



Robert Mroczek is a chauffeur and course director at the Chauffeur Training Academy

# HOW DRIVER TRAINING CAN IMPROVE YOUR BUSINESS?

## Tim Barnes-Clay

**R**UNNING A BUSINESS IS A ROUND-THE-CLOCK occupation that involves hard work, sound management and efficient planning. Operating your own taxi service or chauffeur company is no different. Indeed, it can be extremely demanding for a self-employed cab driver who is left to run the whole show on top of the driving.

Whether you're a self-employed driver or you work for someone else, it's obviously in everyone's interest for the business to prosper. Done properly, cultivating good relationships to ensure repeat custom is the key to staying the right side of the balance sheet - and this is where training comes into play.

Robert Mroczek is a chauffeur and course director at the Chauffeur Training Academy in London. You might recognise him—he won the Professional Driver of the Year Gold award at our inaugural QSi Awards in 2013.

He prides himself on providing development for his students. He says: "We believe that it's our duty to boost awareness and progress standards for those within our industry."

Speaking to Robert, it's palpable how much satisfaction he derives from his work—and it's clear that he wants to pass this positive attitude

on to others within the professional driving industry.

He explains: "As a course provider we have taken great consideration in not only creating the right programme, but also in finding the right people to smooth the progress of the training. Embracing the expertise of our team and skillset, we have moved forward to deliver a new five-day course which is an IQ Level 3 Organisation Award in Chauffeuring."

Robert is quick to point out that other courses have different structures and offer numerous skillsets, but at the Chauffeur Training Academy, his main aim is to instruct drivers on the professionalism that must be displayed when chauffeuring. "We teach chauffeur etiquette, professional standards, driving techniques and many other associated topics," says Robert. "An advanced driving day has been built in to the



**BADGE OF HONOUR: Chauffeur Training Academy graduates are presented with a discreet lapel pin**

course to offer skills that will improve standards, too."

Further up the country, Darren O'Leary helps run The Manchester College's NVQ Level 2 Road Passenger Vehicle Driving training for hackney and private hire drivers. He agrees that it's vital for drivers to understand the value of displaying high quality customer service skills.

He explains: "We strongly feel that a desire to up-skill should be at the forefront of any professional driver. We do this by highlighting poor customer service skills and we encourage our students to discuss their own experiences."

But Darren isn't just speaking from an academic viewpoint; his college department is unique in that all the tutors are licenced taxi and private hire drivers with almost 30 years' experience in the trade each. "We really do practice what we preach," says Darren. "We find the majority of drivers are unaware of local licensing by-laws, so, for example, we'll ask them if they're unaware of such laws, how do they know they're not breaking them? The department also shows drivers how to correctly assist and deal with disabled customers, with an emphasis on risk assessment before so doing."

Darren is an upbeat chap—and that's no surprise, given the positive feedback he gets from his students. "The majority of drivers say once they've been on our course they feel they

have ‘more tools in the box’ to meet customer requirements. This makes it more likely they’ll receive repeat business from the customer,” he adds.

Back in the south, Duncan Blackett is chief executive officer for iRide, a minicab operator providing on-demand, fixed-fare and pre-booked services in London. The company has training at its heart—and it couldn’t be any further away from Uber in its efforts to show the world the positive face of the private hire market.

Duncan explains: “At iRide we pride ourselves on fairness as we adapt to the new paradigm that is the private hire market. Gone are high fares; gone are local plots. Here are more competitive fares; here is a different way of working.”

iRide’s Driver Centre is a hub where drivers can pay rent, query their jobs statement and even ask for tips on how to improve their earnings and fuel efficiency. There is nothing revolutionary in that. But just as drivers have become scant to London’s private hire operators, it seems good drivers who look after their cars and personal appearance have become a scarcity too.

“We have a dual need: to attract and retain drivers,” said Duncan. “All that might seem very elementary so far, but rides have become commoditised through competition, and a race to the bottom has priced the best drivers out of the business.”

