Transit Driver Shortages + Returning Citizens = A Winning Solution

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The Challenge: Shortage of CDL Drivers

The Transit industry was faced with staffing issues before, however, the challenges were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Some reasons:

• Drivers retired or quit out of fear of becoming exposed to the virus.
• Drivers quit over mask mandates
• Drivers were furloughed or got sick and did not returning
• Some decided they no longer want to work in the industry due to the demands, hours and their safety (verbal and physical attacks) from the public.
• In Demand Response transit agencies, the job is physical with securing mobility devices many times throughout the day, and often pay is less than urban counterparts, so the pool of applicants has always been smaller.
• Those retiring today, are not like those retiring in the past and many are not looking for a job after retirement.
WHY Hire Returning Citizens?

• If you don’t look at this pool of applicants you are missing an opportunity.

• Giving people a fair chance to be considered for jobs, employers can help keep their communities safer and potentially reduce crime rates by reducing recidivism.

• Research shows that employees with criminal histories are often reliable, productive, and positive members of their workplace.

• Many must comply with the court-ordered special conditions of their probation or parole and maintain employment, so they have an extra layer of accountability for staying employed.

• Employers can make a considerable difference in transforming a criminal liability into a community asset. Unemployed ex-felons are at greater risk of re-offending compared those ex-felons who are employed.

• Helps create a more diverse and inclusive workforce.
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<th>Myths</th>
<th>Facts</th>
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<td>Once a criminal, always a criminal</td>
<td>Research shows that a criminal record doesn’t predict future re-offending after a certain time period passes. Studies show offering a job to those with a criminal record reduces the recidivism rate by more than 10%.</td>
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<td>A person who has been in the criminal justice system, can’t be a trustworthy worker</td>
<td>Nationally recognized employers, like Johns Hopkins Hospital, hire people with past records and have found them to be loyal, committed workers.</td>
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<td>More “cream of the crop” hires will eventually come back to transit.</td>
<td>By age 23, 1 in 3 Americans have been arrested. Some highly successful people are felons: Martha Stewart, Judge Greg Mathis, Junior Johnson, Tim Allen ...</td>
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<td>They will not be reliable and will increase turnover</td>
<td>Due to the scarcity of opportunities for returning citizens, many employers that hire them have lower turnover than with conventional hires.</td>
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Things that can be done now!

Change how jobs are advertised. *Don’t let someone eliminate themselves because of the language you use.*

- Put the qualities you need in the person, not the duties they will perform
- The most important part you want the potential applicant to see should be at the top of the ad. Flexible Hours – No experience needed or Must have CDL or Will train if you have a permit.
- Eliminate anything about a background check
- Consider making being an EEO Employers more important by what you state and where you place this statement in your ads.

Do you allow flexibility in how someone applies? *Do you offer to help if someone can’t complete application online? Offer paper application?*

Ask for minimal information. *Don’t require someone to enter info that is already on a resume.* If you need a complete applications for HR purposes,
Make applying for your job opening as easy as possible

Make it easy and comfortable for the applicant to tell you about their past history, without fear of it being an automatic NO in getting the job.

Review and Change how you review Background checks:

• Limit record information in background checks to recent, occupation-related information.

• Eliminate blanket bans that automatically disqualify applicants with criminal records.

• Don’t make Gaps in employment an immediate red flag. Someone incarcerated will have gaps, however, so will a stay at home mom or dad who didn’t work outside the home until their children were at the age they could attend school. Also, often those who work temp jobs, will put each job in the resume, and it
A few other things to remember

- Check to see if you qualify for the Federal Work Opportunity Tax Credit or free fidelity bond.

- Make sure you are not violating any contracts that prohibit hiring Returning Citizens. If you do have such contracts, start having conversations in how that section can be removed.

- Previously Incarcerated does NOT mean “unskilled”.

- Ensure YOU control the narrative so it stays positive! Let others know what, why and how the community will benefit, calm any fears of safety and/or reliability. Be proud of any program you begin and keep the public informed.

- We have all terminated drivers we hired with a clean background check. *EVERY Hire is a RISK!*
MBA Service Learning Project

Transit Driver Shortages and Returning Citizens

Community Perspective

The Project Scope

- HIRTA / Transit Agencies in Iowa

Impact on Society

- Driver Shortage
- Reentering Citizens
- Perception Survey

Road Map to Implementation

- Key Players
- Limitations
- Stages
Ivy MBA students in the Iowa State University - Ivy College of Business presented their final presentations from their Service Learning Consulting course. In partnership with ISU Pappajohn Center for Entrepreneurship and CyBIZ Lab - Iowa State University, students in my (Sarah Wilson, Ph. D.) course serve as consultants to non-profit organizations who need support on projects such as branding best practices, project management, marketing and outcome assessments, and more. All our students made great contributions to their partner organizations. Congratulations to the winning teams!


Over the past 12 weeks, my team members Hector Rivera Hernandez, Jordan Poppe, Samuel Smith, and I worked with the non-profit organization, HIRTA Public Transit, as part of our Service Learning Consulting class. We are thankful to have worked with the executive director at HIRTA, Julia Castillo, who shared her knowledge and guided us through this incredible learning experience.

Last Friday marked the end of our first year in the Iowa State University - Ivy College of Business MBA program with final presentations of our project. My team and I were fortunate to be able to receive 1st place, and I am excited to see how our work will benefit HIRTA and the amazing goals they have planned.
Driver Shortages

In the U.S., 3 out of 4 transit agencies have shortage issues.

In Iowa, there's a 17% shortage in drivers failing to meet demand.
In the U.S. 55% of the current population are violent offenders.

On a national level, the prison population is aging (violent offenders are the largest portion of this population) that means non-violent offenders released would be younger.

In Iowa, 73% of the released would be non-violent offenders and would qualify for as potential hires.
Reducing Recidivism Rates for Reentering Citizens

**Current State**
- 50%
- 35%

**Future State**
- 5.7%
- 4.0%

Reentering citizens finding jobs soon after release
Community Perspective

Demographics of those surveyed

Age:
- 21-30: 24.1%
- 31-40: 17.2%
- 41-50: 13.8%
- 51-60: 20.7%
- 61-70: 24.1%

Gender:
- Male: 69.0%
- Female: 24.1%
- Other: 6.9%

Ride Time (minutes):
- 0-5: 3.6%
- 6-10: 3.6%
- 11-20: 21.4%
- 21-30: 14.3%
- 31-45: 7.1%
- 46-60: 7.1%
- 60+: 42.9%
**Question:** What is your general opinion with regards to hiring reentering citizens as transit drivers?  
*Agree, Neutral, or Disagree*

- **76.7%** - Yes  
- **13.3%** - Neutral  
- **10.0%** - No

**POINTS to NOTE:**

1) Personal Safety was #1 concern among those who disagree

2) Those who disagree were also riders in remote areas traveling longer distances
Has Mobility Manager within Correctional Facilities

Workforce Development has offices within Correctional Facilities

Ultimate Goal

Add a CDL component to train for Public Transit Drivers positions
As an Equal Opportunity Employer, HIRTA values diversity and strives to expand representation at all levels in our workforce.

We welcome applicants of diverse background and hire without regard to race, color, gender, religion, national origin, ancestry, citizenship, disability, age, sexual orientation, or any other characteristic protected by law.

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