." 🌲

The Professional Log Truck Driver Program learning resources are available on BCFSC's website. It will be piloted through 2020 and feedback will be collected and reviewed for content revisions and program updates. If you are interested in further information about the Program contact Trish Kohorst at tkohorst@bcforestsafe.org or at 1-877-741-1060.