Central to iRide’s continued growth is the need to up-skill the company’s driver base—and that is where iRide’s Driver Training Academy comes in. Duncan explained: “Offering superior customer experience is the goal. This will insulate ourselves from the migration of ‘cash fares’ to booking apps. It also gives us the opportunity to win back lapsed customers.”

iRide’s Academy is engineered to take a new recruit from enrolment to executive driver. But, according to Duncan, taking a candidate through the company’s driver handbook is not enough: “iRide plans to enter London’s lucrative B2B market. This is an unforgiving sector, and winning a contract is the easy part. Our rigorous training and testing will ensure we can consistently deliver the exacting standards required by the corporate market.”



**Duncan Blackett,**  
chief executive  
officer, iRide

There are three levels of training within iRide’s academy. Level 1: Induction to iRide London. Level 2: Customer service training. Level 3: Executive driver training. Certificates are awarded after graduation from each tier of the course. Successful completion of the training path at iRide permits a driver to progress through the company’s grading steps: from bronze to silver to gold. “We have to give drivers a reason to improve,” says Duncan.

It certainly seems that at iRide, training is one thing, execution is another. “Underpinning our approach is

the desire to create aspiration within our fleet,” clarified Duncan. “Put simply, the better a driver’s grading, the better their earnings. iRide’s Driver of the Month Award has been running for two months. It is illustrative of the aspiration we are creating, where the highest rated driver for the month is awarded £300.”

iRide’s approach is already paying off, with the company recently being awarded ISO certification. The accreditation is certainly indicative of iRide’s commitment to excellence. “We look forward to the future,” adds Duncan. And who can blame him?

## SAFETY TRAINING

THERE ARE MORE THAN 250,000 LICENSED TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE vehicle drivers in England and Wales, with the industry contributing over £3bn to the UK economy. However, the proportion of women to men in the trade can be as low as 1%, and not usually more than 5%.

Julie McColgan, who also teaches at The Manchester College, believes fears over safety, mainly due to the isolation of the job, are possibly to blame for the lack of women in the business. But, speaking from personal experience, she claims driving cabs for a living can be as safe as any other public-facing role.

"I worked nights as a hackney carriage driver in Manchester for 13 years and the public, especially other woman, loved seeing me behind the wheel. At The Manchester College we have been actively seeking female students, and we are pleased to have our first lady drivers taking the Taxi Knowledge programme for Manchester licensing within the next few weeks."



**Julie McColgan**



**Rick Wood**

Rick Wood, head of training for The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA), Fleet Safety is firm in stating that health and safety procedures are necessary for the well-being of employers and employees, whether male or female.

He also explains that proper training makes a difference to how a business is perceived, too: "A driver who has received professional training will have a safer and more economical driving style which will allow even the most prestigious of passengers to feel the difference."

Rick adds: "The RoSPA Chauffeur Course develops these skills through the use of advanced driving techniques as described in the police driving manual, Roadcraft, alongside the highest etiquette standards that provide for excellent customer service."



**Manchester College**

## EVASIVE DRIVING

THERE ARE COURSES ON THE MARKET THAT will offer evasive driving and other such techniques, but this is a different kettle of fish compared with fundamental professional driver training. For instance, the Chauffeur Training Academy will only adhere to that which is necessary for chauffeuring in the United Kingdom, and similar places worldwide.

Robert Mroczek explains: "Our course directors have many years' experience working in a wide range of situations. This means they have the ability to view the chauffeuring sector in a unique and valuable way. If you're working as a chauffeur, you must drive to the highest standard possible and look after your client and your licence. Driving evasively will only put your client in harm's way and result in your licence being revoked."

Robert added: "If while driving you come across difficulties or dangers, then you must stay professional and seek out help from the emergency services. Our security day enforces this ethos that we have, and will certainly drive home the standards that have made us front-runners in the field of chauffeur training within the United Kingdom."



**Robert Mroczek**

